



Teaching and Learning Popular Music in Higher Education through Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Practice What You Preach

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Abstract

This article provides a contextualized explanation of an emerging strategy for popular music teaching and learning in higher education that the authors term Improvisatory Integrative Learning. This strategy coalesces around four themes from a Do-It-Yourself and Do-It-With-Others ethos: autonomy, play, peer learning, and peer teaching. To explicate the possibilities and pitfalls of teaching popular music in this way, the authors analyze the approaches taken in a co-taught university course integrating two perspectives: music education and ethnomusicology. The interdisciplinary collaboration became an investigative space for informal music learning approaches in a formal context, in which students improvised with creative composition. We explore not only how processes that are part and parcel of popular music learning can help improve productivity in a popular music classroom, but also the ways that improvisatory integrative learning can serve a diverse university student population by expanding interdisciplinary approaches to multiple kinds of subject matter.

KEYWORDS: Improvisatory Integrative Learning, popular music teaching and learning, higher education, informal music learning, Do-It-Yourself (DIY), Do-It-With-Others (DIWO)

Introduction

Students sit in pairs or small groups at stations in a music technology lab. Each group clusters around a computer and a piano keyboard. Some students chat noisily, gesturing or jotting down notes as they go. Others focus on the large Digital Audio Workstation screen in front of them, moving segments of recorded audio or trying out effects they have recently learned to apply. Still others play the keyboards, listening to their output through headphones. Students move at their own pace, focusing on composition, collaboration, making specific sounds, or working through ideas. Movement in the lab is fluid, teachers circulating and students occasionally moving about to peer at another screen, get a CD, or plug in another set of headphones. Groups are at different phases of the project, but all students are working at making their own popular music compositions, using strategies they have recently learned during an in-class workshop. The music computer room has actually become a sort of laboratory; changing sounds resonate into students' headphones as they experiment. Interestingly, these students are not learning music technology for future work as music majors. They are not receiving credit as part of a music ensemble. Rather, students are engaged in a music studies class that asks them to critically analyze music making in context while taking a new leap into creative composition.

This classroom scene was just one session of a co-taught interdisciplinary popular music course, *Music and Contemporary Politics*, which will be discussed more fully later in the article. The course was designed so that students could easily discuss, improvise, and share ideas in much the same way that a DIY community of musicians might collaborate. Placed within the existing university structure, the course also maintained aspects from a more traditional music curriculum. In this article, the authors present their pedagogical strategies for a co-taught popular music university course that incorporated the shared elements of a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) and Do-It-With-Others (DIWO) learning community. At present, differing approaches incorporate popular music into the classroom for specific ends (Green 2001; Mantie 2013). As these types of music became increasingly incorporated into the university, at least as course content, pedagogical strategies initially focused on two areas: adding popular music content to traditional classroom methods for music appreciation and analysis, and teaching popular music to students aspiring to professional careers in the genre (Björnberg 1993; Snell 2009; Dunbar-Hall and Wemyss 2000; Titon 2009, Hannan 2003). This article expands upon a growing recommended third strategy: incorporating popular music in both content and methodology. Even when popular music learning strategies are explored,

rarely have researchers identified pedagogical methods for using popular music within integrated approaches to curriculum design, where students may use a musical topic to learn not only about performance practice, music

history, or theory, but also as a route to study aspects usually explored in other subject areas. (Oehler and Henley 2009: 6)

Thinking specifically about how popular music practices overlap with movements for political change, the course under analysis in this article invites discussion on how popular music learning strategies can facilitate student learning on subject matter that extends beyond music performance.

The authors first contextualize the need for the incorporation of popular music into academic settings. We describe how our popular music pedagogy, an interdisciplinary approach drawing on informal music learning, moves beyond additive or pre-professional music learning strategies. Next, we identify practices from the course that exemplify our popular music pedagogy, a collaborative approach that we term Improvisatory Integrative Learning (IIL). This learning and teaching practice incorporates strategies we derive from informal music learning as well as from DIY and DIWO creative approaches. In this article, we employ the term DIY to refer to a self-directed approach towards learning that welcomes all participants to become creators of music, regardless of prior skill level. This idea of DIY in musical practice is based on an understanding of bottom-up music making that has been embraced by punk musicians (Reynolds 2006; Leblanc 1999; Wicke 1990).¹ Where a DIY ethos invites students to create their own media, a DIWO ethos extends this concept further towards collaborative work (Catlow and Garrett 2007). Our teaching and learning strategy capitalizes on the opportunities from formal music learning for developing critical listening and analytical thinking, and further transforms them through creative techniques. This approach also relies on the strengths of multiple pedagogies while maintaining a balance between the music that is familiar to students and the music that is beyond their everyday experience. In this context, we discuss the limitations of and possible responses to institutional constraint. Ultimately, we conclude that a flexible interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning popular music in the university setting could be beneficial for students as well as professors in a variety of disciplines.²

Inclusion of popular music curriculum into music classrooms

There are major differences between the role of popular music in the classroom in North American, European, and Australian contexts, particularly in the degree to which popular music is included in curricula and the kind of scrutiny this music faces within academic settings (Mantie 2013). This article draws on an experience within a US institution, which comes with a specific set of challenges and opportunities.³ Employing literature from multiple disciplines and experiences with teaching in other areas, the authors also explore how the specifics of this particular case are relatable to other countries, institutions, and educational settings.

This context, while specific, offers many similarities with other higher education institutions serving a diverse body of undergraduates. Popular music courses in postsecondary institutions in the United States and Canada tend to be fewer in number than those focusing on Western art music and other genres.

Further, methods used to teach popular music are often the same or similar to those used for other genres, and may include course textbooks, lecture-focused content mastery, and other top-down learning strategies. Finally, many courses using popular music in Canada and the United States teach skills for the production of that music, such as the skills learned in guitar studios or digital music production. This strategy is in contrast to one that integrates both creative engagement and analysis of the social context of popular music. Finally, popular music methodologies are rarely used to help students develop mastery in other content areas.

The Tanglewood Declaration, a 1968 statement arising from a groundbreaking event in the history of music education in the United States, asserted that, “music of all periods, styles, forms, and cultures belongs in the curriculum. The musical repertory should be expanded to involve music of our time in its rich variety, including currently popular teenage music and avant-garde music, American folk music, and the music of other cultures” (Choate 1968: 139). This claim, made a half a century ago and taken as a charge to include vernacular music in a variety of settings, has encouraged musicians and scholars to embrace popular genres in music education in the United States. The ways in which this music has been introduced, however, have varied widely over time. A more conservative pedagogy operates in an additive fashion: popular music subject matter is supplemented in music studies courses as an addendum to textbooks and lesson plans. Alternately, new courses on rock or other vernacular musics are proposed exclusively using the existing structures of teaching, learning, and evaluation (Krikun 2009). In both cases, popular music is assimilated into a more traditional formal music education in the classroom. Even though the music tends to be learned informally outside of the university setting, adding material to formal pedagogies does address the Tanglewood charge to an extent (Cutietta 1991).

Clearly, popular music practices and pedagogies internationally can speak to concerns in the US and Canada (Archer 2012; Ho 2014; Nooshin 2005; Stokes 2010). The situation in the United States overlaps in significant ways with pedagogy in Europe: popular music programs tend to be new, lecture-style teaching continues to be a strategy teachers choose, and the history of popular music is a common course subject. In the UK, popular music degree programs are more likely to be offered at newer institutions of higher learning and the majority of degree programs have been introduced since 2003. That is, in a university setting, popular music in the UK “is a ‘new’ subject largely taught within ‘new’ universities” (Cloonan and Hulstedt 2013: 66). In a 2013 study, interviews with popular music Programme Leaders at UK higher education institutions found that “traditional lecture-based modules formed the backbone of their degree programmes”, while these educators also determined that this style of teaching can be used in consort with other pedagogical strategies including peer learning, music production, or seminar-style teaching (ibid.: 75). Elsewhere in Europe, university programs in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland have offered popular music courses, generally in musicology and music pedagogy (Pfleiderer 2011). A 2011 study suggests that the largest subset of these classes focus on the history of popular music (ibid.: 48). Types of popular music pedagogy, such as cooperative learning, have been successfully developed for secondary school music classrooms through programs like Soundcheck in the Netherlands; this move does

not clearly translate into university education or for the learning of subject matter beyond music studies (Evelein 2006).

Inclusion of popular music in the curriculum, even when taught through classroom techniques devised for other music genres, has benefits for students. This kind of additive strategy can help learners because studying this repertoire uses similar skills that are used in other types of music (Hannan 2003). Studying global and popular musics in the classroom allows students to learn “skills such as pitch discrimination, manipulation of timing and dynamics, listening, ensemble (unless entirely solo), communication with audiences, rehearsal, musical direction, movement, and stage etiquette” (ibid.: 92). Studying popular music as if it were any other kind of music, however, misses out on some significant possibilities.

Teaching and learning strategies

Focusing not just on the inclusion of popular music subject matter but rather the incorporation of learning strategies modeled after popular music allows teachers and students to take full advantage of the possibilities that these musical genres offer. Utilizing learning strategies that students practice informally with peers has long been an essential part of music learning and music making outside of institutional settings (Green 2008). Recently, music educators and scholars in North America have begun to notice that this approach to music learning has been under-examined and have argued for incorporating a variety of pedagogical techniques (Campbell 1995; Clements and Campbell 2006; Hebert and Campbell 2000; Jaffurs 2004). This increasing diversity of teaching strategies is also a trend in education in higher education institutions internationally (Cloonan and Hulstedt 2013). While changes are underway, a discrepancy continues to exist between the ways in which musicians learn and practice music making inside and outside the academy. Features such as peer learning, improvisatory practices, and learning by ear, which are highly regarded in musical practices outside of the academy, still have much progress to make in terms of their inclusion in formal university classrooms (Green 2008). Although many institutions now teach styles beyond Western art music and jazz, the practice, performance, and analysis of popular music, a major content area for informal music learning, are still frequently taught using the same pedagogical strategies as these other genres. In a sense, the kinds of music that are being taught and the ways in which they are offered in higher education institutions can significantly improve in order to better reflect the ever-changing music scene occurring beyond the walls of academia and to serve the multifarious population of young musicians. We argue that in teaching popular music, professors have much to gain by practicing what they preach, further applying developing strategies to use popular music methodologies for popular music content delivery. Further, these strategies can expand the learning of content beyond popular music subject matter.

In the United States and Canada, auditions for many music schools in higher education typically require a breadth and depth of knowledge in Western art music or, more recently, jazz. Improvisatory (apart from jazz), creative or other modes of musicianship are still often overlooked. With a few notable exceptions

that incorporate creative approaches to ethnomusicology, music teacher education programs, and popular music studies, students who pursue undergraduate degrees in composition or performance are encouraged to focus on jazz or Western art music styles. It is for these selected few students who choose music as their professional career that formal music education operates effectively and hand-in-hand with their musical preferences. Many other students who have interests and skills in music do not access the opportunities that music schools and departments could offer them as non-majors or students with backgrounds in global and popular genres. Music institutions miss important opportunities to engage with other kinds of cultural expressions in which students find meaning when they maintain such a narrow focus. Formal music education in universities can improve its response to the plethora of music that students create and enjoy. What role might popular music learning and teaching have in addressing diverse ways students listen, create and engage with music?

Contextualizing the course

This question is best addressed with working definitions of popular music and informal music learning in mind. The definition of “popular” music can be quite contentious. According to Rodriguez (2004: 14), popular music “is so formidable a presence in our lives, and of such rich and sustained history, that the term inevitably has different meanings to people”. Rodriguez suggests that there are three fundamental principles to which a piece of music must adhere to be considered popular: the measurable consumption (the more the people listen to it, the more popular it becomes), the delivery mode (whether it is sheet music, movie soundtrack, a CD, etc.), and the type of people the music is associated with (the empowerment the listener achieves by listening to the piece). Consumption, delivery, and audience also appear in other discussions of “popular” music. The introduction to the *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World* (Shepherd et al. 2005) acknowledges how its editors faced the question “what counts as popular music?” This publication, which has its roots in the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM), both chose to focus primarily on “the urban, the commodified and the mass disseminated” and acknowledged that “the principal test for including music as ‘popular’ has been whether it has been so regarded by communities of practitioners or users”. Given the contingent definition of popular music itself, the course under consideration in this article began with an interactive discussion in which students parsed through the term popular music. After reading multiple sources and listening to music together, students then extended this activity into a collaborative wiki in which they compiled course-specific definitions of the popular music terms they used in class.

Improvisatory Integrative Learning

Improvisatory Integrative Learning is applicable to interdisciplinary approaches in which popular music learning facilitates student learning in multiple subject areas. This approach allows instructors to design, refine, and expand their teaching strategies in collaboration with others. Thinking about music learning beyond preparing students for careers as professional performing musicians, the IIL strategy takes its collaborative and exploratory nature from informal music learning practices. Informal music learning is based on premises such as that: the repertoire used in music classrooms is student-selected; learning occurs by making music, rather than learning about music; the learning is peer directed; it is a holistic way of learning (Green 2008). For IIL, students work with open-ended instructions, and, to the extent possible, students take control of the pace, methods, and content of their projects. This specific learning strategy is also designed to be accessible for students with a variety of music backgrounds, including those students who describe themselves as non-musicians or with no prior acquired musical skills. In contrast to a strategy for learning concert genres,

rather than encouraging music students to *appreciate* the brilliant artistry of great composers of the distant past and to successfully *replicate their intentions*, popular music pedagogy tends to emphasize the opposite notion: that the music already enjoyed by youth has value, and that creating original songs can actually be an approachable and empowering activity that everybody can and should learn. (Hebert 2011: 13)

IIL bridges this strategy for inviting all students to create with other elements of popular music pedagogies: incorporating self-directed learning that derives from a student's own motivations and interests as well as embodied and informal learning strategies (Lebler 2008; Snell 2009).

Studying popular music in an integrative fashion can offer students an inviting entry point into contextualized analysis of music making. For this reason, we propose an interdisciplinary approach. When students encounter popular music in the classroom, they are able to learn in an interactive environment and foster strong connections with their existing interests (Biamonte 2011). Further, students are able to engage with material they already know on some levels, for example as amateur performers and fans, then experience the music with the benefit of additional critical tools. Drawing on methods from ethnomusicology, studying multiple kinds of music in context helps students make connections between sound and the many relevant relationships and issues that surround it. For example, students in our course wrote autoethnographies of themselves as musicians and listeners. Thinking critically about their own roles as musicians allowed them to place themselves in specific contexts and to draw on their own experiences of performance as one of their tools of analysis (Barz and Cooley 2008). Starting from reflections on their personal background in choirs, garage bands, community groups, and school music ensembles grounded our subsequent discussions of the social context of music making. In this way, studying popular music as a social phenomenon offers students the opportunity to analyze music's role in identity formation and its many influences on global socio-political events. A contextualized analysis of this kind of music offers students a way to engage

deeply with the many aspects of musical expression. Through the process of studying the music in its cultural milieu, “students can expand interdisciplinary learning to deeper levels, allowing them to revel in the music’s artfulness, delve into its history, learn its technologies, and unravel its meanings and social impacts” (Oehler and Hanley 2009: 6). It is such a context upon which IIL is premised. Creating an interdisciplinary course joining informal music learning strategies and DIY/DIWO approaches with the analytical tools offered by music studies offers students a way to listen critically to popular music and to explore the possibilities in making music themselves.

The course in context

The course described here was piloted within a school of music in the United States that emphasized the practice and performance of Western art music. This school is part of a larger university structure. While many undergraduates had an interest in popular music, there were few course offerings that reflected this. At the time that we proposed this course, the university offered no courses in popular music for non-music majors, though some have since been introduced. This course in its initial and subsequent offerings has aimed to help the school of music maintain its relevance to a diverse student body, providing an opportunity for students to both make and think critically about music that is outside the Western art music canon. It was to this end that the theme of contemporary politics was selected as the focus of the course. Unlike other courses the authors researched that are developing popular music pedagogies to teach music making, we sought an interdisciplinary angle. Contemporary politics afforded case studies that were highly participatory in nature; this subject matter invited students to take part in local music events. In order to delve into the current socio-political issues related to selected marginalized populations around the world and to investigate how music functions as a means of protest, students explored issues of grassroots activism and developed their own inquiries into how participatory music can function as a means of resistance. We found that the participatory nature of the political situations studied in the syllabus aligned well with a DIY ideology of popular music making in both content and pedagogy. As active musicians who also have experience in grassroots political activism in various venues and for different goals, both authors felt it necessary to amalgamate popular music and issues related to contemporary politics in order to provide a relevant popular music course to students.

In order to be added as quickly and seamlessly as possible into the university’s catalog, the course was designed to fit within the existing structure of the school of music’s offerings. The course covered three major skills: critical listening, creative performance, and analytical writing. Some of the case studies that were discussed in the course were the protest music of the Civil Rights Movement in the US, musical nationalism after 9/11, and the underground music scene in Iran after the revolution. The students were evaluated in multiple ways through writing an autobiographical essay, composing a piece of music based on a political situation of their choice, and writing a case study that relates a musical movement to a political topic (See APPENDIX). Ordinarily, courses at this level expose

students majoring in disciplines outside of music to basic terminology and concepts for music listening, which is often situated in Western art music. However, the institutional structure allows for instructors to offer alternative takes on this model. These alternatives might focus specifically on a subset of Western art music while maintaining an introductory nature and non-major student audience. With the approval of senior faculty, we were able to make some significant changes to the structure of the course, yet we also adhered to other non-negotiable course characteristics including the teaching and learning of basic elements of music. This course, like all others in the music school, followed certain requirements for all approved courses. A course description with some set topics was published the term before the class began. Further, a syllabus with detailed assignments was provided to students on the first day of the course. Finally courses of this kind were required to incorporate a certain number of written assignments that were graded by the instructors. Nevertheless, we did find some flexibility within this structure. Most significantly, the course integrated three significant strategies: it incorporated a creative music composition assignment instead of a traditional exam; it relied upon student choice for a portion of the material studied; and it was co-taught by instructors from two different music studies sub-specialties.

Drawing on music education, performance, ethnomusicology, and musicology scholarship, as well as their corresponding pedagogical practices, and in consort with music learning from outside the academy, the popular music pedagogy for this course took on an identity of its own. Our interdisciplinary framework together with the selected political case studies invited students to think through the definition of popular music from multiple angles, including the use of peer learning, exploring the dissemination and consumption of popular music, and investigating the myriad meanings and identities generated within popular music. For course content, we selected case studies that highlighted the multiple roles of musicians as innovators and active participants in social spheres. When listening to and learning about practices associated with Riot Grrrl, for example, students delved into how punk musicians learned to play instruments from peers, and they analyzed the DIY nature of the making and distributing of 'zines and recordings. Krautrock, on the other hand, presented students with music as a means of social change when German bands such as Kraftwerk, Tangerine Dream, and Faust used electronic music as a means to reinvent their cultural identities by distancing themselves from both their own prewar German *Schlager* musicians and Anglophone "pop" music counterparts. By analyzing Iranian underground music scenes, students learned how un-sanctioned popular music could be created, performed, and disseminated through bottom-up approaches and underground networks.

Through these choices, course material prepared students to take an active role as music makers. Further, these chosen examples typified clear connections between musical activities and other social activities, creating opportunities for students to analyze sound in context. Because of the DIY nature of these musical practices, it seems fitting that the course developed its own DIY/DIWO character. As we taught this course in its first and subsequent iterations, student experiences coalesced around four themes by which popular music was able to change the dynamic of the present status quo. These themes were autonomy, play, peer

learning and peer teaching. The course structure provided scaffolding around which participants came to engage in innovative teaching and learning practices. In the remainder of this article we focus on three major classroom activities that were part of this process: an autoethnographic writing assignment, a creative composition, and a case study that students wrote and presented orally. These experiences emerged as a result of both strategic teaching choices and improvisation with students during the term. We discuss the processes that comprise ILL in the following sections, based on a DIY/DIWO ethos.

Do-It-Yourself (DIY)

Do-It-Yourself music practices incorporate a bottom-up organizational style. Rooted specifically in punk and post-punk musical practices, a DIY practice expands definitions of what is deemed musical, incorporates new kinds of subject matter, and takes seriously the efforts of musicians who might in other schema be considered amateur (Cogan 2007). Goals of incorporating DIY music learning into the classroom include fostering a learning community in which students have the ability to make decisions about their learning, and one that embraces the diverse creative efforts of non-specialists as creators of music. At its best, the use of DIY practices suggests that students can learn effectively, both about popular music and about interdisciplinary subject matter, while they are encouraged to make music as they learn to analyze music in context. When combined with DIWO practices, students take time to listen to each other, and to develop skills that allow them to offer feedback in a way that is useful for their peers.

Integrating the concept of a DIY music making community into the course and presenting communities that incorporated such practices into their music making was a deliberate undertaking by the authors. This served two functions: first, to highlight the kinds of music practices that place value on grassroots and self-produced music; and second, to create a space for students to feel in charge of their music learning with respect to content and production. The DIY ethos operates on self-direction and freedom to create, which we connect to the learning concepts autonomy and play, respectively (Green 2008). This experiment succeeded in that the course itself became a type of a DIY community, and the students continued their projects using and developing DIY elements. The reflection students engaged in, the music they created, and the case studies they generated showed the degree they were invested in popular music making and learning within the course, specifics of which will be addressed in the following sections.

Autonomy

An attribute of our ILL approach that derived from informal music learning was the degree of autonomy the learners enjoyed. In Green's study, learners were given the opportunity to choose music that interested them. What the learners valued "was not merely the autonomy to select the equipment and content [...] but moreover, to direct [their] own learning in relation to pace, structure and progression" (Green 2008: 104). Ryan and Deci (1985: 71) suggest that "teachers

who support autonomy (in contrast to control) catalyze in their students greater intrinsic motivation, curiosity, and desire for challenge". Autonomy improves students' attitudes toward their own learning and helps them to achieve more. It was to this end that the students were encouraged to think critically about their past listening habits and make a new piece of music in which they applied both critical thinking skills and a creative sense of play.

In order to establish themselves at the centers of their own learning, students began the class with a reflective essay. Modeled after autoethnographic writing in ethnomusicology, this exercise invited students to consider their own position as music makers and listeners before proceeding to reading and, eventually writing, their own analyses of popular music making in context. The perspective ethnomusicologists gain by reflecting on their subject position as performers and researchers simultaneously (Harrison 2014; Wong 2008) can be explored in a parallel fashion by individual students as they distance themselves from the idea of a universal music listener. This kind of scrutiny allowed students to evaluate how their viewpoints impact the way they interpret the music around them (Dunbar-Hall 2009). Implicitly placing value on the popular music experience students had from their lives, this process also helped students become aware of their own skills and knowledge. Tracing their own musical trajectories helped students to start the process of connecting music practice to larger social issues that affect music making (Yuyan 2009). Students worked to develop a thorough description and reflection of their musical journey. This writing assignment was open-ended; students were encouraged to take risks and be as creative as possible. We provided a variety of prompts to start off their thinking, though ultimately adherence to these was optional. Students ended up naming and describing pieces of music that were influential for them, tracing changes in their own listening habits over time, and speculating about how their experience with popular music shaped their personal identities. These responses included reflection on the students' roles as listeners and performers, as well as musical descriptions of the material that they found meaningful and relevant. Students reflected back on their positionality later in the course as they conducted case studies that researched a topic of their own choosing.

There were two reasons for incorporating such an assignment. First, as music teachers, we felt the need to get to know our students well from the beginning of the course. Students were provided a space to present what they enjoyed the most in their music making and listening practices. These reflections were helpful for us to develop the course on the go; the course was intended to be flexible in order to meet students' needs. Second, within this assignment, students were encouraged to study their own musicianship with respect to and in contrast with what they expected they would gain from the course. Creating a soundtrack of their musical lives allowed students to become aware of and take ownership of the ways they interacted with music, much the same way as DIY community members do. Self-directed projects, in a variety of mediums, can provide a sense of empowerment to community members. Students included amateur and casual musical experiences as legitimate pieces of their musical lives, and also reflected upon the groups and communities in which they encountered different kinds of popular music.

Starting with self-reflection, students then drew on their own experiences and interests whenever possible. They had a starting point from within themselves to first realize that their musical preferences are valued, and second, have a chance to step back and critically examine their own musicianship as they progressed to making music in class. The autonomy they gained from these practices encouraged them to become active listeners with dynamic engagement in music making, in contrast to the passive listeners who are often the products of music appreciation courses (Campbell 1995). For one student, this took the form of connecting her interest in LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans* Queer) activism with her love for lyrical R'n'B. Working from existing songs by queer artists that address equality in their lyrics, the student incorporated clips of first-person narration by people talking about their LGBTQ identities, including opinions about marriage in particular. The voices of LGBTQ individuals along with an intimate one-line melody started smoothly at the beginning of the song leading to a slow rise of tempo and dynamic of the voices and the melody, culminating in a discussion about marriage rights. The piece ended with strong energy including multiple instrumental timbres and high dynamic volume. Because the student focused on something that was important to her personally, LGBTQ rights, the sound collage she created was both carefully thought-out and well-crafted.

Play

Facilitating a student composition project is a prime example of how ILL was used in the course. Students were given a wide range of options for incorporating music of their choice into their projects. The class's non-music major student population made it an excellent environment for encouraging learners who do not consider themselves "musicians" to make music. While some students were apprehensive at first, the project eventually allowed all participants, regardless of background, to make and present an original song.

Students undertook a two-fold strategy to prepare for this project: a guided analysis of electronically-composed popular music and a workshop on using a digital audio workstation (DAW). Through guided listening in class, and discussion of material students read outside of class, students explored ideas of digital music making. We experimented with found sound, integrating spoken and musical material into new compositions, and listened to how musicians manipulate audio within new popular music pieces. Reflecting back on the class wiki, we then revisited how basic musical elements could be incorporated into their compositions. Based on these exercises, students brainstormed an area of their own interest in which concepts of politics and aesthetics overlap, with an ear towards pieces they would create themselves.

The in-class workshop described in the beginning of this article mirrored this model of guided and open-ended learning. Sessions in the music computer lab focused on working with the DAW software. The first workshop session involved elements of directed explanation aimed at helping students develop enough familiarity with the DAW to begin to explore confidently on their own. After students worked with and internalized the beginning stages of music production, subsequent time in the lab became student-directed. Learners experimented with playing and recording while teachers, and sometimes peers, circulated and

responded to questions and comments. After these introductory sessions, and without direct prompts on how to create their music, students were encouraged to go to the lab whenever possible to continue their compositions.

After making a piece of popular music, students then created written artists' statements, detailing the themes of their piece that they hoped would resonate with listeners, and describing their creative process. Working with the collaborative popular music vocabulary wiki, students described their musical projects in terms of rhythm, tempo, feeling, emotion, mood, and other characteristics they determined as relevant to their own work. All students, regardless of performance experience, presented their music for each other in an informal concert. While some were nervous at first, everyone succeeded in playing music for the class. At the end of the course, some students pointed to this performance as the accomplishment of which they were the most proud. As a whole, students selected both musical genres and the thematic concept of their songs based on their personal interests or those of their group. This resulted in an array of topics, including Occupy Wall Street, LGBTQ rights, global emerging democracies, and the costs associated with going to war. As students arrived with a variety of backgrounds and interests, it was no surprise when their songs aligned with many music genres, including folk, rock, R'n'B, and synth pop. Students sampled existing songs, and also used other strategies, such as playing instrumental parts on the lab keyboards to layer into their pieces. One student incorporated acoustic performance and played the piece live during the class concert. Because this music making was opened to work in teams, students also improvised as collaborative groups, a topic which will be addressed further in the following section.

Within this musical activity, we highlighted the positive impacts of learning through doing (Elliott 1995). One student reflected that this kind of learning was a challenge, but it was ultimately worthwhile. Through IIL, students first used critical listening skills to interpret existing pieces of music. Then, they improvised in the lab, engaging in musical play. Finally, they synthesized critical analysis with creative production, making pieces of popular music that expressed their own ideas. Projects like these can help to create classroom situations in which everyone can learn to make original music while learning about other subject matter. Students are empowered to think of themselves as critical thinkers and creatives. They also explore learning in a collaborative manner, as the next section will demonstrate.

Do-It-With-Others (DIWO)

Peer Learning

Through experimenting with music making, students experienced not only the DIY concepts of autonomy and play, but also the DIWO concepts of collaboration and camaraderie. By working together, participants connected to each other, shared ideas, and collaborated in making alternative art. These strategies together form the second part of IIL. Learning from peers and teachers, students were empowered to explore their own creativity, undermining the

dichotomy between professionals who make music and non-professionals who “just” listen. The purpose of incorporating the creative composition assignment into the course was mainly to facilitate creativity and highlight students’ musical imaginations. During the workshop sessions in the lab, students focusing on different projects collaborated with one another and gave each other feedback. As they learned, they offered help and support to their fellow students.

Through this practice, students also mirrored the roles in the case studies that they explored. As mentioned earlier, musicians in scenes such as Riot Grrrl, Krautrock and Iranian underground music did not solely act as musicians, but as agents of social change and political activism. None of these grassroots movements would be possible without the essence of DIWO. This aesthetic moves beyond cooperating on a project. Rather, members collaborate to make progress on a socio-political issue that is of relevance to them. That is, DIWO processes encourage participants to learn how to identify resources as well as how to provide assistance to others. At their best, DIWO music communities begin by inviting members to act as band members, cooperating on the process of music making. They then encourage students to learn how to incorporate the expertise of instructors as mentors within their creations. Finally, DIWO fosters a sense of mastery within students, inviting them to offer useful feedback to peers. Though the two concepts of DIY and DIWO overlap in some aspects, they should not be considered as one entity (Garrett and Catlow 2012). While DIY focuses on student-directed learning and non-specialist music making, DIWO is useful for educators because it focuses specifically on collaborative learning and the importance of engaging in the learning process *with* others.

Because collaborating comes with challenges, students had to develop the skills to listen to each other and improvise as they went. One participant who worked with a friend found that the compromise that making music together required was difficult at times, yet it ended with a positive result. This project went through several iterations over time. Interested in the group nature of participatory politics, the students chose to make a piece of music centering on public voting behavior. The students, themselves just recently old enough to vote, started by listening to previous attempts to use music to encourage voting. They tried layering in various kinds of spoken and sung audio over the voice of a successful pop star. After they developed their ideas through the process of making a song, they further expanded their ideas while presenting the music. Through the in-class concert, these students exchanged ideas with classmates. Fellow students asked questions about the piece and its composition. By discussing it when they played the piece for their audience, they further clarified their ideas about how music is a collective active phenomenon rather than something that one merely hears.

The DIWO principles that students employed did not stop at the edge of classroom walls. Collaborative work expanded into musical experiences outside of the classroom, connecting in-class learning with application. This was particularly true for a group of students who chose to focus on the music of Occupy Wall Street (OWS), a grassroots political movement that cherishes participatory activism as its core. This group’s interest was piqued when they explored the topic through their collaborative musical composition. Playing with robotic voices, synth pop beats, and sound effects such as police sirens and

aerosol cans, the ensemble developed a musical commentary on the economic situation of the Reagan era. Extending learning beyond the classroom, the students who worked together on this project became collaborative DJs for a local radio station, where they worked on a program that showcased underground and counter-cultural music. Because so many students developed their interest in OWS during the term, we felt it pertinent to invite a local musician who was involved with OWS to discuss how he made and used music within the movement. By inviting a community expert to class, we opened a space in which students connected in-class lessons with musical activities happening around the city.

These two examples were among many that demonstrated the influence of ILL on students' sense of camaraderie and partnership. In this context students learned from peer collaboration, rather than always waiting for direct instruction from their professors. From the first steps of improvising and creating their music to the final presentations and question and answer section of their performances, students showed enthusiasm, autonomy, and sense of working in a community, a community of their fellow non-major musicians who developed their own varied interests together.

The creative project served as a jumping-off-point for another project later in the course. This assignment took the form of a case study for which students were able to select any topic in which they had developed an interest; some students chose to continue with themes they had first explored through their reflective writing and musical composition. Not surprisingly for a course with DIY/DIWO elements, the punk movement with all its manifestations, including post-punk and punk across the globe was a popular theme for final projects. Other students selected themes that stemmed from subject matter covered in the course syllabus, including nationalism and black power. In this way, class discussions, personal reflection, musical composition, and personal interests from beyond the classroom directed student choice for their projects.

Peer Teaching

For the authors, a byproduct of our ILL strategy was our own learning. As previously mentioned, it was a deliberate decision to combine our understandings of popular music teaching and learning drawn from our particular disciplines in order to better serve our students. However, using this space to learn ourselves was not initially an explicit intention. The authors believe that through this partnership, the involved parties complemented each other in teaching, learning, and integrating popular music into a formal institution, and the learning process occurred not only for the students but for the teachers as well. Growing out of music scholarship that acknowledges that teachers learn through practicing their craft, we choose to use the term peer teaching to describe how we learned from each other (Russell 2006; Thompson 2007). There was not a curricular model for us to implement, and the course was intended to be flexible. In this vein, having a partner to collaborate with proved to be beneficial, again reflecting the way popular musicians create their music. We employed each other's feedback and comments when facing multiple challenges. The presence of another teacher from a different discipline and standpoint was valuable in that it added to our library of

teaching approaches. Our teaching collaboration became a necessary component of ILL. The productivity of such an approach warrants the serious consideration of team teaching in university settings. When making decisions about course credits for professors and budget considerations for schools and departments, it is worth keeping in mind the many benefits for students and faculty that occasional team-taught courses can provide.

Building on each other's previous teaching experiences, we were able to offer expertise and teaching strategies from multiple areas. One teacher brought experience teaching popular music composition at a juvenile detention center; this kind of learning through doing thus informed the collaborative course design. The other brought experience of analyzing popular music in a changing social context; helping students learn to ask and answer critical questions formed another important course design element. Together, participation with two different alternative music scenes gave the instructors insight on the subjects of Iranian underground music and hip hop respectively. Pooling knowledge on digital audio recording and editing as well as specifics on different popular music genres in context allowed us to respond in greater depth to students' questions than any single person could have alone. Further, our different vantage points on popular music phenomena allowed us to model dialogue and the generative possibilities of reading a single kind of music in multiple ways, a strategy we encouraged students to explore as well.

While it required flexibility, co-teaching came with benefits for professors and students alike. Our approaches to music teaching were not always similar. This dissimilarity, mostly due to our different disciplines, created some advantages. Because one of us tended to present material with clear overarching themes to the lesson and the other through improvising on the lesson, we were able to reach students who preferred to have material arranged in both ways. Because of the flexibility needed to make the classroom experience successful, collaboration also freed us from using exactly the same methods we were taught for university teaching. For example, we were willing to try strategies each of us had used with primary and secondary school students, and found that creativity and occasional levity helped to enliven the university classroom. We sometimes improvised in the classroom, deviating from pre-arranged lesson plans when one instructor had a new idea arise, and played off each other and our students as we tried it out. We brought performance and analysis together, learned from each other, and felt a pedagogical permission to be flexible with each other and our students. Our partnership thus added value to the design and performance of the course. As Garber (2009: 74) noted:

Exciting and convincing interdisciplinary work stages a really intensive encounter of two or more disciplines, with results that can be unexpected and disconcerting, but also path-breaking and sometimes brilliant. We might compare this kind of encounter to the pedagogical challenge of team teaching, often and quite wrongly thought of as easier than conventional teaching rather than more difficult. Two teachers in the classroom can flash ideas off one another in ways that are exhilarating for both of them, and for their students. But they also need to learn each other's mental moves, rhetoric and styles of thought, taking nothing for granted. Otherwise both they and the students will be bothered and bewildered rather than bewitched. Nothing

works better than team teaching, when it works; nothing falls flatter when it fails.

Our partnership not only expanded our teaching horizons, but also provided us with a space to take risks, improvise and experience first-hand how students engage with their music.

Further recommendations for teaching and learning

The institutional framework into which this class was required to fit offered structure, which came with its own challenges. Based on our own improvisatory integrative learning experiences, the authors suggest that further experimentation within the university environment could lead to more adaptive ways of incorporating popular music teaching and learning in post-secondary education. Experimenting with changes in evaluation methods could offer one such avenue for increased success. In our experience, both departmental and student expectations aligned with those of the professors assigning grades, in large part based on written and presentational student work. This was particularly the case as this course was not a performance ensemble class; the course was integrated into a framework in which students were expected to learn to listen to and describe musical sound as well as to develop critical thinking skills that would allow them to understand music in a wider social context. In our institutional setting, students typically demonstrate these skills through writing assignments, formal presentations, and exams that are graded by the professor. The students we worked with were often goal-focused in the classroom; they expected to know how teachers would assign grades, and were used to the grading process being quantifiable. While a creative composition was possible for one of the major assignments, the department expected that students would also write a traditional paper or sit an exam for the course. In this context, it was fruitful to examine the possibilities of incorporating alternative evaluation mechanisms.

Peer learning and self-assessment, common in popular music learning, allow for learning and relationship building among students (Lebler 2008). At the same time, the evaluation strategies normalized for formal university marking commonly derive from the input of a single instructor. While we were able to give student work input from two instructors and to include peer feedback in a non-evaluative manner, we were not able to fully explore alternative evaluation mechanisms. One possible option for future teaching is to expand the incorporation of evaluation by fellow members of the learning community. Outside of the academy, peer evaluation is common in popular music learning; this has been taken up to an extent in university ensemble rehearsals (Byrne and Sheridan 2000; Pulman 2014). Peer assessment has been explored to a degree in music performance (Blom and Poole 2004; Hunter 1999; Searby and Ewere 1997), but peer assessment as an explicit and official method of evaluation in music studies could be more emphasized. Hybrid methods by which teachers and peers provide feedback and contribute to a student's evaluation would be fruitful to further explore in the university classroom in the United States. The authors attempted to follow the guidelines of their specific institution, where peer

evaluation was not considered a regular form of assessment in academic coursework. Efforts to increase opportunities for peer learning can build on research in peer assessment from other areas in higher education (Boud, Cohen and Sampson 2001; Dochy, Segers and Sluijsmans 1999; Falchikov and Goldfinch 2000; Topping 1998). Even when students are not learning to play in a band together, they can benefit from listening to peers and developing their skills in giving useful feedback. This interaction can be fostered both while students learn to make their own compositions and for assignments that do not involve playing music at all.

Prepared in advance, a course syllabus offers structure, and can even give students a sense of control in their own learning as the plan clearly outlines expectations. At the same time, a structured advance plan precludes a level of flexibility that can be generative in informal learning contexts. Our attempt to address this tension consisted of providing a structured syllabus that incorporated specific moments and mechanisms for students to guide the class. During the first class session, students shared topics related to the course that were of personal interest and discussed their reasons for participating in the course. When possible, teachers incorporated these ideas into daily class plans during the term, though we were limited in how much we could change the material. Students were asked to bring in musical examples from their own lives at frequent intervals. Subsequent versions of the course included increased opportunities for learners to share songs they were playing or listening to outside of class.

Our overall class plan also involved bringing in outside experts. As the class coincided with Occupy Wall Street, we were able to bring in a musician active with the movement. We had not foreseen how enthusiastic students would be about this issue; it was only by leaving space in the class plan for flexibility that we were able to accommodate student interest in this area. Yet even this openness had its limitations. With specific course outcomes to accomplish, we had to limit the number of community experts we involved in the course. As a result, the class focused time on OWS, of great interest to most but not all students, and we were unable to treat all students' specific interests with similar depth. Future courses might consider issuing a syllabus weekly or bi-weekly rather than for an entire term, giving teachers and students the flexibility to choose specific topics or assignments over the course of the class. Planning time at the beginning of a course for students and teachers to collaboratively build a syllabus, perhaps drawing from possible topics students and teachers could offer, would further increase student autonomy and collaboration. Future efforts in this area might further refine a balance between the desire of departments, students, and teachers to plan in advance with the possibilities that increased spontaneity can provide. While teachers, students, and administrators would need to remain flexible during these transitions, the process of learning differently could benefit all parties involved.

Teaching and learning in higher education will not be developed by increasing the range of genres taught in the university classroom alone. As Hebert (2011: 7) reports,

it is evidently unsafe to assume that an opening of the music curriculum to genres perceived as naturally more democratic than European art music (with

its baton-wielding conductor) will necessarily lead to a more democratic form of education, as exemplified by such factors as the extreme gender imbalance, canonization of repertoire, and standardization of accepted practices and pedigrees now evident in jazz education, which serves as the most relevant model for popular music pedagogy in the U.S.A.

The method of ILL that the authors have been discussing here offers many strategies for integrating the strengths of informal learning. Hebert identifies the potential for gender imbalance and repertoire canonization to emerge from formal music education. If not considered carefully, informal strategies can also produce similarly myopic results. If students only select material based on their current interests, they may miss opportunities to expand their knowledge base and experiences. These include not only the genres with which they are familiar, but also the range of ideas expressed in and through the popular music they know. Curricula crafted intentionally to include musicians from a variety of genres, geographies, genders, ethnicities, and sexual orientations offer a foray into diverse musical worlds of which students may not yet be aware. We found that ILL helped students develop interest in musics with which they had formally not been familiar. Some students, for example, listened seriously to country music for the first time as part of the course. In the university classroom, teachers can experiment with ways to incorporate student interests and current phenomena in popular music while drawing on their own strengths and knowledge, teaching students music beyond their experience and inviting them to connect to known areas, helping them to hear known music differently. Incorporating ILL invites teachers and students to expand university teaching productively, bringing in informal music learning and DIY/DIWO strategies when relevant, and building on the strengths of formal learning environments when appropriate.

This required balance will vary for different universities, professors, and even individual groups of students. In the context of our own musicianship and teaching identities we felt it pertinent to integrate our own experience with popular music in a multitude of contexts into the classroom. We worked with students whose career paths were not to become professional musicians but who wanted to be engaged with music, to internalize it, and to continue learning it. This group of students, along with our deliberately improvisatory approach, granted us a fertile ground to take risks and move in and out of the walls of the classroom. Consequently, we worked towards creating collective ownership within our learning community throughout, and even beyond, the university term.

Conclusion

This article has illustrated how Improvisatory Integrative Learning brings together informal music learning strategies used outside of the academy with the strengths of contextualized analysis made possible by the music classroom. Instead of assimilating informal music learning into a formal learning structure, we integrated it in a transformative manner. This strategy did not abandon but transfigured the beneficial extant elements of formal music learning through characteristics of a DIY/DIWO ethos encompassing both the self-directed and

collaborative elements of popular music learning and teaching. Further, we have focused on the benefits of creative music making for students who are not studying popular music performance or music production as a career path. By facilitating learning for non-specialists through autonomy, play, peer learning, and peer teaching, the music classroom expands to offer pertinent popular music content as well as new and relevant learning experiences for students. The musical projects students engaged in expanded upon existing areas of interest. Rather than necessarily producing a polished musical product with a keen ear for aesthetics, students participated in the process of creative composition and improvisation. Additionally, the class's emphasis on contemporary politics invited students to develop skills in critical listening, analysis, and music making in order to deepen their knowledge of another subject. This invites future interdisciplinary work that could bring popular music learning methods to students across departments to make classroom experiences more meaningful to them.

Integrating popular music courses into higher education offers not just one more style of music from which students may learn a similar set of skills, but teaching and learning strategies that provide innovative ways of engagement that can enrich university classrooms. These approaches can serve a diverse non-specialist and specialist student population, whether individuals study popular music, Western art music, or other genres. We have proposed strategies for future exploration of the role of popular music in changing the status quo of teaching and learning in academia. This model suggests a number of further possibilities. Further expansion of music in higher education can integrate other musical genres, each with its own ways of learning. Even from within established structures in higher education, professors can find opportunities to change the dynamic of music teaching and learning. Higher education institutions vary in their wealth of resources, accessibility, organizational structure, and established traditions; the flexible nature of ILL can be adapted to a number of other situations with the creative input of both teachers and students. Popular music has a central role to play in this process, as both a relevant type of music for university students and as a vehicle for adapting the teaching and learning environment to facilitate relevant and expansive student engagement.

Endnotes

¹ Web 2.0 tools have changed the game for self-production in music; sites with user-generated content and the development of marketing techniques that also use these sites might be argued to expand DIY in a sense. Research exploring YouTube and music dissemination include Jung (2014). For more on Internet media and music consumption practices, consult Sanjeev and Ramaprasad (2012).

² This article employs the term "professor" as used in a US and Canadian context, which refers to a teacher in a university setting.

³ The authors have taught in US and Canadian universities, and speak to concerns that are raised in other contexts as well.

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APPENDIX

Overview of the course “Music and Contemporary Politics”

In this course, students will develop their analytical skills for listening to and talking about music as it relates to political contexts. We will cover a series of case studies, including protest music in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement, underground music in post-revolution Iran, punk and post-punk, musical nationalism, and music of Occupy Wall Street. Students will also be invited to share analysis of music and contexts that relate to their personal interests. Projects include music listening and reading assignments, an autobiographical sketch, a creative composition project, and a written case study connecting musical sound to a political context of the student's choice. Experience writing, improvising, or performing music is welcome but not required. No music reading knowledge is necessary.