

## **Formal and Informal Music Learning: Attitudes and Perspectives of Secondary School Non-Music Teachers**

**Dr. John L. Vitale**

Schulich School of Education, Nipissing University

50 Wellington St. Brantford, Ontario, Canada

Phone: (519) 752-1524 Email johnv@nipissingu.ca

### **Abstract**

This study investigates formal and informal music learning through the attitudes and perspectives of 41 randomly selected non-music teachers from a suburban Toronto, Canada high school. Data collection includes a questionnaire based on a semantic differential scale, as well as a randomly selected focus group. Hence, this is a mixed method study integrating both quantitative and qualitative data. Results indicate that the attitudes and perspectives of the participants were very positive towards informally trained musicians. Specifically, participants generated three principal themes. The first theme of value indicates that informally trained musicians are very esteemed members of society. The second theme of creativity identifies how informally trained musicians are great composers. Lastly, the theme of non-conformity focuses on the steadfast desire of informally trained musicians to achieve musical competency without formal instruction. From an education perspective, conclusions demonstrate that formal music educators should consider the inherent advantages of informal music learning.

**Key Words:** music education, formal learning, informal learning, attitudes, perspectives

### **1. Introduction**

It has been my experience as a musician, music educator, and teacher educator that formally trained musicians have more admiration and respect from the general public over their informally trained counterparts (Cain, 2001). Even when informally trained musicians are accompanied by fame and fortune, such as popular musicians, they are often brushed off as commercially motivated and not serious musicians (Warner, 2003). Green (2003) states: "The case of popular music provides a clear example, insofar as it is understood, by contrast to classical music, as ephemeral, trivial, derivative, or commercial" (p. 264).

During my experience as a music educator, I have participated in numerous discussions on formally and informally trained musicians. These discussions have transpired in a variety of forums, including teacher conferences, professional development workshops, and even the teacher lounge. Even today as a teacher educator, discussions about formally and informally trained musicians are commonplace in many of my classes. Ultimately, all of these discussions have inspired me to conduct research into the attitudes and perspectives of formal and informal music learning.

### **2. Literature Review: Formal vs. Informal Learning**

#### **2.1 Formal Music**

In general, there is scholarly consensus that formal music learning is associated with classical music. Regelski (2009) argues: "Most music teachers in schools – public and private music schools – are trained in Classical music, and school music curriculum has typically favoured Classical music" (p. 4). There is even a sense among music scholars that classical music is a superior form of music (Gracyk, 2010; Green, 2003; Shepherd, 2003; Hewett, 2003; Ross and Rose, 1994). Greenawalt (1995) has stated: "I take some pleasure in some popular music, but I find the music of Mozart, Bach, and Schubert to be more deeply enjoyable, and I believe it is better music" (p. 34). Moreover, the circle of classical music society is often referred to as "high society" or "high culture", indicating it is more advanced than other forms of music. Bannister (2006) contends that this "high" attitude is an extension of capitalist ideology in western nations. Perhaps these attitudes are imbued by the very long and institutionalized past of classical music, which is clearly evident today in both public and private music education forums.

In Canada, for example, Royal Conservatory of Music in Canada, commonly referred to by the acronym RCM functions like a politically regulating body, having formal exams in performance, theory, and history that all must be passed in order to move from one level to another. Hence the expression "classically trained" or "formally trained." The influence of the RCM in Canada in terms of formal music education is second to none (Schabas, 2005). In fact, the RCM is so highly regarded in Canada that their students are often praised and even rewarded for their hard work and accomplishments.

For example, students who successfully pass Grade Eight RCM on their instrument of choice and Grade Four RCM theory receive a full Grade 12 high school credit in Ontario (Canada's largest province), which can be used as one of the six required courses needed for university admission.

The style of such musical training in the RCM Model (often referred to as studio instruction) is a very traditional, transmission style of teaching where the student is considered passive and only asks questions for clarification purposes (Kingsbury, 1988). In sum, the RCM and other institutionalized organizations (schools, colleges, and universities) approach music education in a very sequenced and formalized setting, and has usually favoured classical music. A natural extension of this phenomenon has been music education research, which has mostly dealt with the formalized approach typical of the RCM model. Folkestad (2006) states:

Most research in music education has so far dealt with music training in institutional settings, such as schools, and is accordingly based, either implicitly or explicitly, on the assumption that musical learning results from sequenced, methodical exposure to music teaching within a formal setting. . . . Consequently, in order to realize and understand the multidimensional character of music teaching, musical learning should be considered in a much broader context than it typical of much contemporary research literature. (p. 135)

## **2.2 Informal Music Learning**

The world of informal music learning is often connected to popular music forms (Green, 2001 and 2008; Lebler, 2008; Rodriguez, 2004; Jaffurs, 2004). Jaffurs (2006), for example, has stated: "The style of music that students learn in an informal setting is often popular music" (p. 07). In the realm of pop music, however, (which commercially makes up the vast majority of the music industry), there is no governing body other than the record-buying/downloading and ticket-buying public, which from week-to-week dictates what sells and what does not. In fact, many pop musicians are self-taught and have engaged in a plethora of unstructured learning scenarios and environments typical of garage band practices. The best example to date is that of The Beatles -- the most successful pop musicians of all time. In fact, none of the Fab Four knew how to read music (Roberts, 2002). Lack of formal music education, however, did not stop them from being perhaps the best songwriters of the twentieth century and the most influential entity not only in music, but also, in all of pop culture. John Lennon stated (as cited in Roberts, 2002): "None of us were technical musicians. None of us could read music. None of us can write it" (p. 22).

Being an informally trained musician, however, does not mean that influence, motivation, stimulation, and prompting from other musicians/mentors fails to exist. In fact, it is quite the contrary. That is, it is other musicians that provide the underpinning for all self-taught musicians to effectively learn a musical instrument. In the technologically savvy society we currently live in, these "other musicians" come in the form of a variety of formats, including live music, recorded music (radio, television, CDs, DVDs, MP3 files, computers, and online applications), and print-based materials (both traditional and electronic formats). The principal difference, therefore, between formal and informal musicians, is that the latter lacks in structure and instruction, but still allows for rich musical experiences representing a variety of methods and formats, very similar to the unschooling principles as described by Holt (1981) and Farenga (1984). Lebler (2008) has stated: "Popular music is usually learned in the broader community as a self-directed activity, sometimes including interactions with peers and group activities, but rarely under the direction of an expert mentor/teacher" (p. 195).

Literature in the field has also corroborated the importance of informal music learning. Fornas, Lindberg, and Sernhede (1995), for example, followed three young rock bands and discovered that informal music learning offered more many other ancillary benefits outside the realm of music education, including administration, management, and linguistic development. Green (2001) offers much in the way of the self-taught musician in the classroom specifically distinguishing between peer-directed learning and group learning. This is similar to the study by Soderman and Folkestad (2004), which shows that the creative process of making lyrics and composing music in the hip-hop genre are peer-directed and collective in character. Rodriguez (2004) and Green (2008) offer examples and strategies for the teacher's role in such a self-taught and peer-directed classroom environment. Wright and Kanellopoulos (2010) argue that both students and teachers of music experience "social and personal effectiveness of informal learning as music pedagogy" (p. 71).

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Creating Definitions of Informal and Formal Musicians**

Developing definitions for formally trained and informally trained musicians proved to be a difficult task. For starters, much of the research in music is done by formally-trained individuals, so I wanted to avoid the bias associated with such institutionalized research, including my own.

On the other hand, non-music specialists may lack the proper language, terminology, and overall nomenclature in their perspective to come up with viable definitions. The ideal scenario, therefore, was to tap into the perspectives of both music and non-music specialists. This was achieved by a previously unpublished pilot study of 52 participants who each provided a definition for both formal and informally trained musicians. All participants were in a second year, general elective undergraduate course in musical appreciation, which consisted of an almost equal split between music and non-music majors. Six participants from the pilot study (three music majors and three non-music majors) were randomly selected to create a focus group. The principal mandate of this focus group was to categorize, code, and synthesize all the data in an attempt to create a practical and functional definition for both formal and self-taught musician. These definitions were brought back to the undergraduate class for a final vote of approval, where 47 out of 52 participants (90% of the sample size) approved the content and substance of the definitions as they appear in this study, namely:

A formally trained musician is an individual who has learned to read and perform music through formal training and education offered by an accredited institution or school of music. Such education and training is teacher directed, includes formal assessment and evaluation, and culminates with some sort of documented and recognized system of achievement and completion (i.e. credit granted, certificate, diploma, and degree). In some cases, it is possible to achieve musical literacy through self-teaching and peer-directed learning.

An informally trained musician is an individual who has learned to perform music through unstructured and non-institutionalized learning environments. These environments involve self-teaching through media applications (recorded music, books, and computer technology), peer-to-peer teaching, and other social learning opportunities such as jamming. Informally trained musicians follow no stringent rules and regulations, and have no formal evaluation or documented system of achievement and completion.

### **3.2 Participants**

This study consists of 41 teachers from a variety of disciplines who teach in a suburban Toronto, Canada high school, and none of the participants were known to me prior to the commencement of this study. According to gender, the participants consisted of 24 males and 17 females, which is consistent with the gender ratios in Toronto secondary schools. Since the male to female ratio of the sample size was imbalanced, the variable of gender will not be addressed in this study. Overall, the selection of non-music teachers was an intentional attempt to solicit a non-biased view towards music learning and music-making.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

Each participant responded to a questionnaire based on a semantic differential scale (please refer to appendix one) consisting of ten closed-ended questions. In addition, a focus group session consisting of six randomly selected participants (three male and three female) was also conducted.

This diverse method of obtaining data (questionnaires and a focus groups) stems from the principle that academic validity comes from utilizing multiple methods of investigation (Bartel & Radocy, 2002). In addition, Darbyshire, MacDougall, and Schiller (2005) argue that using multiple methods is a “valuable approach that does not merely duplicate data but also offers complementary insights and understandings that may be difficult to access through reliance on a single method of data collection” (p. 417). Consequently, this is a multiple methods study entrenched in both quantitative and qualitative inquiry (Cresswell & Clark, 2007; Morse & Niehaus, 2009). Cresswell (2009) has stated:

Alternatively, researchers may first question a large number of individuals and then follow up with a few participants to obtain their specific language and voices about the topic. In these situations, collecting both closed-ended quantitative data and open-ended qualitative data prove advantageous. (p. 19)

### **3.4 Participant Questionnaire**

For this study, close-ended questions were used, and intended to extract participant attitudes and perspectives toward formal and informal music learning. Close-ended questions are used in the majority of questionnaires and are a non-threatening and simplistic platform to elicit responses from participants (Bradburn, Sudman, and Wansink, 2004). Moreover, close-ended questionnaires allow for easier coding, categorization, and statistical interpretation. Specifically, a semantic differential scale (SDS) was employed in this study. The SDS was first devised by Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957), and is a simple and elegant scale (Korzenny and Korzenny (2005), where participants are asked to indicate their degree of preference among a set of bipolar phrases or adjectives that best describe their own feelings towards a subject or issue (Majumdar, 2005). The scale thus measures the variation in intensity and direction of the participants' attitude (Kruger, 2007).

For this study, answers to the semantic differential scale were based on a ten-point polarization scale, with formally trained musicians on one side of the scale and informally trained musicians on the other side of the scale. Ten data points is a common and well-liked choice because people are familiar with a 10-point judging scale (Boslaugh and Watters, 2008). Thus, a score of one demonstrates absolute proclivity to formally trained musicians and a score of ten demonstrates absolute proclivity for informally trained musicians (see appendix one). For each question, an average numerical response between one and ten was calculated for the entire sample size of 41 participants. This average cumulative score for each question was also subjected to a standard deviation calculation, which shows whether or not the distribution of responses were near or distant to the average response.

The formulation of the ten questions was rooted in many of the discussions and personal experiences (Peterson, 2000) that I have had over the years on this topic, particularly those that generated rich and vibrant debate. One such conversation addressed the concepts of music as an art and a science, and where formally versus informally trained musicians fit into these concepts. This resulted in question one and two. There were also numerous conversations that focused on the financial success between formally and informally trained musicians, which spawned the third question. The fourth question is tied into conversations addressing Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory, particularly focusing on self-actualization level. Teacher lounge conversation always has overtones of academia, and the discussions I have participated in with other teachers on formally and informally trained musicians was no different. These conversations spawned questions five, six, and seven. Many conversations also addressed the role that music plays within society and how formally trained and informally trained musicians fit into that role, which inspired question eight. One additional topic that sparked tremendous debate explored the concept of creating original music. How society benefitted (or not) from such music was the inspiration behind questions nine and ten. Please refer to appendix one for all ten questions.

The lack of open-ended responses, however, is a major disadvantage of using a close-ended questionnaire design. This disadvantage, however, will be addressed by the data generated via the focus group, as participants had a surfeit of opportunities to expand on their questionnaire responses.

### **3.5 Focus Group**

A focus group provides an opportunity to hear, see, and interact with a small sect of the sample size, revealing specific subtleties and nuances that are not possible to detect through questionnaires (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Morgan, 1997). Gibbs (1997) has so eloquently stated: "The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way in which would not be feasible using other methods" (p.1). Another positive outcome of focus groups is known as "the group effect" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), where participants stimulate one another in a group setting in terms of past experiences and ideas in "a kind of 'chaining' or 'cascading' effect" (p. 182).

Specific to this study, there is one focus group consisting of six participants. Since I was an active participant in all focus groups, I lead the discussion and used the questionnaire as my general guideline (see appendix one). Typical of qualitative research (Merriam, 2002), the focus group is intended to generate a "richly descriptive end product" (p. 6). The focus group was audio recorded and transcribed, and only pseudonyms were used to identify participants in this study. This data was analyzed by creating categories for key words, phrases, and comments.

### **3.6 Results Presentation**

Rao and Woolcock (2003) state that qualitative and quantitative methods can be integrated in three different forms, namely; "parallel, sequential, and iterative" (p. 172). Parallel level integration is not fitting for this study, as it involves different researchers for both quantitative and qualitative data, and is mostly used for an unusually large sample size. According to Rao and Woolcock (2003), sequential and iterative approaches, however, "seek varying degrees of dialogue between the qualitative and quantitative traditions at all phases of the research cycle and are best suited to projects of more modest scale and scope" (p. 173). Such varying degrees of dialogue can be well presented through thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is a search for themes that materialize as being imperative to the description of the phenomenon being studied (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksmann, 1997). This approach involves the identification of themes through careful reading and re-reading of the data (Rice & Ezzy). It is essentially a type of pattern recognition within the data itself. Since this is a mixed methods study, it was deemed appropriate to present the findings in a thematic context. Reporting findings for each section of the methodology (questionnaires and focus group) would be too analytical, segregated, and reductionist in approach.

Using themes, however, will allow for a more integrated and holistic approach, making it easier to digest and internalize the interpretation of the data. Hence, only the quantitative and qualitative data that supports the extracted themes will be presented in the findings of this study.

#### **4. Synopsis of Findings**

Results of this study demonstrated that my experiences were indeed vastly different than the participants of this study. Rather, the attitudes and perspectives of the participants were very positive and favourable towards informally trained musicians. Specifically, participants generated the three themes of value, creativity, and non-conformity. The first theme of value indicates that informally trained musicians are very productive and esteemed members of society. The second theme of creativity identifies how informally trained musicians are great composers and originators of music. The final theme of non-conformity focuses on the steadfast and persistent desire of informally trained musicians to achieve musical competency outside the arena of formal instruction.

#### **5. Full Explication of Findings**

##### **5.1 Theme #1: Value**

In general, participants felt that informal musicians provided significantly more worth to society. Evidence of this can be found in the responses to questions seven and ten of the questionnaire. In question seven (which group has a better chance of succeeding in non-musical careers?), the average response was 7.02 out of 10, with a standard deviation of 2.04. Hence, responses were clustered in the 5 to 9 range, clearly leaning towards the informal musician side of the semantic differential scale (see appendix two). Focus group responses also corroborated the quantitative results to question seven. Here is a sequential excerpt from the focus group:

Author: Okay, question seven -- which group has a better chance of succeeding in non-musical careers? How do you feel about this question?

Mark: I think that informal musicians have demonstrated that they are capable of learning and doing things on their own. This shows drive and dedication and commitment. These are qualities that are transferrable to so many different careers. I think that informal musicians would be great at a lot of different things.

Sara: Yes, I agree. Having the desire to teach and learn on your own is usually a good indicator that someone can be successful in different careers.

Joseph: I think that both formal and informal musicians can have drive and dedication, but I must agree that informal musicians face more challenges because they do not have someone to guide them, yet they still succeed, which perhaps shows a bit more drive and dedication. I would think that this deep drive would be present in other career options that interest them.

Author: Is there one or two non-musical careers that you can specifically think of that informal musicians would be better at succeeding at?

Larry: I think business – being an entrepreneur. I think that informal musicians have shown that they have the right attitude to succeed at business. In the end, being in business for yourself means that you are doing things on your own.

Author: Can you give me some examples? What kind of attitude?

Larry: Things like being a go-getter, shaping your own destiny, searching for knowledge and answers. These are the qualities of a good businessman.

Author: So, in the big pictures, do these qualities help us as a society?

Larry: Yes, absolutely! Everybody here knows that it is virtually impossible to teach drive and commitment. That has to be within you and when you have them, there is tremendous value for society.

Sara: Yes, I agree, you cannot teach drive, it is innate. Informal musicians obviously have drive, and they should be commended for that.

Responses to question ten (which group provides more benefit to society?) also perpetuate the theme of value as the average response by participants was an overwhelming 8 out of 10. Moreover, there was a standard deviation of under 2 (1.98), suggesting that the cluster of responses were in the 6 to 10 range, evidently on the informal musician side of the semantic differential scale (see appendix three).

Comments made in the focus group session support this claim. Please read the following excerpt:

Betty: Informal musicians tend to be the mega pop stars that shape not only music, but also culture in general – hairstyles, fashion, and even language.

Mark: I agree, informal musicians, the self-taught people, benefit society but they also impact society in negative ways. Look at Rap stars, for example, they impact society significantly. I mean, take a look at some of our students here at the school. Look at the way they talk and dress. They all think they are Rap stars. I would be willing to bet that the vast majority of Rap stars are not formally trained musicians like Eminem and Fifty Cent – none of those guys are formally taught. No offence to anyone in this room, but I do not think that Rap music benefits society.

Author: I do not have any evidence to support or refute your claim about Eminem and Fifty Cent.

Betty: That is your opinion, Mark. There are many people out there – not just teenagers – who think that Rap music does benefit society. Rap music has taken a marginalized group of young black youth who come from impoverished homes and empowered them. Rap has given them a voice literally and figuratively. It is a forum for how they express themselves and how they dress.

Mark: Like I said, I didn't mean to offend anybody – sorry if I did.

Wanda: I think the point being made is that mega stars in pop, rock, rap, whatever, have an enormous impact on society. Some people will find benefit and value in this impact, and others will not, you know, one person's dream is another person's nightmare! Although we do not know for sure, I think that many of these stars are not formally trained according to the definition that you read to us at the beginning of this meeting. Yet, these stars have provided a benefit to many aspects of society.

## 5.2 Theme Two: Creativity

In the creativity theme, informal musicians were deemed as true artists of composition, not emulators of music from other composers. Evidence of the creativity theme can be found in questions one and two of the questionnaire. In question one (what group knows more about music as a Science?); the average response was 1.2 out of 10 with a standard deviation of .69, overwhelmingly in favour of formal musicians (see appendix four). In question two, however (what group knows more about music as an Art form?) almost the reverse trend transpires, with an average score of 8.29 out of 10 and a standard deviation of only 1 -- well in favour of informal musicians (see appendix five). The following focus group excerpt substantiates the quantitative analysis of questions one and two:

Author: Alright, I would like to address question one and two together. Which group knows more about music as a science, which is question one, and which group knows more about music as an Art form, which is question two.

Wanda: It seems to me that classical musicians, the formal guys, know more about the scientific aspect of music. I think they know more about sound production, how to execute notes, and why certain notes sound good together and others do not. I also think informal musicians know these answers as well, but they know it more from their heart – how it feels and sounds, not necessarily the reasons why things sound good or bad. That is what art is about -- at least I think so. Informal, self-taught musicians are definitely more creative.

Larry: Yes, self-taught musicians tend to be more creative. They do not have as many rules to follow like classical musicians do. They just tend to play what sounds good, following their heart and feelings. Art is really about passion and feeling, so I would concur that self-taught musicians are more artistic.

Sara: Yes, but knowing the science behind music does not necessarily make you less of an artist. It can actually make you more of an artist. I mean songs from Puccini's opera's are some of the most beautiful pieces of music I have ever heard, and he was a formal music composer – a great artist.

Mark: I am sure that all of the big and famous composers were all great artists, but I think as a whole, self-taught musicians, the informal guys and gals approach music from an artistic and creative perspective, and classical musicians from a scientific one. My daughter is taking piano lessons, and she -- even at seven years old -- she is very aware of what fingers can and cannot be used when performing a piece of music. Although this might be the correct way of playing, I can see that more of her energy is directed into how to play a song rather than feeling the music. That is more science and precision to me, not art.

Author: Interesting point!

Mark: Yes, I can see that. Informal musicians tend not to care about how they play, what fingers they are using, etc. They just tend to play and create what sounds and feels good, which is more like art.

The theme of creativity was also evident in the response to question nine of the questionnaire: Which group has the best foundation to create original music compositions? The average response was 7.8 out of 10, with a standard deviation of 2.07, once again indicating a propensity for the side of the semantic differential scale in favour of informal musicians (see appendix six). The focus group participants also substantiated the statistical analysis of question nine:

Author: Although we talked a little about this in questions one and two, I would like to move on to question nine: Which group has the best foundation to create original music compositions? What are your thoughts on this question?

Joseph: I think – like it was said earlier, the informal musicians learn to play without rules and regulations, which naturally lends itself to creativity when composing. The kind of “no rules no limits” scenario.

Betty: Yes, for sure. I see informal musicians as people who compose whatever they want, however they want to do it. Even when they play music from other people, they tend to play it their way.

Author: Does this free spirited approach to composition actually provide a better foundation for creativity – as the question states?

Betty: I guess it depends on how we define foundation. From a technical perspective, informal musicians may lack theoretical concepts that they can apply to creating music. The theory could be seen as a missing foundation. But I actually think when it comes to creativity, the lack of a foundation, is actually a better foundation. Does that make any sense? Kind of like you have to be out of the box in order to think out of the box.

Mark: Wow, that’s a pretty deep thought. But I guess I agree with you. Pure creativity comes out of spontaneity and instinct. I guess it is hard to be instinctual when you are working from theoretical concepts.

### **5.3 Theme Three: Non-Conformity**

In the theme of non-conformity, participants appreciated the somewhat rebellious attitudes of informal musicians to learn and succeed in the musical arena despite lack of formal instruction. Evidence of this can be found in the response to question six of the questionnaire (which group has trained harder and overcome more obstacles in developing musicianship), where the average response was 7.19 out of 10 with a standard deviation of 2.03, once again in favour of the informal side of the semantic differential scale with a range of 5.17 to 9.21 (see appendix seven). Supporting this view is Larry from the focus group session that has stated:

Informal musicians have a lot of barriers. They usually do not have anyone telling them that they are heading in the right or wrong direction, and are basically at the mercy of the trial and error system. This is, in the end, much more work than a formally trained musician who has a teacher guiding their every move, or at the very least supporting them and steering them in the right direction. Us teachers like to call it scaffolding.

Moreover, Joseph from the focus group has a similar response:

I think that formal musicians also train hard, maybe even harder, but I think that informal musicians face many more hardships. Many self-taught musicians can’t read music, and they are forced to use their ear to learn songs. Learning a song by ear, I would think, is far more difficult and abstract than having the notes directly in front of you.

In addition, Sara comments are also worth mentioning:

I guess the informal musicians, kind of like street musicians, remind me of the Nike slogan a little bit – they “just do it!” They don’t care if they are playing something incorrectly, they just play music because it feels right to them. It is a form of freedom and expression for them. Learning to express yourself is really like overcoming a major hurdle, especially since the education system does so much to suppress creativity.

Question four (which group is more likely to achieve personal satisfaction) also promotes the theme of non-conformity.

Participants scored an average response of 6.8 with a standard deviation of 1.72, indicating an average distribution between 5.08 and 8.52, still on the informal side of the scale suggesting that informal musicians are more likely to achieve personal satisfaction (see appendix eight). The following excerpt from the focus group session also supports this viewpoint:

Author: Question four addresses personal satisfaction. Which group is more likely to achieve personal satisfaction?

Mark: There is no doubt that informal musicians are more likely to achieve personal satisfaction. They do what they want in terms of music. They play what they want to play, listen to what they want to listen to, and learn what interests them. I think you would get more personal satisfaction from doing this than being told what to play and listen to.

Joseph: I agree, I know of so many people that take piano lessons and ultimately give it up because they simply loose interest. My own son gave up piano lessons after his first year. He did not like the whole classical approach. He hated the music, it had not real connection with him. I think he found the songs really lame and square. Yet, he loves music and listens to his iPod all day long. I guess he finds rock music more appealing!

Wanda: Oh my gosh! That sounds like a carbon copy story of my sister's son! Same thing, she signed him up for piano lessons and he quit after six or seven months, I think. Apparently he said the music sucked and he wanted to play stuff that he liked.

Sara: Yes, I guess if you do not like classical music, you will not get much personal satisfaction from it. But what if you like classical music? Then I think you would get a lot of personal satisfaction from taking piano lessons.

Author: It's not so much about classical music vs. other types of music, it's about achieving satisfaction. Do you get more satisfaction from teaching yourself, for example, a really informal approach to learning, or having someone else teach you?

Wanda: I guess it depends on what the teacher is teaching. If the student picks the curriculum, so to speak, then I think it is possible to get a lot of personal satisfaction. The problem with most piano lessons, for example, is that the students are told what to play. Those piano books are like textbooks in a way. If you teach from the textbook – I don't care what the subject is – most students won't get personal satisfaction. They are outdated and so not student-centered. Kind of hard to differentiate your teaching when you are using a piano book all of the time.

Betty: I agree, teachers have a lot to do with the student being satisfied or not. Ultimately, when the student is the teacher, there would have to be more satisfaction, because he or she learns whatever he or she wants to learn based on personal interest.

Mark: Yes, that makes sense.

## **6. Discussion**

This study has corroborated that there is meaning and significance in the informal approach to learning music through the themes of value, creativity, and non-conformity. Informal music learning is lacking in the music curriculum across many Westernized nations. Rather, music curriculum guidelines across Westernized nations should be more flexible in terms of what is taught and how. For example, music teachers should take more of an inductive approach to curriculum by teaching students music that they find interesting and motivating such as pop music, and actually liberate them from the stress that children face when studying classical music. Winspur (1998) states: "As children, aspiring pop and rock musicians do not suffer the same pressures as those children studying an instrument classically" (p. 3). Moreover, popular music genres such as Rap, Heavy Metal, Latin, and Dance to name but a few, can provide a valuable source of ideas and motivation for both teachers and students. Connecting with students' on their level is consistent with Green (2008) who asks us to listen to "young people's voices" and, as music educators, to take "their values and their culture seriously" (p. 185).

Many scholars have also corroborated the notion that traditional schooling suppresses creativity (Robinson, 2001; Holt, 1995), and the music classroom is no exception. I find this rather ironic, since the music classroom is supposed to be a place where creativity and imagination is cultivated. Yet, it has been my experience that classroom music teachers often suppress creativity by perpetually reproducing their own musical experiences (what and how they were taught).

These experiences are from a different time and world (very formal and traditional), and are not a panacea for modern music education. That is, the method and matter of musical experiences of youth are vastly different than just a decade ago. Through mass media and technological innovations, music is vastly free, ubiquitous, and recorded (not live). If musical experiences have changed, then logic tells us that the way we teach and learn music should also change. Informal music learning, as referenced in this study, can provide music educators with vast supply of pedagogical ideas and practices. In fact, other music education scholars are having similar experiences, such as Wiggington (2010) who exposes the decline of formal music pedagogy in the realm of vocal music. He argues that music students are inspired and stimulated by current artists that usually have little or no formal training. That is, the theme of non-conformity (as referenced in this study) is typical of many successful pop music artists. Wiggington (2010) argues:

Somewhere outside the classical paradigm of perfect posture, pure vowels, and forward placement exists a vast universe of musicmaking singers. These artists pour their souls into each note, their voices shaking you, moving you to your very core. These singers have never heard of the zygomatic arch or the ligament vocalis; they have never even considered raising their soft palates. . . Many of them have never had a voice lesson in their lives-and see no reason to. (p. 449)

## **7. Conclusion**

In sum, the informal approach to music learning -- imbued with self-teaching principles, peer-to-peer interaction, and social learning experiences -- should be seriously considered by music educators at all levels and settings. Since curriculum is a reflection of society (Ross 2000; Hewitt 2006), it is safe to say that music curriculum has not kept up with recent trends in musical experiences and developments of our modern technological world. Music learners need to perceive value in what they are learning. They also need public school music education that allows them to play and create music of their ilk that fosters imagination, cultivates creativity, and ultimately produces musically independent members of society. Bowman (2005) states:

Too often, teaching and learning resemble training (or even indoctrination) more than education. The do-it-this-way mode of instruction, in which modeling rightly figures centrally, can, if not carefully monitored, foster critical compliance and nurture dependence rather than the independence and empowerment that are hallmarks of true education. (p. 13)

Kratus (2005) argues that the enriched marketing and promotion of current public school music curriculum is not a solution for marginalized attitudes and perspectives toward music education. Rather, the stark reality of the situation according to Kratus (2005) is that music education has not embraced the mass culture of popular music, necessitating a complete overhaul or reformulation of music curriculum guidelines. Clearly, the time for all music educators to start facilitating informal learning in their classrooms is right now. Numerous public school music educators have marginalized a generation of youth with a music curriculum deeply imbued in western music and pedagogy. This view is supported by Regelski (2009) who argues that the classical music plays a role in the marginalization of music in public schools" (p. 68). In sum, the shift toward popular music in public school curriculum is not only desirable; it is absolutely critical to the very salvation of public music education.

## **Appendix One**

### **Questionnaire: Formal Vs. Informal Musicians**

For the purposes of this questionnaire, please read the following two definitions in order to provide a contextual framework for you:

**Formally Trained Musician:** A formally trained musician is an individual who has learned to read and perform music through formal training and education offered by an accredited institution or school of music. Such education and training is teacher directed, includes formal assessment and evaluation, and culminates with some sort of documented and recognized system of achievement and completion (i.e. credit granted, certificate, diploma, and degree). In some cases, it is possible to achieve musical literacy through self-teaching and peer-directed learning.

**Informally Trained Musician:** An informally trained musician is an individual who has learned to perform music through unstructured and non-institutionalized learning environments. These environments involve self-teaching through media applications (recorded music, books, and computer technology), peer-to-peer teaching, and other social learning opportunities such as jamming.

Informally trained musicians follow no stringent rules and regulations, and have no formal evaluation or documented system of achievement and completion.

**Instructions:** Please read each question and circle only **one number between 1-10**. A number “1” indicates an exclusive proclivity for “formally trained musicians” and a “10” indicates an exclusive proclivity to “informal musicians.”

**Question #1:** In general, what group knows more about music as a Science?

Formally Trained Musicians					Informally Trained Musicians				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Question #2:** In general, what group knows more about music as an Art form?

Formally Trained Musicians					Informally Trained Musicians				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Question #3:** Which group is more likely to be financially successful in the music industry?

Formally Trained Musicians					Informally Trained Musicians				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Question #4:** Which group is more likely to achieve personal satisfaction through music?

Formally Trained Musicians					Informally Trained Musicians				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Question #5:** Which group is more adept to succeed in academic pursuits?

Formally Trained Musicians					Informally Trained Musicians				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Question #6:** Which group has trained harder and overcome more obstacles in developing musicianship?

Formally Trained Musicians					Informally Trained Musicians				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Question #7:** Which group has a better chance of succeeding in non-musical careers?

Formally Trained Musicians					Informally Trained Musicians				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Question #8:** Which group has a better understanding of music’s function in society?

Formally Trained Musicians					Informally Trained Musicians				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Question #9:** Which group has the best foundation to create original musical compositions?

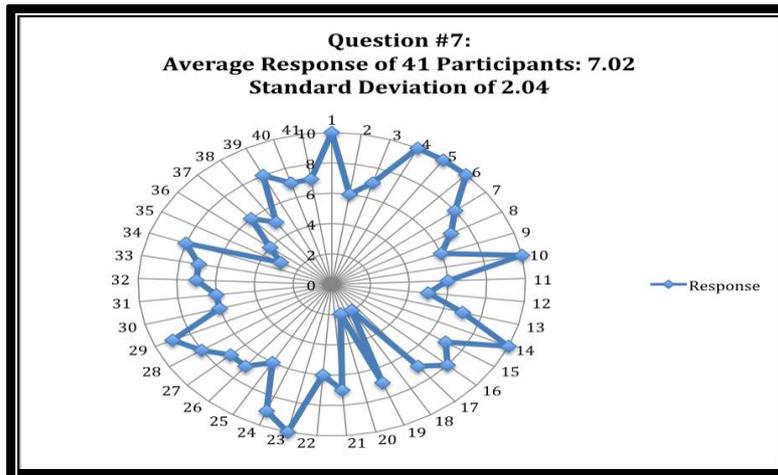
Formally Trained Musicians					Informally Trained Musicians				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Question #10:** In general, which group provides more benefit to society?

Formally Trained Musicians					Informally Trained Musicians				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

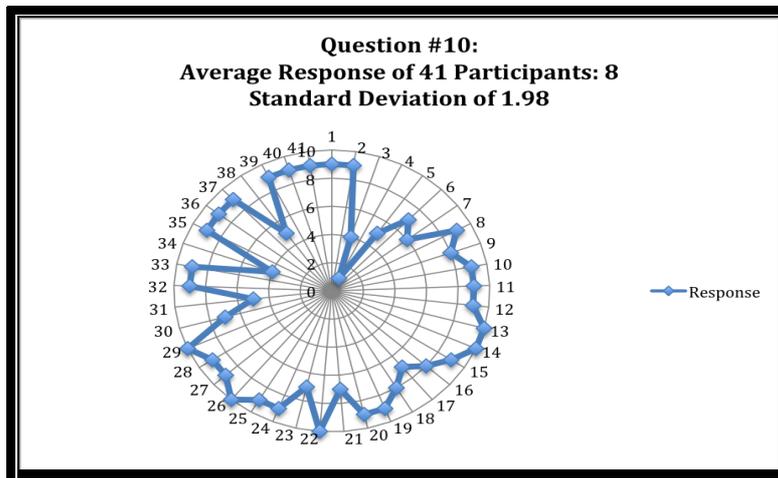
**Appendix Two**

**Which group has a better chance of succeeding in non-musical careers?**



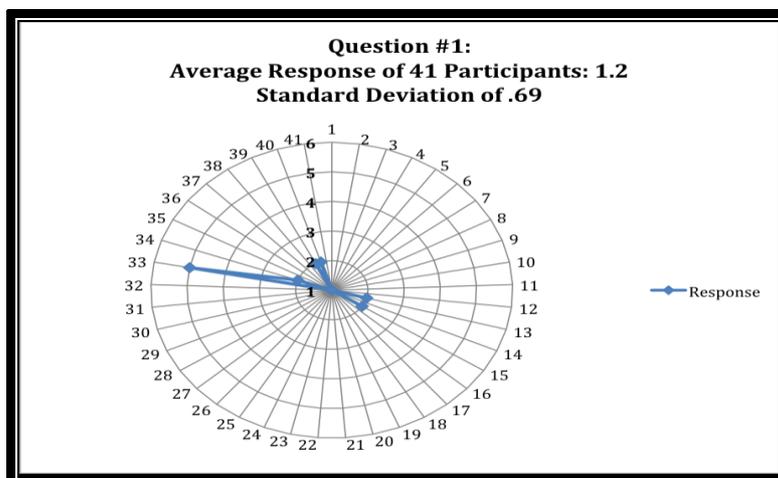
**Appendix Three**

**Which group provides more benefit to society?**



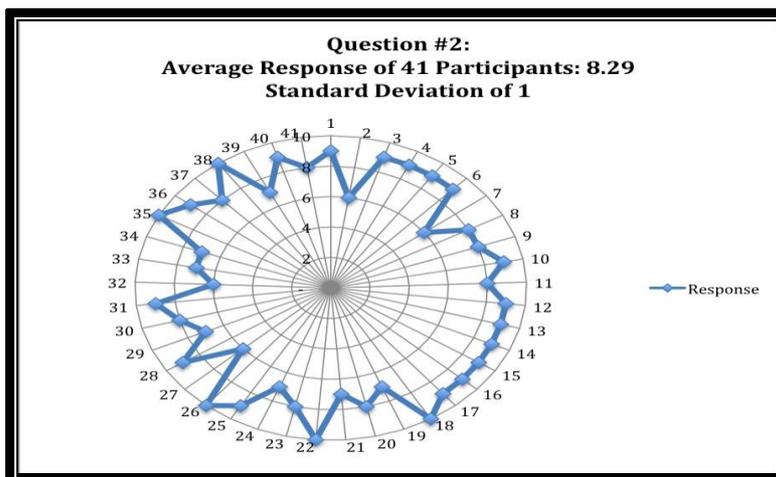
**Appendix Four**

**What group knows more about music as a Science?**



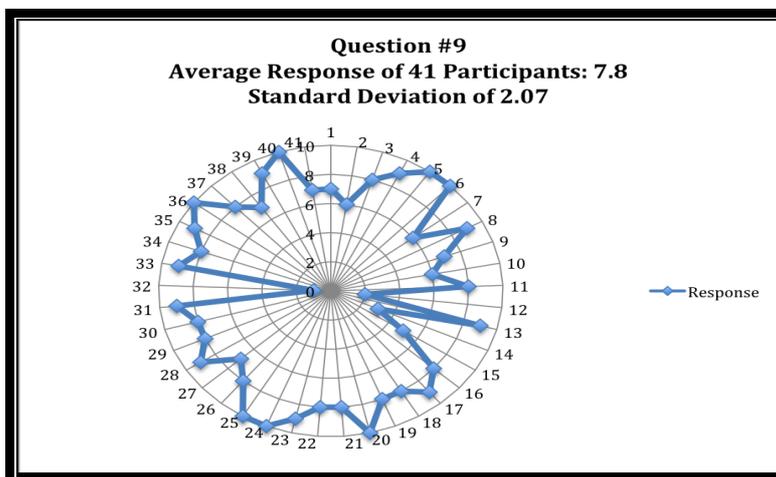
### Appendix Five

What group knows more about music as an art form?



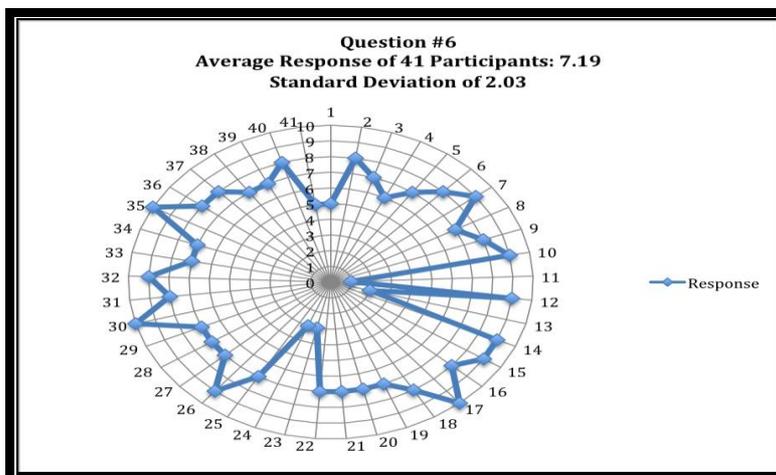
### Appendix Six

Which group has the best foundation to create original music compositions?



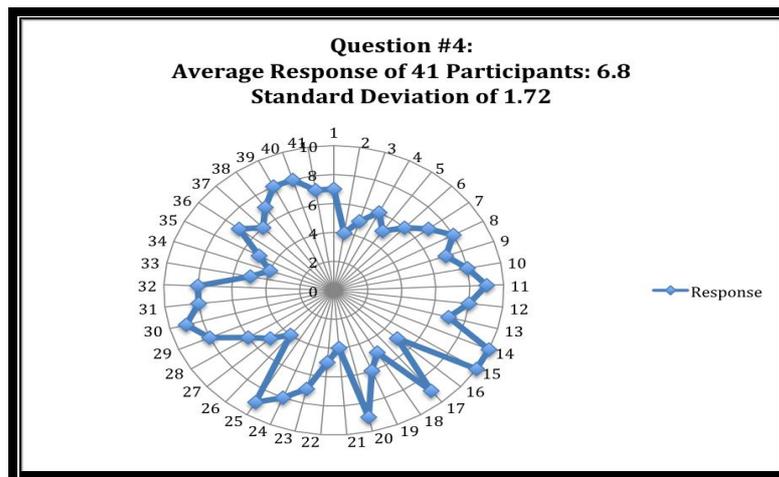
### Appendix Seven

Which group has trained harder and overcome more obstacles in developing musicianship?



## Appendix Eight

## Which group is more likely to achieve personal satisfaction?



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