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Digital Sociology and Online Music Communities: Models and Lessons from the Internet

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ABSTRACT

With the rise of the internet, work from the of fields of digital sociology, communications/social media studies, and online research methods have become increasingly relevant for music education scholars both investigating and facilitating music teaching and learning in online contexts. While opportunities for online music making, teaching, and learning activities have grown exponentially, the number of online places dedicated to music making, learning, and sharing has exploded with the arrival of COVID as much of the world moves online. What was once an option – going online to teach and learn music – has now become a necessity for most musicians and music educators. What existing models can music educators draw on to teach and learn music in the age of COVID?

We explore this question in this, the second of a three-part investigation of online communities of practice. The first study in the series (Authors, 2021) surveyed digital music education in formal settings such as schools and institutions. This paper, second in the series, addresses online communities of practice involving music learning in what would usually take place in informal settings. We review current research in informal music education into areas of genre (vernacular, traditional, popular), fan-based, and composition. Our third and future investigation will consider the implications of on and offline convergent music teaching and learning. We contend that the most important and significant aspect of this work is not the technology but rather the sociological perspective – the interactions and discourse that people have with one another through these digital enablers that render music learning, making, and teaching possible.

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Keywords
digital sociology, online/offline convergence, online communities of practice, music teaching and learning, cross-disciplinary, lifelong learning, informal and nonformal music learning

With the rise of the internet, work from the fields of digital sociology, communications/social media studies, and online research methods has become increasingly relevant for music education scholars investigating and facilitating music learning in online contexts. While opportunities for online music making, teaching, and learning activities have grown steadily and exponentially since the late 90s, the number of online places dedicated to music making, learning, and sharing has exploded with the arrival of COVID as much of the world moves online. What was once an option – going online to teach and learn music—has now become a necessity for most musicians and music educators. What extant models of online music communities can music educators draw on to research, teach, and learn music in the age of COVID?

This paper explores online research frameworks and theoretical groundwork referencing literature from the cross-disciplinary fields mentioned above. We survey current research in informal music education into areas of genre (vernacular, traditional, popular), interest (fan-based), composition, and open-sourced work and implications of this body of literature for music educators. This work forms the second of a three-part investigation of online music communities; the first study of the series surveyed digital music education in formal settings such as schools and institutions, while the third investigation will consider the implications of on and offline convergent music teaching and learning.

FRAMEWORKS AND METHODOLOGIES: DIGITAL SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND COMMUNICATIONS

As a good deal of 21st century life takes place online, literature from digital sociology, social media, and communications has significant implications for music education research, most notably around issues of internet enquiry and online research frameworks/methodologies. Digital sociology is a particularly important cross-disciplinary field for music education sociology scholars focused on internet enquiry because the online and the offline are now so tightly interwoven with each other that, according to Lupton (2014), one can't be fully understood without the other. Marres (2017) notes that digital media facilitates a more nuanced approach to "the capture, analysis, and manipulation of data, networks, and interaction by computational means, produc[ing] new interfaces between social life and social research" (p.1).

Two useful frameworks for digital sociologists are Lave and Wenger's (1991) Communities of Practice (CoP) social learning theory and Barrett's (2006) and Kenny's (2016) related Community of Musical Practice (CoMP) theories; they are also the predominant frameworks used by music education researchers exploring online communities and on and offline convergent communities.

In addition to CoP and CoMP theories, other concepts/ideas from the disciplines of social media and communications have also proved useful for both investigating and facilitating collaborative networked online and convergent communities by music education scholars for music learning. Key ideas include Jenkins' (2009) concept of "participatory culture," Lievrouw's (2011) theory of "interactive participation," and Jenkins, Ford, and Greens' ideas (2013) on "spreadability" of content. As well, Rainie and Wellman's "networked individualism" (2012), Ito (2008), boyd and Ellison's (2008) theory of "networked publics," are influential. Finally, Van Dijck's (2013) meta-framework of a "culture of connectivity" functions as an "uber" lens for framing the online music CoPs we present in this paper.

According to Van Dijck (2013) a "culture of connectivity" (p. 21) is created when people share user-generated content (UGC) across a variety of social media applications through laptops, tablets and/or smartphones. This "ecosystem of connective media" is a result of "all platforms combin[ing] to constitute a system that nourishes and, in turn, is nourished by social and cultural norms that simultaneously evolve in our everyday world" (Van Dijck, 2013, p. 21).

Online Communities

The past twenty years have seen an escalating discourse surrounding "community," as internet access and SNS disrupt earlier ideas of community creation and bounding while simultaneously creating previously unimagined opportunities for network building and community growth. For online community members – including those in any number of diverse music genres – belonging to the group can play as significant a role in their lives as that of a physical place-based community (Jenkins, 2006; Guimaraes Jr., in Hine 2005, as cited in Waldron, 2013, Waldron, 2018).

Background

The earliest online communities emerged in the 1980s, centred around peoples' common interests, unlike later branded social media sites which emerged in the mid aughts—MySpace, Facebook, etc.—which are primarily organized around individuals' on and offline personal networks. What differentiates branded social network sites from earlier online, forum-based communities (which still exist) is that, rather than being based around a common subject or topic, branded SNSs are "primarily organized around people, not interests" (boyd and Ellison, 2008, p. 219). SNS participants then, are most likely "communicating with people who are already a part of their social network" (p. 213).

While online music communities can be found on branded SNS, many are still based on the earlier original open website model first developed in the 80s. These open online communities (or OOCs) are Internet affinity groups whose websites are free and open to viewing (i.e. "lurking") by the public; there is no requirement to register as a member—which is free—unless one wishes to post commentary on the site. Content is almost always archived, so that answers to questions already posted can be viewed and located at any time by forum members. By now, most people are familiar with the

standard user-friendly OCC format consisting of forums—bulletin boards—chat rooms, YouTube links and repositories, links to related sites, and "rules" posted on the main site page. If members follow these guidelines, they are free to post, chat, "lurk," collaborate, discuss, ask questions, give advice, and share user-generated content on the community's forums.

METHOD

Communities of Practice (CoPs) theory emerged from situated learning theory which locates learning within social contexts where knowledge is co-created.[1] As conceived by Lave and Wenger (1991) and expanded by Wenger (1999), structural characteristics of these groups who interact and learn together include 1) the social fabric of community, 2) a domain of knowledge, and 3) the focus or practice around which the CoP shares and deepens its expertise. Communities of Practice may be created intentionally with the aim of gaining knowledge or they may evolve naturally as members share common interests.

In the case of online or virtual CoPs, members must be involved for the site to remain vital. That means that participants post and share while others choose to observe, or 'lurk'. In this context, according to Lave and Wenger (1991), this activity is part of an apprenticeship of sorts that they term *legitimate peripheral participation*. Observation is often the first step that a newcomer will take before joining a community:

> 'Legitimate peripheral participation' . . . [is] the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice. This social process includes; indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills. Lave and Wenger (1991) (https://newlearningonline.com/new-learning/chapter-6/supporting-material/lave-and-wenger-on-situated-learning)

This survey examines current research into social interactions and new cultural formations afforded in digital spaces, as well as contingent connections between online and offline social spaces. Online Communities of Practice offer a window into complex social dynamics.

Criteria of study coherence, richness of research, and timeliness (2017-2021) were chosen for this survey of research into online informal music CoPs. Emerging themes reveal that this cache of research studies centered around communities of practice engaged with 1) diverse musical genres, 2) fandom, and 3) composition. Twelve studies were curated from a possible thirty-one.

Genre-oriented Online Communities of Practice

The first category focuses on research into genre-oriented Communities of Practice. Genre-oriented CoPs are based on shared enthusiasms in vernacular, popular, traditional, and other musics. Members of these communities share expertise, information,

perspectives, sources, goods, and services. It is assumed that more experienced members will guide others but that the vitality of the online CoP rests on the collective consciousness or "hive mind."

Keegan-Phipps and Wright (2020) assess the role of social media in the learning experiences through the landmark Digital Folk Survey of UK folk musicians. Digital Folk is a three-year research project completed by over 800 folk arts participants engage in amateur to professional capacities. Genres include UK folk activities in addition to diasporic practices such as Scottish Country and Irish dancing. Those surveyed described the ways in which social media was used to organize events, connect with groups, and reach students. As well, they indicated that digital participation allowed individuals agency to access tools which best suited them. Online platforms were consulted to learn repertoire and manipulate other means of learning, such as audio-visual items or alternative notation systems which bypass the need to master staff notation. Users learn repertoire, practice in virtual sessions, consult the hivemind through archives such as Mudcat Café, and locate tunes or variants through search engines such as Tunepal (designed to identify traditional Irish tunes).

Keegan-Phipps and Wright (2020) note that the learning process amongst folk musicians is not merely acquiring musical skills and knowledge, but is itself a culturally performative act:

> . . . a personal and public enactment of socially negotiated and affirmed cultural and aesthetic values. Nonetheless, the centrality of collective immediacy as an underlying aesthetic of much contemporary folk arts practice makes it unsurprising that an unquestioned aim of most explicit learning activities is to enable participation in unmediated, face-to-face folk music events, such as sessions and folk clubs. (p. 462)

Rodriguez (2019) explores the role of online affinity spaces as people learn rock guitar through playful technology, in this case through the PlayStation 4 game *Rocksmith*. The researcher feels that learning to play guitar online can not only provide a viable option for people who wish to learn to play the instrument informally, but also for those who may not have access to formal music education because of geographical reasons, economic constraints, or a learning disability.

Rodriguez analyzed the *Rocksmith* discussion forum from 2017-2019, an online forum to which users post comments, images, and videos. His analysis of the discussion forum reveals three themes of interest: 1) the guitar, 2) the *Rocksmith* game, and 3) learning techniques. Rodriguez finds that newcomers to the community became proficient in insider terminology:

> [N]ovices were able to grasp and apply specialist language into their responses, thus learning while interacting, not only about specific techniques, but also about the situated context of the community. Novices did not learn the specialist terminology because they were required to . . . Rather, they were motivated by interactional opportunities that emerged in the discussion . . . [T]the analysis shows that the enactment and development of specialist language can not only foster learning to play the guitar but can also be considered a discursive means to insider participation. (p. 84)

Söderman and Söderman (2020) consider ways in which immigrant youth use social media as they take part in a Swedish hip-hop youth association "The Movement," or in Swedish *Rörelsen Gatans Röst poch Ansikte* (The Movement of the Voice and Face of the Street). The researchers trace how the convergent community uses social media in branding, member recruitment, and accountability to funders.

The Movement draws inspiration from political dimensions of global hip-hop as well as digital music making and collaboration. Inspired by global organizations Universal Zulu Nation and Movimento Cultura De Rua, The Movement incorporates elements of hiphop culture with commitments to citizenship and everyday life. The Movement originated and received municipal funding from the city of Malmö where a relatively low ratio of ethnic Swedes reside. Söderman and Söderman (2020) find that members of hiphop culture value knowledge and skills gained informally through the hiphop musical genre to empower and emancipate and that these ways of learning find resonance with:

> the traditional values of Swedish *folkbildning* (which roughly translates as "people-learning") . . . refer[s] to the Swedish notion and tradition of public education and informal and nonformal adult learning . . . *Folkbildning* is considered to be a cornerstone of civil democratic society in Sweden . . . In music education contexts, Swedish *folkbildning* is in harmony with ideals of vernacular and lifelong popular music learning and is considered to constitute a radical educational ideal. (p. 180)

Veblen, Kruse, Messenger, and Letain (2018) survey children's informal music play and online teaching, play, and invention through an analysis of clapping games on YouTube. Clapping games have customarily been played in the seams of regular life with scant attention paid to them. Found worldwide, this activity appears to be the province of little girls in some places, but also played intergenerationally and with all genders.

Video clips were chosen randomly, using search terms on YouTube such as "children's clapping games" and were then pulled into a loop of related videos. A total of 184 games were collected and analyzed according to video characteristics, participant attributes, purpose, and teaching and learning aspects. Individual videos receive hundreds of thousands of views and comments. Findings indicate that there is an active online community of children teaching others how to play a game as well as modelling, collecting, and showcasing their talents. Children expressed a robust impulse for sharing. Social relationships were an important part of play, as games were played within families and friends. Children in this study were shown to transmit games in much the same way they had received them:

> [G]ames were taught and learned in their entirety; that is, from whole to part, and through immersion in the social experience . . . [K]inesthetic components of the games supported spoken patterns, which in turn reinforced the clapping cadences. (Veblen, Kruse, Messenger, and Letain (2018) (p. 7)

Trobia and Lo Verde (2017) examine four online communities of Italian amateur pop-folk musicians who play drums, bass, guitar, and keyboards. They noted that online

structures often substitute for physical sociability that was essential before the Internet. The researchers gathered data from Facebook groups using a plugin called Social Network Importer, "because interaction within groups is more direct, frequent, and of higher quality than personal or fan pages" (p. 6). Analysis indicates that active members (those who regularly post messages and replies) are a small percentage of the total membership on each page (only 11.2 percent). This may suggest a lack of continuity in amateur music making. Many people enter a group, but for various reasons do not participate in its activities. (p. 8)

Trobia and Lo Verde note a blurring of amateur and professional roles. Furthermore, the Italian musicians in these four online CoPs have access to expanded repertoire, tools, and opportunities for creativity:

> Today's Italian "Millennials" who create popular music in their leisure time can draw from expressive cues, technical knowledge, languages, musical rules, and syntax from all over the world by accessing the Internet or through the increase in global cultural trade. The creation of this amateur pop music goes beyond simply imitation. (p. 22)

They found that this online community is predominately male but that there is a prevalence of collaboration and supportiveness, and corresponding lack of strong hierarchy.

Interest or Fan Based Musical Communities of Practice

The second category centers on research into interest or fan-based musical communities. Fans are inspired, pay homage, learn, generate, and create content to spread through grassroot, alternative, and emerging social networks (Cayari, 2020). Fandom offers opportunities for an individual to develop an identity as enthusiast and connoisseur, to share, and to trade artifacts and services. Fans connect through collective on and offline experiences. As well, they participate as part of social/cultural capital.

The internet has created a powerful platform for individuals but also as a potential source of consumers for corporate interests. Researchers have taken a variety of perspectives on fandom communities noting the dichotomy between individual and collective: Jenkins (1992) observes vibrant communities of consumers as well as resistant "poachers," while (Hiyashi (2018) notes individual/collective behaviours and hierarchies.

Bronstein and Lidor (2020) interviewed Israeli members of the virtual Eurovision Fan Club to understand their engagement with this CoP. The Eurovision Song Contest which began in 1956 is the world's largest music competition, expanding from a Europe-based to an international audience. The song contest has the serious goal of politically unifying Europe. At the same time, the popular kitsch aspects of Eurovision attracts social media followers such as members of the LBGTQ+ community.

The researchers questioned 15 Israeli Eurovision fans about their engagement and participation with the virtual community as well as the role that the song contest and the community of fans have in their lives. Study findings revealed four motivations for involvement: 1) seeking information, 2) making social connections, 3) finding a sense of belonging and 4) forming an identity. The researchers concluded that this study

extends literature on serious leisure theory. Bronstein and Lidor's (2020) research is timely as it follows the event hosted in Tel Aviv in 2019. The event was charged as global divestment and sanction movements called for an end to occupation of Palestine and treatment against Arabs. (Holmes, 2019). However, participants in the study did not discuss the political aspects of the contest.

Hayashi (2018) explores fandom through music-making in three online communities: 1) "filk" devotees who appreciate science fiction and fantasy folk, 2) those who enjoy wizard rock as inspired by Harry Potter, and 3) fans of YouTube musicals of Team StarKid and Avbyte. Hayashi who has long been a fan herself attended events over a period of 4 years, surveys and interviewed fans and participated online. She finds that while online communities here differ in aesthetics, members embrace common values:

> Fandom is premised on the idea that a person can love something or someone intensely without judgement and find acceptance and community not despite that love but because of it. Consequently, fandom has long been considered a safe space for those who identify as LGBTQ+. (p. 133)

Findings reveal that while members of the three communities are different, members voice similar themes in describing what they do and how they do it: ". . . openness, acceptance, the equality of all participants (and by extension, the lack of hierarchy), and the celebration of amateurism. . ." (Hayashi 2018, p. 2). At the same time, Hayashi traces a decrease in amateur participation and rise of professional musicians and creators. The rise in professional musicians and creators in turn accelerates commercial exchanges:

> No matter how fervently fandom positions itself as a countercultural or subcultural community that is set apart from mainstream Western culture, these shifts in performance practices and social practices (online and off) . . . inevitably falls back on its traditions of cultural production and the power structures that come with them . . . (p. 150).

Hayashi posits that fan communities are embedded in society, therefore reflecting the tensions as well as positive dynamics of the public spaces.

Reinhard (2020) explores the use of bots in shaping fan CoPs. Bots are a software application that run automated tasks over the Internet. In this case, these are social bots used to influence the impressions, experiences, and behaviors of fandom online. They are used to generate more likes, comments, and retweets to existing social media posts which in turn generates the reach of social media content to interested users.

Use of fake followers has been documented with Katie Perry, Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, Taylor Swift, Rhianna cited as offenders. Reinhard comments:

> The latent democratic impulses that marked the initial rise of internet technologies have started to crater. The growth of fake followers and inflated metrics on social media now work as drivers of celebrity marketing, reflecting how legacy media industries have been shaped by the emerging logic of social media networks in both their casting and marketing decisions. (2.4)

Social bots are also used to shape cultural discourse as documented in Reinhold's research. He considers the ways in which Lady Gaga, and others position themselves to the LGBTQ+ community, while Taylor Swift and Beyoncé align themselves with politics of feminism: "Identity sometimes functions as a narrative we tell ourselves about our bodies and others as part of a shared community based on the intimate truths of social life . . . (3.1). Reinhold's research documents ways in which the politics of identity have been used in marketing various music celebrities over the past decade.

Thibeault and Matsunobu (2020) explore the possibilities of vocaloids in music learning through a Japanese singing vocal android. Hatsune Miku, whose name translates as "first sound from the future," is a virtual popstar adored by her fanbase, a vocaloid software and voiceband now on Nintendo. A trilingual hologram, Miku performs for crowds as a teenager with long turquoise ponytails and six vocal timbres. She can sing in Japanese, English, Mandarin, and other languages. Miku has claimed popular imagination in contexts ranging from ranging from topping Japanese music charts, appearing in an opera, incorporation in a video game, appearing in commercials, and raising funds for tsunami and nuclear meltdown victims.

Thibeault and Matsunobu (2020) document the vocaloid's use as inspiration for artworks and music expression. The researchers frame Miku as a multiplicity, commenting that "she" can be defined and understood as a medium, a collection of technologies, software freely available to make music, and the "dynamic product of virtual collaboration by fans" (Thibeault and Matsunobu (2020) p. 513 citing Zaborowski (2016).

The CoP devoted to this vocaloid is unlike other fandoms where there is a line between official and unofficial creations. Any member can be Miku. Works by Miku are created solely by fans. She sings for human fans and simultaneously fans can sing Miku's music.

Adaption of vocaloids into Japanese schools began significantly with Yamaha's introduction in 2017. However, while Miku software is freely available to make music, it has not been officially adopted in schools, possibly because Miku is intellectual property of Crypton, not Yamaha. (p. 520)

Online Musical Communities of Practice Centered on Composition

The third category encompasses current research into informal CoPs revolving around creating music. Platforms and applications for virtual music interactions open new possibilities as they bridge distances and challenge divergent thinking. The past twenty years have provoked much research in online music learning and collaborative creativity reflected in the sample presented here.

In their work on disabled musicians/musicians with disabilities (DW/MwD), bell and Rathgeber (2020) identify participatory social media that facilitate these musicians such as SingSnap and Bandhub. In the case of one member, Singsnap is a karaoke site that welcomes contributions:

> If he so chooses, Jami19 can talk to his peers about being disabled and relate it to his singing, but it is important to note that his online identity is not one-dimensional . . .

> This platform assists him in engaging with his passion and sharing it with others. (p. 573)

Jami19 is a prolific contributor to this karaoke site; his comments and responding posts tend to remark on the song and his singing, with little reference to disability.

Similarly, Bandhub enables people to make music together by one person posting a video of themselves playing a song and then others add on. Co-creator Pablo Osinaga describes the CoP: "We're making it much easier for anybody, any recreational musician, the amateur, casual musician, to engage in social musical experiences which is . . . what really matters when you make music" (p. 573).

bell and Rathgeber consider content generated by and for DM/MwD as it enters the larger social media landscape through story of Julia Maritza Ceja. A video of Ceja singing was posted in 2016 labelled "Little girl despite her disability shows her beautiful voice." Widely spread on the internet, the video provoked sympathy and awe. However, reports of the nature of the girl's disability varied. What seemed to matter was the way in which her story was framed. The researchers write: "Inspiration pornographers have transformed Julia from a child attending school in Santa Cruz who can sing like Whitney Houston into a poster child for overcoming disability" (p. 582).

bell and Rathgeber conclude that social media can enable connections or, as seen in the case of Julia Maritza Ceja, can be used to further objectify and 'other' DM/MwD. They note that "Social media can be an enabler . . . but it can easily be disabler if not approached critically and carefully" (p. 585).

Hennekam, Macarthur, Bennett, Hope, & Goh (2020) examine women composers' use of online CoPs to negotiate the traditionally masculine space of music composition. Arguing that music composition is a highly gendered profession, the researchers sought to understand how women composers resist exclusionary practices.

The fifth in a series building upon an international study, this phase of the research employed a mixed method using a survey coupled with in-depth interviews of 27 female composers. Respondents were asked about their training, career trajectories, impact of gender, creative process, and role of collaboration. Informants described the online environment as:

> a "safe space" where they could control the aspects that were important to them and feel comfortable about sharing work, receiving assistance, and helping others. These aspects align with the concept of CoPs . . . which allow adults to learn through everyday social practices . . . (p. 220)

Online environments offer opportunities to connect, to learn, to find mentorship and increase visibility. This can be especially beneficial for solitary pursuits such as composition where it can be difficult to find or connect with likeminded colleagues. Hennekam, Macarthur, Bennett, Hope, & Goh (2020) cautioned:

> In order to reap the benefits of online CoPs, members need to take into account and deal with social, cultural and, in some cases, organizational issues . . . The present study was unable to examine differences between open vs closed CoPs, moderated vs unmoderated CoPs and differences in number of memberships and posts . . . (p. 227)

Despite these shortcomings, online CoPs emerged as an alternative approach to career development for practicing female composers when augmented with individual agency. As well, online CoPs serve as a supportive space which can circumvent some of the enduring gendered challenges and operating outside hierarchical structures.

Hein (2020) draws upon his involvement with the Disquiet Junto, an online community of composers and producers. Organizer Marc Weidenbaum sends weekly compositional prompts to catalyze musical thinking. Participants compose, collaborate, and discuss both creative and technical processes. Since 2013, members of this community have generated over 500 hours of original music.

The Disquiet Junto is named for the Junto or Leather Apron Club that Benjamin Franklin established in Philadelphia in 1792 for mutual improvement.[2] As well, there is a nod to the Modernistic Portuguese poet Pessoa who authored *The Book of Disquiet* in 1982. Pessoa wrote under his own and over seventy other pseudonyms, each with their own unique identities.

Activity takes place on SoundCloud, a free site which allows users to share and create audio content that can be embedded in websites and social media posts. While Soundcloud's status as a private company may raise tensions with the Disquiet Junto's desire to retain independence, Hein comments:

> While it might have been possible to start the Junto on a site other than SoundCloud, it is scarcely conceivable that it could exist without the internet . . . no [other] institution would be able to compile, copy, and distribute as many hours of music to as many people in as many countries as SoundCloud does . . . [G]iven the experimental nature of most submissions, it is unlikely that [the compositions] could ever generate commercial profit (p. 200).

Asserting that "learning is not simply a matter of receiving and retaining information, but rather a social process (p. 195)," Hein explores origins, structure, and motivations through member survey and virtual ethnography. Respondents describe their experience of the Junto as a secure, non-intimidating community "Here we see the Junto forming a "zone of proximal development" (Hein quoting Vygotsky, 1978), where more advanced practitioners act as guides and role models for these who are less advanced or simply less confident" (p. 206).

DISCUSSION

Online communities of practice exist against the backdrop of complex and diffuse modern life accelerated and accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic. With the advent of social media, people's contacts have become increasingly online both for people that are part of one's physical space, but also populated by people from earlier times, expanded networks based on shared interest, and liminal persons who cannot be easily put into a single category of existence. The new digital commons enable resources to be shared between and within communities in ways that can flourish beyond exchanges as commodities.

As seen through online CoPs, the act of learning—acquiring new understandings, knowledge, skills, and values—is a social process.[3] While the internet affords more opportunities for engagement, access to more knowledge, and exponential growth of media, the ways in which individuals connect to learn adheres to enduring patterns. The researchers presented in this piece consistently observed themes of learning as a social process, collaboration and supportiveness, and participation as part of social/cultural capital in online contexts.

Information sharing is another continuing theme noted through these case studies. Some information sharing is conveyed directly either verbally or through media. However, much information embedded within a Community of Practice is tacit or implicit knowledge. For the purpose of this paper, musical ways of thinking and knowing may be assumed. Musicians in a digital music community of practice recognize a collective reservoir of embodied knowledge through the know-how of singing or playing an instrument even though this domain of knowledge may be assumed and understated. As well, connoisseurs of a musical genre may share situated knowledge of performance practices and historical context.

Another important role of implicit and tacit knowledge is found in the asserting of participant roles. Rodriguez (2019) noted that novices became members in the *Rocksmith* CoP through a process identified by Lave & Wenger (1991) as "legitimate peripheral participation" (p.36). Hayashi (2018) needed to assert her credentials as a fan to secure credibility as a researcher within filk, wizard rock and Avbyte fan groups. Hennekam, Macarthur, Bennett, Hope, & Goh (2020) find that being female is obviously pre-requisite to becoming a member of online women composer CoPs.

Participant roles may dictate how individuals contribute. Typically, a group will build upon individual expertise of one or more master practitioners through processes of coaching, modelling, scaffolding, articulation, reflection, and exploration as described by Collins, Brown, and Newman's (1987) cognitive apprenticeship theory. Any and all of these learning processes may exist simultaneously online. In the instance of clapping games online, Veblen, Kruse, Messenger, and Letain (2018) find that these processes can be observed as children seek to share. In his research with the Disquiet Junto, Hein (2020) documents the success of thoughtful and sustained collaborative engagement and mentorship. Hein's informants describe the Unquiet Junto as a place to engage and expand creatively within a trusted cohort.

Themes of participation as part of social/cultural capital, openness, equality, and lack of strong hierarchy thread their way through this research. Observing ways in which hip-hop music is a cultural way of acquiring musical knowledge as well as an expression of political views, Söderman and Söderman (2020) find resonance between hip-hop culture and *folkbildning* ("people-learning"). Swedish *folkbildning* signifies public education and informal and nonformal adult learning and is considered the "cornerstone of civil democratic society in Sweden" (p. 180). In the case of four predominantly male online communities of Italian amateur pop-folk musicians, Trobia and Lo Verde

(2017) observe collaboration and acceptance, but lack of strong hierarchy. Hiyashi (2018) found the same themes in fan CoPs.

Belonging and identity are potent forces for some members of online CoPs. Keegan-Phipps and Wright (2020) describe the learning process amongst folk musicians as "a personal and public enactment of socially negotiated and affirmed cultural and aesthetic values" (p. 462). Bronstein and Lidor (2020) perceive that Israeli members of the virtual Eurovision fan club seek belonging and individual/ social identity. Thibeault and Matsunobu (2020) assert that any member of her collaborative CoP can become the multiplicity that is Miku.

Some researchers explore dissonances within online CoPs. bell and Rathgeber (2020) examine the ways in which social media can "other" or can facilitate disabled musicians/musicians with disabilities (DW/MwD). Bonds that people form with celebrities can be significant dimensions in their sense of self and points of reference for CoPs. However, here too, darker sides may emerge. Reinhard (2020) considers the ways that BOTs can shape fan CoPs through use of fake followers used to inflate metrics generating more likes, retweets, and comments. Furthermore, social bots are used to shape cultural discourse by position celebrities in light of trendy causes. Hayashi (2018) opines that online social practice "inevitably falls back on its traditions of cultural production and the power structures that come with them" (p. 150) despite rhetoric of counterculture or subculture status.

CONCLUSION

Emerging themes threaded throughout these online communities of practice emphasize learning as a social process, information sharing, collaboration and supportiveness, and participation as part of social/cultural capital. Information sharing, becoming a member through legitimate peripheral participation, and assuming one or many roles such as novice or mentor are part of being in an online musical CoP. Findings suggest that while gender roles may be important in some cases, online platforms lend themselves to equality of participants with corresponding lack of strong hierarchy. Individuals may find these communities to be a safe place to explore, collaborate, and extend their own creativity.

Members join CoPs for a sense of individual or collective identity. Finally, tensions between nonprofit and commercial forces extend into some interactions.

In the most ideal instances, exchanges that happen in successful online music communities are glowing examples of what Rheingold deemed the virtual "gift economy" (1993); the participatory activities listed above exemplify that spirit of gift giving and social capital in the form of shared knowledge and information, accepted as crucial to an online affinity group's success and growth as a community.

For 21st century music education researchers and practitioners, developing and sustaining online and/or convergent music communities offers enticing and relatively unlimited possibilities to foster music learning and teaching, regardless of physical proximity.

ENDNOTES

[1] Barrett's (2006) and Kenny's (2016) related Community of Musical Practice (CoMP) theories build upon Lave and Wenger (1991).

[2] Franklin's Junto was an enduring civic minded club called into being the first lending library, volunteer fire department, police department, paved streets, public hospital, and the University of Pennsylvania. (https://www.juntomuncie.org/about/)

[3] Theories of social learning and social pedagogy have an honorable lineage from Rousseau to Bandura.

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