Informal learning of popular music: gender monoglossia and heteroglossia

Alison Butler, Kelly Bylica and Ruth Wright

Don Wright Faculty of Music, Talbot College, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada
Corresponding author. Email: abutle45@uwo.ca

Abstract

This paper reports on a small-scale study in an elementary school in Southern Ontario, Canada. The study investigated relationships between students' perceptions and practices of gender in popular music education with particular attention given to communication, instruments and technology and development of freedoms and constraints. The findings present a more opaque picture than previous research, suggesting that students frequently transgress binary gendered patterns of practice and perception in this particular field. Gender monoglossia and heteroglossia provide a useful explanatory framework for analysis, indicating that further application of these concepts to issues in popular music education might be most fruitful.

Keywords: Gender; informal learning; popular music education; monoglossia; heteroglossia

Introduction

This paper reports on data collected as part of a small-scale study conducted between February and April 2017 in an elementary school (Grades JK-8, ages 4–14) in Southern Ontario, Canada. The study was designed to investigate whether relationships could be observed between students' gendered musical practices and perceptions when learning popular music in informal music learning situations. Despite many perceived benefits of this model of music learning (Green, 2001, 2008; Hallam et al., 2009; Wright, 2014, 2015, 2016), some research has suggested that the issue of gender in relationship to the learning of popular music requires investigation, as an unexamined implementation of a popular music-based curriculum may replicate gender inequities and reinforce dominant male hegemonies present within such music (cf. Abramo, 2010, 2011; Björck, 2010, 2011; Ferm-Almqvist, 2017; Smith, 2015).

Gender, popular music and informal learning

Popular music education is a diverse field, as demonstrated by the research about popular music education and gender. The studies that we refer to in our literature review involved participants of varying ages who worked and/or studied in a wide range of settings. The rapid evolution of popular music, and in particular, the use of technology in its creation and performance, further limits the potential for direct comparison between earlier empirical work and our own research project.

The majority of research on gender and popular music learning to date suggests that this style of musicking often favours male students (Abramo, 2010, 2011; Björck, 2010, 2011, 2013; Clawson, 1999; Smith, 2015; Ferm-Almqvist, 2017). Björck (2010, 2011, 2013) argues that the inherent freedom perceived to be offered in popular music is complicated by matters of gender, as processes in popular music tend to privilege certain masculinities. Clawson (1999) found that gender also affected which popular music instruments women were permitted, or dared, to play,

citing the bass as the instrument (aside from voice) most often chosen by women because it was technically easier and had a lower attractiveness to men.

Such gendered inequalities have been found to be reproduced through a number of practices frequently found in popular music education. Research suggests that male students are more comfortable using technology associated with popular music computer-based composition, which increases male motivation in these learning situations and may make girls feel excluded (Comber, Hargreaves, & Colley, 1993; Dibben, 2002; Simoni & Younker, 2008; Tobias, 2014). Pegley (2006) found that as working with technology can be insular, it might allow boys to have a direct relationship with the sonic properties of the music without the need for verbal articulation. This is suggested to appeal to boys' preferred musical communicative processes, described by Abramo (2011) as 'the classic popular music practice of relying on sound events to communicate' (p. 30) or 'para-communicative' processes (p. 36). Girls, on the other hand, were seen to use verbal communication much more and in more clearly delineated ways with separation between discussing music and music-making. These factors led Armstrong (2001) to suggest that boys are often seen as leaders in the popular music classroom due to such classes favouring their preferred communicative attitudes as well as their technological prowess.

Prior to her informal learning working, Green's (1997, 2002) research in gender and music education in the UK found that both students and teachers held gendered patterns of perception relating to music classes and musicality. Her respondents described girls as preferring singing, and slow, classical music and its associated instruments. Girls were described as mature, cooperative, hardworking and reliable. They were seen as obedient to school and teacher rules, values, expectations and behaviours. They were also shy, less willing to show off and avoided technology and performance on pop music associated instruments such as drum kit and electric guitar. Teachers also perceived girls' composition work as dull and less creative. In contrast, Green found that the playing of popular music instruments was almost entirely associated with masculinity. Boys were not seen as successful at singing, but as uniformly responding positively to popular music instruments such as drums and guitar, liking fast, upbeat, rock and pop music. They denounced school music as cissy and unmacho, were uncooperative and anti-conformist and 'messed around' on instruments. Teachers saw boys' creative work in composing as imaginative, risk-taking and bold. Gendered teacher perceptions of students were born out by gendered student self-perceptions in interviews. Perceptions of gender-based creative potential, Green argued, demonstrated a re-enactment of a gendered threat to femininity enshrined in the masculine-dominated history of music composition. In terms of performance, Green suggested that at the time of writing, the only avenues available to girls to express gender norm resistance in music were in the singing of popular music in locations outside the school, where genres such as popular music were not subverted by the gender normative discourse of the school. Whilst education settings have changed considerably since the time when Green (2002) undertook this research, her concerns about school and teacher reinforcement of gender roles remain relevant to contemporary discussions about gender and schooling, and therefore informed our own study.

In the context of a Swedish high school, Ferm-Almqvist (2017) contended that a too-distant teacher allowed boys the opportunity for 'power grabs' in the learning process, snatching chances to display their musical skill and consequently denying girls of such opportunities. Simultaneously, girls often did much unrecognised, behind-the-scenes organisation and management of group rehearsal and learning. Because the absent teachers did not observe the rehearsal work but only the final group performance, boys' contributions were valued more highly than those of girls. The boys received both more opportunities to display their musical skills and much of the final credit for the end result.

It appears, therefore, that important issues arising from the literature about gender and informal learning of popular music are: teacher and students' perceptions of gendered norms in musicking and the ways in which these may be reinforced in pedagogy; the reproduction in the classroom of male-dominated and dominating popular music practices such as the use

of technology and power grabs in soloing, and claiming space in rehearsal and performance; female perceptions of popular music spaces as 'not for them', particularly when in mixed-gender groups or in technology-based contexts, as not speaking to their preferred learning; and artistic, creative styles. Questions also arise as to whether girls feel restricted to only playing certain instruments such as the bass guitar or singing, and the degree to which girls and boys see themselves as able to speak out in group situations and exercise creativity.

Gender, monoglossia and heteroglossia

By referring to 'girls' and 'boys' in this paper, it may appear that simplistic binary conceptions of sex/gender are being reproduced. As Reay (2001, p. 153) citing Heath (1999) clarifies, however, contemporary gendered power relations are more complicated and contradictory than any simplistic binary discourse of 'the girls versus the boys'. Björck (2010, p. 9) discusses the heritage of the terms sex and gender and their uses with gender originally used to signify 'social and cultural interpretations of sex'. Since the 1970s, the terms sex/gender have been used in various ways to move beyond explanations of societal distinction based solely on biology, before being challenged by Butler (1990, 1993) who argued that the relationship between sex and gender is more complex. We follow Butler (1990, 1993) in viewing sex and gender as produced discursively, being something that is 'done' rather than something that inheres. As Francis (2010, p. 481) observes of her own data, 'It would be most accurate to refer to "those discursively constructed as male" in place of "boys" and "those discursively constructed as female" in the female case', but this contributes to a clumsy authorial style. We also agree with Reay (2001, p. 155) that 'femininities can only be understood relationally' and that girls 'both construct and are constructed as feminine' (p. 155). Similarly, we acknowledge that there are multiple gender discourses available to girls, some of which are more influential than others with specific groups of girls or in specific peer group situations (Reay, 2001; Francis, 1998). Moreover, all of the above are affected by factors of class and ethnicity (Reay, 2001), which are issues that our data collection did not permit us to explore.

Francis (2010) suggests that a conception of gender drawn from Bakhtin's (1981) linguistic work using concepts of monoglossia and heteroglossia may be more appropriate in this respect:

> Bakhtin argues that language is never neutral, but rather reflects and constructs power relations. He uses the term 'monoglossia' to refer to dominant forms of language representing the world-view/interests of dominant social groups, which are positioned or imposed as unitary and total. However, for Bakhtin language is never static or fixed, but is rather diverse, with different meanings and readings constantly jostling in assertions or subversions as subjects use language in different ways. Hence while at the macro-linguistic level there may appear to be stability, at the micro level there is fluidity, contradiction and resistance: heteroglossia. (Francis, 2010, p. 479)

We find this a useful way to understand the multiplicity of ways in which gender may be enacted beneath societally constructed and imposed binary categories. As Francis (2010) speaking of her own study also states:

> It is argued that although cases of female masculinity and male femininity are identified, such labels can usefully be applied to only a very small number of pupils, and even here there are profound problems in the conceptual application. The concept of gender heteroglossia appeared applicable to a far larger number of pupils. It is argued that this latter concept offers a less rigid application, that can incorporate analysis both of continuing patterns of gender inequality (as reflective of gender monoglossia), and of individual, gender transgressive (heteroglossic) performances. (p. 477)

In our own data analysis, we, therefore, tried to avoid static conceptualisations of gendered practices and attempted to capture and relay complexity in this respect as it relates to informal learning of popular music. Had we understood this before designing the research, we would have collected data in ways that permitted a much more nuanced and flexible approach to observation and analysis of gendered behaviours and perceptions. In this paper, however, whilst recognising this as a weakness, we refer to 'boy/male' and 'girl/female' for the purposes of analysis while also trying to be sensitive to nuanced and multiple performances of masculinity and femininity. We do this both because this is how our student participants chose to describe themselves in biodata forms (see methodology) and because this is what our data collection permits us to do. We hope that this research may, however, be a useful preliminary step in approaching the complex task of doing otherwise in the future.

Methodology

The working hypothesis for the research, based on prior work in this particular elementary school on a previous project (Wright et al., 2012; Wright, 2015), was that the gender disparities noted by other scholars concerning popular music learning were not as marked in the case study location. During the study, our research questions evolved from our engagement with the literature. The questions became:

> Are there teacher and student perceptions of gendered norms in musicking?
> Are students and teachers aware of gender-dominated and dominating popular music practices in this context? If so, how are they enacted?

> Does gender impact student perceptions of

> affordances or constraints of technology?
> freedom or constraint in group work?
> accessibility of the genre?
> accessibility of instruments?
> creativity?
> musical preference?

> Does the pedagogy of the teacher influence any of the above?

The study involved three Grade Seven/Eight age-mixed (ages 12–14) general music classes, their music teachers and the school principal. Qualitative case study was chosen as the methodological approach, as it allowed the use of a range of data sources for the complex examination of the issues of gender and informal learning of popular music within their original context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). As the authors advise: 'This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood' (p. 544). Prior to beginning data collection, we sought ethics approval from our university's Research Ethics Board and the Ethics Committee of the local Catholic school board, slightly altering our study design in response to feedback from both institutions. There was a 2-week habituation process during which we, as researchers, 'hung out' in the classroom to accustom students to the presence of visiting adults and video cameras. During this period, we observed the students at work in their bands, considering whether to record the whole classroom or to focus on particular groups. Each band used a JamHub, a headphone monitor-mix product that allows members to hear one another through headphones rather than monitors. The use of multiple JamHubs made it possible for the whole class to rehearse in their bands simultaneously. We found that the JamHub technology requires close observation with at least one researcher sitting amongst the band and listening through the JamHub in order to hear the music-making.

Table 1. Composition of Observed Groups ($n = 28$)

Group	Boys	Girls
Group 1	2: Mario, Steven	5: Hattie, Mia, Maizie, Sasha, Suzanne
Group 2	2: Ben, Eddie	5: Darcey, Katie, Maria, Rachel, Rhiannon
Group 3	8: Adam, Bobby, Ethan, Isaac, Kyran, Leon, Mikey, Terry	
Group 4		6: Alice, Ashley, Charlotte, Imogen, Michelle, Tarryn
Total	12	16

Table 2. Responses to Biodata Form ($N = 26$)

Grade	Boy	Girl	Other
Grade 7	6	9	0
Grade 8	5	6	0

We, therefore, decided to focus on selected groups, rather than the whole classes. We selected one group in each of classes 1 and 2, each comprising a mixture of boys and girls, and two single-gendered groups in class 3: one of boys, one of girls (Table 1). Due to our interest in gender in this context, we felt this combination of groups would allow us the best opportunity to gain data related to our hypothesis in both single-gender and mixed-gender contexts.

The data collection lasted for a 6-week period from February to April 2017 with researchers visiting the class music lesson each week. Instruments used for data collection were video-recorded lesson observations, field notes, focus group interviews involving 26 students and principal and teacher interviews. Before the interviews, we gave each student a confidential biodata form to complete which asked their name, school grade and self-chosen gender identification. The Catholic school board permitted three options: boy, girl and other. The responses to this form are collated in Table 2, showing that 11 students self-identified as boys, 16 as girls and none as others. The principal interview followed an unstructured interview format in which background information about the school was obtained. A semi-structured student and teacher interview guide was produced based on the issues identified from the literature above. All interviews were video- and audio-recorded to enable accuracy of transcription and analysis. The student focus group interviews, which are the primary data source for this paper, occurred at the end of this period. By the time of the interviews, we had become aware of visible power distributions within the groups. We, therefore, split each band into two focus groups according to our perceptions of student or dominance within the band and interviewing like students together. We hoped this would afford space for less dominant students to express themselves. After transcribing the student focus group interviews and teacher interviews, we created a spreadsheet that allowed us to compare how the different groups responded to each question. This drew our attention to both similarities and differences in their responses. Data were entered into NVivo software by interview questions, in order to allow cross-examination of coding between questions and thereby amplify the thematic analysis during the coding process.

The case study school

From interviewing the school's principal, the following information was obtained: the school is a Kindergarten-to-Grade Eight (ages 4–14) Roman Catholic elementary school in south-western Ontario. There were 347 students on roll at the time of the research. The student participants

in our study were all in the three Grade Seven/Eight (ages 12–14) mixed classes, each of which had one 40-min music lesson per week. The school is located in a small rural town. The principal offered that the school takes part in the Ontario School Nutrition Program student nutrition programme, indicating the lower socio-economic status of many of its students. She described the area as a 'blue-collar community' with many parents working in industry, trade and service. Farming, previously a large occupation in the area, is of dwindling significance to the community. The principal described the Grades Seven and Eight cohorts as 'quite settled' and said that they very much looked forward to their music lessons. Our field notes also indicated that the school had very few students of visible ethnic minorities. The students generally appeared to us as being 'younger' than students of similar ages that we had observed for other projects in urban schools. Their dress and behaviours did not reflect current trends, and their attitudes to life and relationships with one another also seemed less worldly than those of other students we had encountered.

The school music programme

The school was one of the original Canadian pilot schools in the Musical Futures Canada research project undertaken from 2012–14. The same female music teacher, Nicola, was still in post in the school. She had been implementing an informal music learning programme for students in Grades Six–Eight continuously since 2012. She also taught vocal music to all of the school's younger students, ensuring that the students were confident participating in musical activities prior to beginning the Musical Futures programme and were aware of the opportunities that Musical Futures would offer them in their final years at the elementary school. Since 2013, Nicola had enlisted a local male popular musician, music teacher and music store owner, Dave, to team-teach the Musical Futures programme with her. In return, the school provided Dave with space to offer individual instrumental tuition during the school day on several popular music instruments to the school's students. This practice of children being offered individual instrumental tuition at school is relatively uncommon in Ontario. We observed both Nicola and Dave modelling musical practices for students on all instruments. Both teachers also sang along with the student bands and demonstrated musical ideas vocally. With the Grade Six–Eight programme focusing on small group work, the students engaged in aural learning of self-selected popular music using rock band instruments and voices. The teachers acted as guides and facilitators and operated across the continuum of teaching modalities from informal to formal as they judged necessary (Wright, 2016). Whereas bands had rehearsed with amplification in different locations around the school during the previous research project (Wright, 2014), the programme now used JamHub devices. These allow multiple groups to work effectively and simultaneously in the music classroom with members of each group plugging their instruments into a JamHub and listening to one another through headphones.

Results and analysis

In this paper, we present data obtained from student focus group interviews, supplemented by information from our lesson observations and field notes. Data are presented under headings representing coding themes that relate to the literature we referenced while developing our research questions.

Gender and freedom or constraint in group work

A significant theme arising from the data related to the question prompted by Björck (2011) finding that girls had difficulty 'claiming space' in mixed groups. One aspect of claiming space is a feeling of being able to voice one's opinion in musical group work, and we therefore asked the student participants whether the gender composition of their group affected how comfortable they felt about speaking out in practice situations:

Group 2 (mixed gender)

Rhiannon: It doesn't really matter.
Maria: I'm nervous around a lot of people, but if I start getting to know you better, then I can start talking freely about really anything [. . .]

We had observed that both Rhiannon and Maria were quiet and retiring within their group rehearsals, but their interview responses suggest that the gender composition of the group was not a significant factor in whether or not they felt they could speak freely. More important for them, as the following quotation demonstrates, was whether they were close friends with the people in their group:

Group 2 (mixed gender)

Rhiannon: [. . .] some of the people in our band are not that really [. . .] like, they're our friends, but they aren't close, close friends.
Ruth: Right. Do you think it would be different if it was all girls in your group?
Both: No.

This notion of being comfortable with the people in the group, rather than the gender of people in the group, also emerged in other focus group interviews. The students in one of the mixed-gender groups said that gender did not matter 'as long as we work well together'. The girls in Group 1 clearly expressed their enjoyment of the chance to exercise power over boys in a mixed group. Again, the matter of friendship was underlined:

Group 1 (mixed gender)

Maizie: I like bossing the boys around, it's fun.
Suzanne: I dunno, if I'm, like, close with the boys and the girls, then I'm like comfortable with them.
Maizie: If I don't like really hang out with the guys, then it's not – it's really awkward.

It, therefore, appeared from our data that the students did not have clear, binary, gendered patterns of opinion or preference about the gender within working groups. Instead, both the focus group data and our field notes indicate a more diverse and fluid situation with students performing and verbalising perceptions of gender that both accorded with and transgressed the gendered musical roles established by previous research.

Our questions about whether students preferred to work in mixed or single-gender groups also produced a range of comments:

Group 2 (mixed gender)

Darcey: I prefer to work in a mixed group. [Others agree]
[. . .]
Eddie: If you, if you could have girls in your band, they could probably sing better than guys sometimes (shrugging).
[. . .]
Darcey: I just think then you can get along better and get to know each other's interests.

Kasey: Yeah, sometimes girls can have a lot of drama in music and stuff.
          [. . .]
Kasey: So it's better to have other people than just girls.
          [. . .]
Darcey: Last year we had a mixed group, but it still caused a lot of drama.

These comments appeared to support mixed group working for musical reasons, for getting to know other people and for avoiding 'drama', although Darcey mentioned that mixed-gender groups could also experience 'drama'. Accordingly, our data did not support the pattern we observed in the literature of girls finding single-gendered spaces more conducive to freedom and autonomy.

In our focus group interviews with the single-gender groups, some students agreed that gender was not as significant as personality and friendship in this respect:

Group 3 (single gender)

Ruth: Does it make a difference what sort of groups you work in? I noticed that you've chosen to work in an all-boy group. Was that deliberate?
Leon: No.
Ruth: Did you want to work with girls or is it just kind of how it . . .
Adam: It just kinda happened.

Later in the interview, however, one boy expressed some hesitancy about having girls in the group. Just as some girls expressed pleasure at being able to transgress the female gender norm of quietness and submissiveness to 'boss the boys around', some boys found such behaviour difficult:

Group 3 (single gender)

Ruth: Would it matter to you if there were girls in your group?[Boys all generally say no, not really]
          [. . .]
Leon: It depends because sometimes if, like, one person is running the show then, like, if you'll speak out sometimes they'll be like 'no' or say no or 'that's a stupid idea' or sometimes you just don't say anything and if it's mixed they'll have counter – contradicting ideas or whatever and then it might not [. . .] well even with an all-boy band sometimes it's not [. . .] the greatest thing in the world [. . .]

This contradicts much of the literature we consulted prior to this study, which reported that males tended to silence females in the popular music context. Some of our male students seemed to feel that they had difficulty claiming space in the presence of girls. Francis' (2010) concept of gender heteroglossia may be useful here to help understand the conflicting patterns of response we gained from students. The issue does indeed appear not to be as simple as 'boys do this or girls do that' (Reay, 2001) but rather that *some* boys and *some* girls experience popular music informal learning in certain ways, while others experience it differently according to their heteroglossic gender performance at that time.

Gender and affordances or constraints of technology

The student participants were much more unified in their opinions about technology (the JamHubs, microphones, electronic keyboards and drum kits, lead to connect instruments to the JamHubs and

headphones). Our research questions in this area were intended to investigate the issues related to gendered music class preferences and affordances or constraints of technology (Armstrong, 2001; Dibben, 2002; Pegley, 2006; Tobias, 2014) in relation to informal learning of popular music.

Group 1 (mixed gender)

Suzanne:	I like working with technology, it's like a new opportunity for us.
Ruth:	Do you think that the technology is helpful to your work?
Maizie:	Yeah, cause you can look up chords.
Suzanne:	Are you talking about the JamHubs, or our phones?
Ruth:	Any of the technology.
Maizie:	Well, it's easy to use your phones for like chords and stuff. And there's like apps you can do to like practise at home.

Students linked their ease with using technology in music education contexts to the omnipresence of technology in their lives:

Group 4 (single gender)

Alice:	Now that technology is like a big thing, it's much easier.

The students we interviewed appeared comfortable with technology, and the girls did not appear to feel that technology in their music education context was alienating or otherwise favoured boys. It is unclear, however, whether this was because these students were using technology to support performing tasks, rather than undertaking computer-mediated composition tasks as with some of the previous research.

It was also interesting that some of the female participants described how they valued the JamHubs because they felt they provide privacy within the group during rehearsal time:

Group 2 (mixed gender)

Ruth:	On the whole if I were to say to you, I could take the JamHubs away today and you could just play out loud, which would you prefer?
Maria:	The JamHubs.
Rhiannon:	The JamHubs.
Maria:	I don't like when people watch me or listen to me.
Rhiannon:	Yeah.
Maria:	I try and pretend that they're not there.
Rhiannon:	Yeah.
Ruth:	Really?
Maria:	Because it scares me. I'm afraid they're gonna judge me on how I do.
Ruth:	And do you – so with the JamHub, do you feel safer?
Both:	Yeah.
Rhiannon:	Because then it's only our band that listens.
Ruth:	And you don't mind your band hearing you?
	[Both shake heads no]

The data provided by Rhiannon, Maria and the other quieter girls in our study did appear to align with previous research findings that girls find it more difficult than boys to project themselves in front of others or to take advantage of opportunities to draw attention to themselves (Björck,

2010; Ferm-Almqvist, 2017). Our data also highlight the potential for technology to create safe spaces for less confident girls in popular music classrooms, offering them privacy to take risks within a small group of friends, which aligns with Simoni and Younker's (2008) study. Our videoed lesson observations suggested that there were also less confident boys who appeared to benefit from the JamHub 'protection'. It appeared therefore that differences in student confidence and use of technology had more to do with different heteroglossic *expressions* of gender than with binary gendered differences.

Interestingly, the only student who expressed a dislike for technology was a boy singer:

Group 2 (mixed gender)

> Eddie: I prefer without [JamHubs] because then I don't have the headphones, and turning the volumes up and down, and problems with the jacks and things.

Eddie appeared to be confident and well-liked by the other boys in the class. He did not exhibit any noticeable 'femininity' in his behaviour, yet in responses such as this, he transgressed several of the gendered patterns found in the literature. His particular expression of masculinity at this point in time did not appear to fit the binary gendered musical patterns observed by other authors, such as confidence with technology and avoidance of the singer role.

Asked about tackling problems with technology in their groups, the student participants mentioned experience and leadership rather than gender:

Group 2 (mixed gender)

> Rachel: Probably like Eddie and Darcey, people who have done it before.

It appears therefore that these female students were not deterred by music technology, at least of the sort experienced in their particular popular music class. Indeed, for some, it offered a measure of protection from the gaze of the rest of the class. It is also interesting to note that the gender of the 'gazer' did not appear to be of interest to our student participants. These findings, which do not confirm those in the earlier literature (Abramo, 2011b; Armstrong, 2001; Björck, 2010; Comber et al., 1993; Tobias, 2014), suggest a difference in gendered relations to technology. Whilst this may be true only for the students in our own study, it may also reflect the changing nature of children's engagement with technology generally.

Gender and musical preference

Our questions about listening to music were prompted by Green's (1997, 2002) and Armstrong's (2001) results concerning student perceptions of gendered patterns of listening and musical preference. The responses from our own student participants were diverse and often contradictory, thus indicating heteroglossia, as these girls demonstrated:

Group 2 (mixed gender)

> Ruth: When you listen to a piece of music, what's most important to you? The meaning of the lyrics, or the sound of the music, or both of them?
>
> Maria and Rhiannon: Both! [laughing]

From the same band, the girl drummer said she listened to the beat most of all whilst the boy singer said he started by listening to the beat and then began to absorb the meaning of the lyrics:

Group 2 (mixed gender)

> Katie: I pretty much listen to the beat and like –
> Eddie: [Interrupting] I listen to the beat, but then after I listen to the song like five or six times, I realize what the song is actually about.
> Darcey: So, both.

It is possible that the immersive nature of informal learning accounted for Eddie's growing interest in lyrics, transitioning distracted to purposive listening, to use Green's (2008) terminology. He began to listen differently as he realised the requirements of his role as a singer. Likewise, fulfilling the musical requirements of her drumming role in the band may have focused Darcey's attention on her specific part. Both these students appeared more interested in listening to the musical elements of the song they most needed to hear in order to master their performance, rather than in any other particular gendered focus. Such responses suggest that the literature findings regarding gender and musical focus (Armstrong, 2001; Green, 1997) do not apply in such a clearly gender-delineated way to this group of students. They again indicate heteroglossic gender expressions in this respect.

Similarly, unlike Green's (1997, 2002) respondents, who exhibited gendered patterns of musical preference, several of our focus groups described how their song choice for the band performance was a careful process based on practical musical considerations:

Group 1 (mixed gender)

> Suzanne: We first decided on songs that were new, that came out – so we were deciding between Love Me Now and [looks towards the other two] what was it?
> Mia: This Town.
> Suzanne: And This Town by Niall Horan. And Mario brought that song too. But it was really fast, and we couldn't do it.
> Mia: And I couldn't sing it.
> Maizie: So then we listened to both of the songs and we figured like which one would be easier to do, like, by chords and stuff. So that's how we chose our song.
> Ruth: So it's very much about the instruments, and how fast you had to sing the words, was it?
> Maizie: Yeah, so This Town, it didn't have a ukulele in it, and a couple other instruments. And because we have a lot of people in our band, we have to have a lot of instruments included in the song.

Group 3, however, had more difficulty choosing a song. The responses from this (all-boy) group indicated that they had a wide range of musical tastes and that this was, at least partly, the problem when trying to choose a song for the band:

Group 3 (single gender)

> Ruth: What did you find out about the types of music you all like? Do you like the same sort of stuff?
> […]
> [Most boys say no.]
> Adam: Kind of like hip hop […] not all of us.
> Isaac: AC/DC (pointing at Bobby).
> Ethan: Some of us like rap, some of us like rock.
> Leon: That's basically just you.

Two students in this group did suggest that if they had had girls in their group, the girls might have wanted to choose different sorts of songs and this could have been a problem, but then one of them appeared to reconsider that opinion:

Group 3 (single gender)

Leon: And they [. . .] would've had a different song choice that they would've liked [. . .] there's a lot of things that might be different.
Isaac: They would've made us do some Katy Perry or something
Leon: Actually, that's not true. A lot of girls like rock also.

Leon and Isaac's opinions were supported by some of our data, which did suggest that girls had more common musical tastes. In the all-girl band (Group 4), one student even told an anecdote of how working with boys the previous year had been problematic because of differences in musical tastes.

Group 4 (single gender)

Michelle: [. . .] last year, I had an all-girl band, too [. . .] and this year I have an all-girl band. [. . .] I guess I really prefer working with all girls 'cause then you guys kind of all have the same music, like the same kind of music, you guys all listen to, I guess?
[. . .]
Charlotte: I definitely prefer to work in an all-girl group, 'cause last year we had a guy in our group and everybody seemed to fight 'cause he liked a different genre of music than everybody else and then there was like, more fighting in between.

Once again, there is a varied response to the idea of gendered patterns of musical practices or preferences with no clear patterns being obvious according to gender. It is possible that the participants' informal learning experiences had enabled them to work with the intersonic properties of the music to change their gendered delineations (Green, 2008). This further indicates heteroglossic gender performances (Francis, 2010), rather than binary gender divisions.

Themes significant by their absence

Our analysis also highlighted when the focus group questions, and the literature that influenced them did not provoke any indications of importance to the pupil participants in the study. One such topic was gendered instrument allocation or preference within the groups (Bayton, 1992; Clawson, 1999). In the two mixed-gender groups, it was apparent from the conversations that significant band decisions were based on prior experience with playing the instrument at home (or at school, for those participants who had been in a Musical Futures class the previous year) rather than gender. This is demonstrated in a conversation about the previous year's Battle of the Bands and a last-minute instrument switch that occurred due to a band members' absence:

Group 1 (mixed gender)

Ruth: Why do you think you were the one that switched instruments, Suzanne?
Maizie: Well, because she'd already had been playing piano. And like she has a piano at her house so it's easy for her to practise. Like, I couldn't switch because I don't have a piano. It's very confusing to learn all the chords and stuff.

> Suzanne: Like, everybody was already doing well with the instruments they had. And ukulele wasn't that important with the song, so then I decided to take leadership and play the piano.

Our specific questioning about the allocation of the bass guitar in groups also produced no indication that gender was a factor in decisions around choice of instruments:

Group 1

> Ruth: Do you think that girls or boys are better at playing any of the instruments? Do you think that some of the instruments are more 'boy instruments' than 'girl instruments'?
> [All say no.]
> [. . .]
> Mia: Like, everyone deserves to play what everyone wants.

Group 2 (mixed gender)

> Rhiannon: Um, anybody can play it.
> Maria: It doesn't matter [. . .] if you can learn how to play it, then you can play it.

It is possible that the participants' attitudes were influenced by their enculturation into this school's popular music informal learning programme. These students had been in junior kindergarten/kindergarten when the Musical Futures programme started at the school in 2012. It was common for younger classes to be invited to listen to Musical Futures performances by older classes within the school. Therefore, from a very young age, our participants had seen boys and girls playing all of the popular music instruments. This may have helped to dispel the gendered instrument associations identified by other authors. It is also observable therefore that these students were exhibiting heteroglossic instrument associations.

Conclusions

In this small-scale study, the clearly-defined gendered practices and perceptions concerning popular music learning identified in earlier studies were either not found or were much less clearly evident. In many instances, it was difficult to attribute any homogenous gendered patterns to our focus group data. This lack of gendered patterns of practice and perception was also apparent in our lesson observations and field notes. We have considered various explanations for our findings. First, these young people, born after the year 2000, might be less aware of/concerned by the gender stereotypes that prevailed in previous generations, just as their attitude to technology appears to have countered previous gendered perceptions of technology. Furthermore, they are still relatively young, compared to several examples in the literature that refers to studies with high school or college students. We wondered whether gender identification, gender differences and expressions of gender were more likely to be demonstrated after the transition to a new school environment during adolescence. Most of our participants had been at the same school since junior kindergarten (age 3). It is possible that a similar study of, for example, a UK class of the same age, where the children have already transferred to secondary school, would produce more obviously gendered results. All of the above may be compounded by the case study school's rural location and its Catholic school/community status. Similar studies in urban, non-faith school settings, for

example, might produce different results. We also questioned whether the nature of the pedagogy these students experienced could explain some of the differences between our data and the findings in the literature. As the JamHub technology allowed the whole class to rehearse in their bands in one room, they were not left unsupervised for extended periods of time during the rehearsal process. Although they were given considerable 'space' to work, the 'absent teacher' effect referred to by scholars such as Ferm-Almqvist (2017) was, therefore, not a feature of their experience.

We also considered whether the informal music learning model students had experienced in this school might have affected our findings. In this respect, we found applying Francis' (2010) Bakhtinian application of gender monoglossia and heteroglossia to be a most persuasive explanatory tool with potential for further use in the music education field. Researchers might, for example, consider whether informal popular music learning, as conceived of in Green's model, provides space for students to cross previously gendered musical boundaries? Similarly, when students are encultured into informal learning of popular music from a young age, as was the case in this school, can it afford them opportunities to perform heteroglossic gendered musical practices and perceptions that permit them to inhabit previously categorised gender-transgressive spaces? May, therefore, these then come to feel natural before dominant societal models of gender identification and performance have the opportunity to exert their full force?

Compared to previous research, within our own context, the findings regarding students' awareness and performance of gender-dominated and dominating popular music practices suggest a picture of much greater opacity. The issues, which included themes where the students were in agreement and other topics where there were varied responses, suggested that many students were transgressing the previously identified, gendered patterns of practice and perception concerning popular music learning. We suggest, therefore, that despite abiding within society's dominant monoglossic binary gender categorisation (as their biodata form responses indicated), it appeared that students' practices and perceptions within or beneath the monoglossia were 'diverse with different meanings and readings constantly jostling in assertions or subversions' (Francis, 2010, p. 479). This would appear to bear out Francis' application to the gender of Bakhtin's linguistic concepts: 'Hence while at the macro[-linguistic] level there may appear to be stability, at the micro level there is fluidity, contradiction and resistance: heteroglossia'. Since this is a small-scale study, it is not possible to extrapolate any generalisations to a wider population from these findings, but our data suggest that further application of Francis' concepts of gender monoglossia and heteroglossia to the issue of informal popular music learning in school contexts might be most fruitful.

References

ABRAMO, J. M. (2011a). Gender differences in the popular music compositions of high school students. *Music Education Research International*, **5**, 1–11.

ABRAMO, J. M. (2011b). Gender differences of popular music production in secondary school. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, **59**(1), 21–43.

ARMSTRONG, V. (2001). Theorizing gender and musical composition in the computerized classroom. *Women: A Cultural Review*, **12**, 35–43.

BAYTON, M. (1992). Out on the margins: Feminism and the study of popular music. *Women: A Cultural Review*, **3**(1), 51–59.

BAXTER, P. & JACK, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, **13**(4), 544–559.

BJÖRCK, C. (2010). *Claiming Space: Discourses on Gender, Popular Music, and Social Change*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.

BJÖRCK, C. (2011). Freedom, constraint, or both? readings on popular music and gender. *Action, Criticism and Theory for Music Education*, **10**(2), 8.

BJÖRCK, C. (2013). A music room of one's own: Discursive constructions of girls-only spaces for learning popular music. *Girlhood Studies*, **6**(2), 11–29.

BUTLER, J. (1993). *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge.

CLAWSON, M. A. (1999). When women play the bass: Instrument specialization and gender interpretation in alternative rock music. *Gender & Society* **13**(2), 193–210.

COMBER, C., HARGREAVES, D. J., & COLLEY, A. (1993). Girls, boys and technology in music education. *British Journal of Music Education*, **10**, 123–134.

DIBBEN, N. (2002). Constructions of femininity in 1990s girl-group music. *Feminism & Psychology*, **12**(2), 168–175.

FERM-ALMQVIST, C. (2017). Becoming a guitar playing woman – The risk of unequal gender role conservation in non-formal ensemble music education. In R. Wright, C. Beynon & B. A. Younker (eds.), *21st Century Music Education: Informal Learning and Non Formal Teaching in School and Community Contexts.* https://books.google.ca/books/about/21st_Century_Music_Education_Informal_Le.html?id=drhfAQAACAAJ&redir_esc=y.

FRANCIS, B. (1998) *Power Plays: Primary School Children's Construction of Gender, Power and Adult Work.* Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

FRANCIS, B. (2010). Re/theorising gender: Female masculinity and male femininity in the classroom? *Gender and Education*, **22**(5), 477–490.

GREEN, L. (1997). *Music, Gender, Education.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

GREEN, L. (2001). *How Popular Musicians Learn: A Way Ahead for Music Education.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

GREEN, L. (2002). Exposing the gendered discourse of music education. *Feminism & Psychology*, **12**(2), 137–144.

GREEN, L. (2008). *Music, Informal Learning and the School: A New Classroom Pedagogy.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

HALLAM, S., CREECH, A., SANDFORD, C., RINTA, T., SHAVE, K. & MCQUEEN, H. (2009). *Survey of Musical Futures: A Report from Institute of Education University of London for the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.* London: Institute of Education, University of London.

PEGLEY, K. (2006). Like horses to water: Reconsidering gender and technology within music education discourses. *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, **10**, 60–70.

REAY, D. (2001). 'Spice Girls', 'Nice Girls', 'Girlies', and 'Tomboys': gender discourses, girls' cultures and femininities in the primary classroom. *Gender and Education*, **13**(2),153–166.

SIMONI, M. & YOUNKER, B. A. (2008). Project Lovelace: Teenage girls and technology-based composition. *International Computer Music Association Conference Proceedings*, 8. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.bbp2372.2008.025.

SMITH, G.D. (2015). Masculine domination in private sector popular music performance education in England. In P. Burnard, Y. Hofvander-Trulsson & J. Soderman (eds.), *Bourdieu and the Sociology of Music Education* (pp. 61–78). Farnham: Ashgate.

TOBIAS, E. S. (2014). Solo, multitrack, mute? Producing and performing (gender) in a popular music classroom. *Visions of Research in Music Education*, **25**, 1–28.

WRIGHT, R. (2015) Bourdieu and music education: habitus, field and capital in Canadian music education in P. Burnard, Y. Hofvander-Trulsson & J. Soderman (eds.), *Bourdieu and the Sociology of Music Education* (pp. 79–98). Farnham: Ashgate. Portuguese translation licence requested 2017.

WRIGHT, R. (2016) Informal learning in general music education. In C. Abril & B. Gault, (eds.), *Oxford Approaches to Teaching General Music* (pp. 209–240). New York: OUP.

WRIGHT, R. (2017a). The longer revolution: The rise of vernacular musics as 'New Channels of General Learning.' *Journal of Popular Music Education*, **1**(1), 9–24.

WRIGHT, R. (2017b). Introduction: The complexities of informal learning and non-formal teaching in 21st century society. In R. Wright, C. Beynon, B. A. Younker (eds.), *21st Century Music Education: Informal Learning and Non Formal Teaching in School and Community Contexts.* https://books.google.ca/books/about/21st_Century_Music_Education_Informal_Le.html?id=drhfAQAACAAJ&redir_esc=y.

WRIGHT, R., YOUNKER, B.A., BEYNON, C., HUTCHISON,J., LINTON, L., BEYNON, S., DAVIDSON, B. & DUARTE, N. (2012) Tuning into the future: Sharing initial insights about the 2012 Musical Futures pilot project in Ontario. *The Canadian Music Educator*, **53**(4), 1–15.