Abstract

As new forms of musical learning have arisen in the 21st century, researchers, educators, and the wider community are seeking ways to describe how youth are learning and engaging with music in a technologically evolving digital age. This exploratory research aims to provide a framework for understanding innovative learners engaged in musical activities that can inform both research and practice in music education. In part 1 of the research, a framework for understanding innovative learners is proposed based on three broad and interrelated areas: connecting, self-directed learning, and multimodal meaning making. These three areas align with current Canadian perspectives on 21st century learning and innovation and were derived through a review of relevant theoretical and empirical literature. In part two, an interview study was conducted with 93 participants aged 11 to 18 years (females = 35; males = 58) attending elementary, middle, and secondary schools in the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia, Canada. The participants’ perspectives on their engagement with musical activities (initiators, sustainers, benefits) was explored and considered in relation to personal, social, and systemic factors. A content analysis was used to identify the prevalence of innovative learners using the proposed framework. In part three, 11 case studies involving rich and detailed descriptive vignettes explored further how participants who were identified in the interview study as innovative learners were engaging in musical activities within their digitally infused musical lives. The findings indicate that while many of the participants exhibited at least one or some of the three broad and interrelated areas associated with 21st century learning and innovation, the 11 participants who were identified as innovative learners were situated in all three areas of the proposed innovative music learner framework in diverse ways. These innovative learners’ transformative music engagement was deeply immersive, fluid, and interconnected, and unlike previous generations of music learners. Young people’s involvement with these evolving technologies and digital devices suggests a new landscape for how they navigate and describe their musical learning within today’s digitally infused musical landscapes.

Keywords: music education; innovative learners; 21st century learners; multimodal meaning making; informal music learning; transformative music engagement