

Exploring Formative Routes, Opportunities, and Events in Music Education

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Abstract

This paper analyses the narratives of five professional musicians, involved in popular music, aiming for an exploratory overview of their individual formative routes, events, opportunities and influences. Through retrospective accounts, these musicians reflect on the influences and opportunities that have contributed to their professional choice, and, thereby, providing some insights relevant to music education and culture in this digital age, in Portugal. As participant's routes are alike, but share an involvement in popular music as teenagers, a special focus is placed on issues concerning the characteristics of their musical environment. Also, the role of school music within those lives, the relative influence of school experiences, and the significant peer influences and models that seem sustaining and fostering their musical involvement and identities, are analyzed. Issues on music education, in its varied contexts and ways, are debated and draw upon writings on informal learning in music and the implications are of concern to student, educators, and policy makers.

Keywords: *formative contexts, music education, music learning, musicians.*

1. Introduction

Issues on music education are often debated and drawn upon research on some important features that come from the study of synergies between school music in its varied contexts and on ways the home and the various sociocultural environments are important. Studies underlining the impact of home and school on lifelong musical interest [1] opportunity and motivation [2], and the quality of the musical interactions, situation and learning experiences are important factors on the way music is used, and valued. These experiences may be relevant on shaping attitudes, choices and identities towards a lifespan musical involvement but also in 'creating' their own selves, and in representing themselves to others, as seen also for the Portuguese context [3, 4].

As a process, "education continually redefines its meanings" [5], and many changes and challenges have been observed in the educational system, related, for instance to a formal framework definition for validating the non-formal and informal learning experiences and their certification. In knowledge society, when we reflect upon educational processes associated to the use of digital technologies, changes and challenges are growing. In Portugal, new learning environments emerge [6, 7] and new digital and virtual technologies create wider opportunities in music education through music-related social participation, musical learning and artistic expression that slowly become acknowledged in the field of formal music education [8].

Furthermore, studies concerning popular musician's learning and development [9], events and opportunities that have influenced their lives and contributed to their professional choices [10, 8] have drawn researcher's attention considering its applications to music education as well as providing a way forward for professional musicians [8].

Manturzeska [11] developed a longitudinal exploratory study of the life-span development of professional musicians collecting empirical data about their life course and on the factors influencing their development and achievement in different stages and fields of music. Other studies have investigated events that have influenced the careers and lives of musicians, examining, in particular, the transitional phase from training to professional life, providing important implications for the education of talented musicians, and methodologically, showing how individuals can be traced over a long period of time [10].

In line of the mentioned, this exploratory study focuses on the analyses of the narratives of five musicians involved in popular music. It aims for an exploratory overview of their individual formative routes, events, opportunities and influences in music.

2. Methodology

The specific context addressed corresponds to the Leiria region, located in the littoral centre of Portugal. The selection of five case study participants took into account the need to cover different

genders and levels of education, having as common denominator being popular musicians from the same region. Participant were 2 female musicains (FM 1 and 2) and 3 male (MM 3, 4 and 5), aged between 23 and 48 years old.

It was intended to unveil and interpret the formative processes they experienced, understanding the interviewees' worlds of life and specified social groups, and exploring the spectrum of their opinions and the different representations on the subject in question [12]. As participant's routes are alike, but share an involvement in popular music as teenagers, a special focus is placed on issues concerning the characteristics of their musical environment. Also, the role of school music within those lives, the relative influence of school experiences, and the significant peer influences and models that seem sustaining and fostering their musical involvement and identities, are analyzed. Taking into account the specific context, the circumstances described above, and the aim settled, this study may be seen as exploratory [13] and, still, descriptive, as the collected data intend to originate detailed narratives of five musicians involved in popular music. It aims for an exploratory overview of their individual formative routes, events, opportunities and influences.

Semi-structured interviews were used focusing on musician's experience of the theme, providing retrospective accounts and personal narratives of the influences and opportunities that have, in their opinions, contributed to their professional choice.

Ethical procedures were followed with results drew on participants informed consentient. After recorded, data from transcriptions were analysed and themes were identified.

3. Findings and discussion

The main provisional results are expressed through themes that were identified and fell into three broad areas. These were 1) Formal and non-formal contexts of music learning; 2) Sociocultural contexts of music involvement; and 3) Peers influence.

3.1 Formal and non-formal contexts of music learning

Irrespective of whether the participants had learnt music in formal or non-formal contexts of music education, opportunities and contexts of music learning during childhood, and specially adolescence, were emphasized.

Only FM2 does not recall to have had opportunities in formal music education contexts. Like FM1, FM2 is a popular singer but she did not have formal instrumental or singing lessons during her childhood. She strongly emphasis her family role in providing her with opportunities to music learning as they were closely connected with popular contexts of music practices. Her family were her music teachers, stressing singing activities as a key element for music learning. She refers that "*life was her music school*", emphasizing the importance of music practice and real life musical experiences.

FM1 and MM1 have higher education degrees, but only MM1 has a degree in the music domain. FM1 recalls about the way some musical learning experiences lived during childhood were important as they provided her with a close connection to music practice. As a child and adolescence, she had music classes in a formal context, in a conservatoire. Besides learning the piano, she had vocal lessons that she describes as very relevant to the development of her musicianship. However, in her opinion, musical learning methods should be more attractive in order to motivate and attract more young people to formal contexts of music learning.

3.2 Sociocultural contexts of music involvement

Participant's narratives reveal positive musical experiences associated to the role of music in their lives during childhood and especially during adolescence. These include the combination of parental encouragement and home resources with existing opportunities of cultural consumption, participation, and involvement.

MM2 refers to the emotional experience music has in his life, dismissing the idea of his family as influencers in his musical choices and options: "Nobody in the family played, it was really an individual passion" (MM2).

For FM1, music listening is seen as a central musical experience to which she confers a special meaning. For this professional popular singer, music listening seem connected not only to positive memories that she recalls having had with her family as well as determinant of some of the musical choices she made throughout her career. "I remember my mom had some tapes from Amália and I started listening to a lot of fado" (FM1).

FM2 childhood musical experiences are mostly associated with informal contexts of music practice, either attending her family concerts, as a spectator, as a participant behind the scenes, or helping on the concerts backstages.

FM2, MM1, MM2 and MM3 stresses the importance of opportunities in music provided by the sociocultural context were they grew up. "Although the environment in which we were involved was relatively small, there were a lot of musicians and, at the time, there was some facility in reaching a whole set of musical learning's" (MM1). This view is elucidated by MM3: "I lived in a locality that has a philharmonic" (MM3).

As explain by Pitts [1], "much of the influence on young people lies beyond teachers' control, as parental attitudes, home environment, and cultural consumption shape young people's musical lives in complex and unpredictable ways.

3.3 Peers influences

The strong message from all of the musicians was that practising is seen as a foundation stone of their musical development. Peers influence is recalled has having had a strong role in their musical opportunities and learning experiences.

For FM1, the influences of the musical activities provided by peer's involvement in music projects were an important stimulus towards a professional career in music. She says: "a musician from our area invited me to be a dancer and singer on a project he had and I accepted." (FM1)

MM2 and MM3 also clearly refer to the peers influence, as they mention: "it was all that ambition to play in a band, to do some shows" (MM2) and "it was my friends who influenced me to be part of it". (MM3).

4. Conclusions

Through this explorative study, we have analysed the narratives of five professional musicians, involved in popular music on their individual formative routes, events, opportunities and influences.

The evidence presented suggested that, for those musicians, opportunities and contexts of music learning during childhood, and specially adolescence, had an important role in their professional choice. The opportunities provided by the sociocultural contexts, including, for some, parental encouragement and home resources and family and local opportunities of musical participation and involvement are recalled as having had particular influences in these musicians life's and professional choices. The practical musical experiences they had during adolescence and their peers influences seem having been an important foundation stone of these popular musicians' individual musical formative routes, events, opportunities and influences in their lives.

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