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Facilitating Self-Mediated Learning Through Recording Technology: Bedroom Recording Practices Among Music Education and Music Technology and Production Students

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ABSTRACT

An increase in access to recording technology has expanded opportunities for teachers and students. One approach, *bedroom recording*, involves the use of low-budget hardware and software in common, untreated spaces, often in one's home. Bedroom recording practices significantly impact the sense of place and workflow in the industry for both professionals and amateur music makers. As an art form that thrives on mobility, bedroom recording is a natural pathway for music students to achieve low-cost, self-guided recordings. The purpose of this study was to explore best practices and student interactions related to a bedroom recording project. Participants were 17 Music Education Majors and 10 Music Technology and Production Majors. Participants from both majors collaborated to record an original song. Exploratory case study methodology was used to gather perceptions of the recording project. Data collection included students completing writing prompts before and after the project. Coding revealed four primary themes: resourcefulness, workflow, communication, and relevant social groups. Findings reveal best practices for bedroom recording include clearly defining roles, facilitating communication, and providing appropriate guidance.

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Introduction

Computer software and mobile tools have dramatically impacted how artists create, perform, and consume music (Hughes & Lane, 2003; Mantie, 2017; Webster, 2012). Prior to the advent of Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) and the personal computer, artists required an extensive team to realize their vision, including musicians, engineers, and a promotional team (Burgess, 2014). Artists are now able to conceive, create, perform, record, produce, market, and disseminate their music from the comfort of their own home (Elliot, 2021; Kealey, 2016; Kody, 2023). As a result, our culture is experiencing a rise in music production amateurism, as more people than ever have access to powerful inexpensive physical and software tools used to make music digitally (Prior, 2018).

Music educators naturally need to pivot and incorporate these new methods of creation into their pedagogy (Dorfman, 2016). Future teachers should strive to balance teaching proficiencies in band, choir, orchestra, and general music with 21st-century musicianship, which includes recording and music production (Fick & Bulgren, 2022). Teachers can use mobile devices, tablets, and computers to facilitate children's development related to composition/songwriting, recording, beat-making, and performance/improvisation with technology (Walzer, 2016a).

We designed a collaborative project for music education (MUED) and music technology and production (MTP) majors to work together in the shared learning of recording and producing original music. We incorporated bedroom recording practices and low-budget equipment in order to model the potential availability of resources students might have in their teaching career.

Background

Bedroom recording is a technology-based approach to music production that combines recording technology, production approaches, and creativity in a low-budget, self-taught manner (Thompson, 2023). The recordings are made in non-professional settings such as bedrooms, living rooms, and other common spaces not acoustically treated for sound recording. As with all recording, resourceful use of miking techniques, editing, effects processing, and mixing is paramount to achieve optimum sound quality (Moylan, 2014). Musicians ranging from

professional recording artists to K-12 music instructors have used bedroom recording practices to maximum effect. Notably, Billie and Finneas Eilish record and produce most of their music from their bedroom studio (Gustafson, 2021).

Technology plays an important role in supporting student creativity (Katz, 2010; Mantie, 2017; Webster, 2004). Thibeault (2012) asserted that recording technology provides creative freedom as it is a pathway to ideas. Walzer (2016a) described an independent "recording class" based on the interaction of the individual and technology. Other authors highlighted the ways that accessibility of recording technology promotes access to musical opportunities. Walzer (2016b) found that novice composers can develop recording and software-based technology skills in a discovery-based learning environment.

Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) are software programs that can record, edit, and play back audio. Programs range from free platforms such as BandLab and Audacity to paid options such as ProTools and Logic Pro (Bell, 2018). This author describes DAWs as powerful teaching tools that allow students to sequence, edit, manipulate, and loop sound. Teachers can emphasize compositional, analytical, and performative thinking through lessons and assignments that encourage students to create original music and record their own audio (Fick & Bulgren, 2022). Clauhs, Franco, and Cremata (2019) discussed how public-school students captured and manipulated original sound with DAWs such as Audacity, GarageBand, FL Studio, LogicPro X. These authors described deterritorialized collaboration, wherein students were able to communicate in person or online in synchronous or asynchronous platforms that transcend institutional and geographical boundaries.

Cremata (2017) described Popular Music Pedagogy (PMP) as a modern pedagogical approach that incorporates styles such as Rock, Blues, Country, Pop, and Electronic Dance Music with a typical instrumentation that includes guitar, bass, drums, keyboard, and vocals. Vasil (2019) found that teachers seeking to enact change were able to engage students musically through popular music. Powell (2019) examined the integration of music technology into K-12 popular music programs in New York City. Teachers reported benefits including musical successes that were often related to capturing original songs and making beats. Further, students were able to work independently and teach themselves. Challenges related to incorporating technology such as lack of budget resulted in limited access to technology like computers and iPads.

In this bedroom recording study, we sought to identify how recording technology can be taught to students of different majors in a mutually beneficial manner. MUED students were preparing for a career in education that often requires technological savvy alongside high musical acumen. Similarly, MTP students wanted to develop their own career toolset which includes a variety of recording and production techniques with different types of clients. An examination of bedroom recording may elucidate best practices for those seeking to incorporate technological pedagogy in a college Music Education course or public-school classroom environment.

Theoretical Framework

The bedroom recording study is rooted in the theory of Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) (Pinch & Bijker, 1984). These authors suggest that humans shape technology, rather than technology shaping human behavior. Technology is an open process with varying outcomes that are influenced by social circumstances. SCOT is well suited for analyzing varying outcomes of students collaborating to record and produce a song through the open process of bedroom recording. Relevant social groups are two or more people that share in the construction and subsequent meaning of an artifact (Pinch & Bijker). The wider social context of a group influences the meaning given to an artifact. Within these interactions are socially-embedded processes. In this study, we considered social circumstances among the student collaborators with varying majors and backgrounds. Technology cannot be understood without social context. This framework allows for flexibility in interpreting artifacts and their design.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine a bedroom recording project among MUED and MTP majors. This study was guided by the following research questions based in SCOT:

1. What social interactions guide students in the open process of the bedroom recording project?
2. What social elements are embedded in the bedroom recording project?
3. What relevant social groups formed during the bedroom recording project?
4. What is the role of peer-to-peer learning in the bedroom recording project?

Setting

The study took place at a large R1 state university in the Pacific Northwest. Participants included 17 MUED Majors and 10 MTP Majors (*N*=27). This study analyzed their collaborative habits and outcomes during bedroom recording. Five rock bands comprised of MUED majors (two quartets and three trios) each wrote a song as part of a secondary general methods course. Two MTP majors were assigned to each group. The teams met in advance to discuss the songs and devise an approach for recording. The original songs were recorded in a variety of informal, non-studio settings such as non-treated classrooms serving as make-shift recording studios. Participants edited and mixed the tracks after the project was recorded, then submitted an .mp3 of their completed song.

Research Protocol

Exploratory case study methodology was used to examine student responses to open-ended questions related to the bedroom recording project (Creswell, 2014). Creswell described case study as in-depth analysis of a bounded system. In the bedroom study, the bounded system consisted of students collaborating to record an original song. Students responded to writing prompts before and after the bedroom recording project. Furthermore, survey design was guided by SCOT with questions intended to analyze social interactions related to recording technology.

Participants completed writing prompts in Qualtrics that focused on expectations prior to beginning any recording activities and additional responses that reflected on the recording process following the completion of the project. Responses to writing prompts were coded for emergent themes according to Creswell and Poth's Data Analysis Spiral (2025): 1) preparing and organizing the data, 2) reading for emergent ideas, 3) classifying and describing codes, 4) developing and assessing interpretations, and 5) representing and visualizing the data.

Findings

Responses to the research questions are grouped into four codes: resourcefulness, workflow, communication, and relevant social groups.

Resourcefulness. This code emerged as an important socially-embedded process (research question two). Participants found many inventive approaches to music production and

recording as a result of their collaborative process Examples of resourcefulness included altering mic position/location and adjusting gain structure on the fly to best address the room conditions during production. One respondent wrote, "I learned about how to mic different instruments during recording. I had no idea where they should go or how many I should use. I also now feel more confident using microphones, amps, and PA systems."

Participants also described inventive approaches to correcting errors during the editing process such as altering incorrect pitches, minimizing bleed-through, adjusting timing issues, and applying audio effects. Some students spliced parts together to improve performance issues through "copying and pasting" different takes. Students also reported manipulating tracks to achieve desired production/emotional effects using reverberation, compression, and splicing. For example, reverberation was added to create a fuller vocal sound and imply a larger space.

Workflow. This item was identified as an important peer-to-peer learning element (research question four). Workflow encompasses social interactions related to organizing, planning, and executing the bedroom recording project. Issues of time management were evident throughout the project as students often underestimated the time required to successfully complete each stage. In a few cases, the entire allotted session times were exhausted setting up, maximizing mic levels, and troubleshooting. One respondent described the process, "I learned that setting up and troubleshooting recording equipment (multiple mics, interface, DAW) can take quite a bit of time." Participants were also surprised at the amount of time required to edit the project, with one student noting "Fixing things in the mix is very time-consuming, difficult, or straight up impossible sometimes."

In addition to time management issues, participants stressed the importance of adhering to a strict protocol that required several steps and an organized approach. Respondents also reported workflow items related to editing tracks such as planning ahead and moving deliberately through the editing process. This optimized collaboration by keeping all parties apprised of which steps have been completed and those that remain.

Communication. Communication was rooted in social interactions (research question one). Participants reported challenges as well as successes related to communication in all phases. Communication related to scheduling time to meet and work on the project was often strained. Participants typically interacted via email with some text messaging. Both MTP and MUED majors reported a lack of consistent responses from the others involved in the project which also resulted in participants seeking help from university instructors to facilitate communication. These interventions,

which included emails and in-person communication, led to increased communication and forward momentum in recording activities.

Participants also reported a lack of communication during the editing and mixing process due to a lack of shared language related to music production and creative vision. For example, MUED majors reported an inability to fully grasp the process due to their inexperience and lack of technological knowledge. Respondents stated that clear communication is required if the mixing is done by multiple people. One participant reported, "The most challenging part was coordinating times that worked with everyone to meet and record/explain the changes made in the editing/mixing process." Another respondent described taking copious notes during the mixing process on items such as song structure, individual takes, and what parts of a track were superfluous. Participants reported the importance of communication when sharing digital drafts. Despite issues, participants were able to overcome these challenges, leading to successful completion of the recording.

Relevant Social Groups. Participants took on roles of relevant social groups that included recording artists, engineers, and producers (research question three) which allowed both parties to function as industry professionals. They were successful within their own relevant social groups, but often failed to see the needs of the other groups. MUED majors took on the role of recording artist, writing and performing the song. In this social group, participants bonded internally as performing artists as well as MUED classmates. MTP majors were similarly acquainted with each other due to shared coursework and degree-related recording activities. MUED students experienced performance anxiety in the role of recording artist, often related to performing on secondary instruments, in front of MTP students who were also knowledgeable musicians. In the role of producer(s), MTP students reported being frustrated with the level of musicianship among the MUED students on secondary instruments.

In the role of engineer(s), MTP majors reported that they did the bulk of the technical work, including setting up equipment, testing levels, and configuring the digital interface. MUED majors expressed the desire for more collaboration during editing and mixing to gain knowledge applicable in their teaching careers. MTP majors contributed ingenuity in finding ways to make the technology work in challenging situations. MUED majors served as performers seeking to learn more about the role of the producer and engineer.

Discussion

Results of this study illuminated pedagogical practices alongside student interactions. "Resourcefulness" represented a socially-embedded process related to simplifying and streamlining the recording process (research question two). An inventive spirit combined with strong troubleshooting skills are important assets in audio education and recording projects. Students guided their own learning with various microphone placement techniques and digital audio editing approaches. This exploratory approach offered freedom for the MTP students to experiment with new recording strategies, while at the same time exposing MUED students to various recording, mixing, and editing approaches.

Educators who plan to incorporate a bedroom recording project should guide students with a constructivist approach by encouraging exploration and ingenuity. Scott (2006) described constructivism as learning wherein students form knowledge and beliefs through learning experiences. Constructivist activities allow students to shape musical experiences, often with varied and unpredictable outcomes. Students can take a trial-and-error approach to setting microphone levels based on their intuition. They can improvise through alternating audio effect parameters and editing positions of sound clips. Resourcefulness is paramount in audio education as the tools and procedures change so rapidly that users must be savvy and capable problem solvers.

"Workflow" encompassed peer-to-peer learning interactions during procedural preparation and incorporation of a pragmatic approach (research question four). As in many projects, time management is key to success. Burstein and Powell (2019) highlighted the importance of scaffolding in popular music learning. Participants scaffolded the project by breaking down the project into manageable stages, allocating adequate time for each stage. They must budget appropriate time for tracking and post-production that affords time for troubleshooting, critical analysis, and feedback.

Social interactions guided "communication" in all phases of the recording process (research question one). Green (2002) discussed how popular music learners often engage in self-guided learning that takes place in groups and involves discussion, listening, and imitation. The bedroom recording project encompassed these democratic concepts. We believe more structure is needed to facilitate communication such as mandatory check-ins on discussion

boards or through a project check-list submission that outlines the recording and mixing process. Those seeking to facilitate communication could convene groups for a weekly check in or require drafts at various stages. Additionally, instructors could outline the recording process, indicate the anticipated time it takes to complete each stage and provide some hard data about the stages (gear used, software employed, file and sample rate settings, etc.). Instructors may want to consider appointing a team leader and implementing mandatory meetings to facilitate communication. The implications of these findings hold true in the real-world as communication is paramount in the music industry. MUED students need to develop communication skills for incorporating technology in the K-12 classroom.

MTP majors must also develop a language to speak to a variety of clients/audiences, and this project was well suited to developing this vital skill. Findings revealed that communication was strained due to a lack of shared language among the relevant social groups. Teachers may also consider delivering a lecture or creating online content related to recording and music production vocabulary to facilitate future communication.

The code "relevant social groups" included items based on the roles of artist, producer, and engineer (research question three). Prior (2018) suggested recording artists can interact with technology as amateurs. The project allowed participants to pursue these roles in a low-stakes learning environment. Social relationships should be developed alongside recording activities. All students participating in the project should meet in advance and talk about the project aims, as well as backgrounds and abilities of all participants. Teachers should encourage each relevant social group to act as knowledge bearers in their respective roles. For example, MTP students can be encouraged to describe the steps of the recording process as they progress through the project.

The relevant social groups often did not collaborate effectively due to a lack of understanding the needs of the other group. Participants should be encouraged to take on roles of the other relevant social groups. Tobias (2012) described students working with recording technology as hyphenated musicians taking on several roles including songwriters, performers, sound engineers, recordists, mix engineers and producers. Corresponding pedagogy could include an assignment that facilitates taking on another role in which MUED students mic instruments or make a draft of the mix.

Social dynamics could also be shaped through an in-class, technology-based project that requires collaboration among social groups. Participants may benefit from a group lesson that outlines the functionality of an open-access DAW such as BandLab or SoundTrap. Requirements for the project could include manipulating recorded audio and editing a MIDI to make a loop with audio effects. This activity may also facilitate discussion of possible approaches to music production. Lum (2017) described communication rooted in students' musical connection in virtual and physical communities that lead to self-understanding. Students developed the recording as they worked together to achieve the best final product possible. Additional guidance should be built in to discuss the desired outcomes of the project from both sides. MTP majors used their editing skills to maximize the performances with technology. However, MTP majors require guidance and support from instructors to be successful.

Conclusion

Findings from the foregoing analysis reveal the benefits and challenges of facilitating a bedroom recording project among students with varying backgrounds. While key instructional points are important, a successful bedroom recording project involves instructors and students working in tandem to develop self-mediated learning. Hedgecoth (2018) outlined benefits of self-mediated learning and found important elements including the role preparation and planning and musical benefits based in democratic interactions. These authors also found that self-mediated learning allowed for gaining and sharing knowledge from multiple perspectives despite the challenges associated with social interactions.

Students in the bedroom recording project participated in self-mediated learning during all phases of the project. The disposition of a student participating in a bedroom recording project is that of an independent, self-starter seeking to steer their own learning. Developing these self-directed learning skills in recording leads to life-long individual learning and music making which is key to successful careers that incorporate technology whether it be the music classroom or a professional recording client.

The role of the teaching in self-mediated learning is that of a coach. Teachers must provide the baseline skills, while guiding students through the process. In addition, teachers can foster positive social interactions that lead to a collaboration that holds educational value as well

as artistic gratification. Guiding students toward self-sufficient recording practices could prepare them to develop their technological learning throughout their careers. Those seeking to implement a bedroom recording project play an important role in establishing student disposition.

In conclusion, results from this study may guide teachers in the incorporation of recording technology. Engendering positive social interactions may contribute to creating an auspicious setting for projects that incorporate recording technology. Through the practice of bedroom recording, participants developed technological skills through heuristic learning and ingenuity in creating quality recordings. This pedagogy may increase access to meaningful musical learning for all, while serving the needs of teachers and students in technology-based lessons.

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