



Permission to Play:

Practice principles for collaborative learning in music technology

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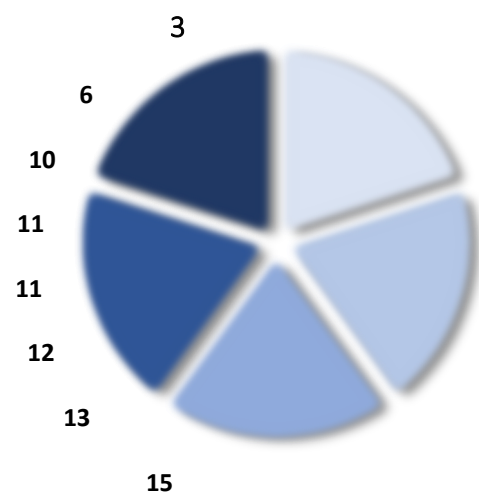
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References



Yorkshire Sound Women Network

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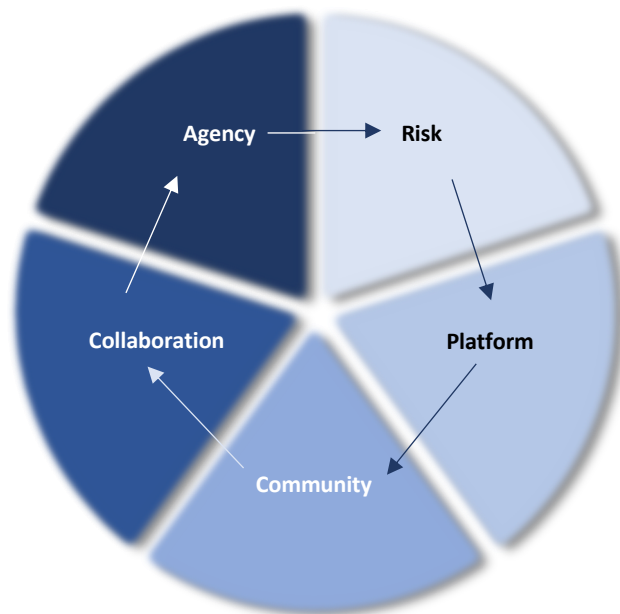


Introduction

Yorkshire Sound Women Network was founded on a set of principles that stem from social psychology and education research¹. This document presents these principles as a model that shows how this combination of practice builds community and personal agency through the creation learning environments that promote interaction and, foster risk taking, creativity and enterprise.

This document is designed to be a guide, introducing the principles and outlining how they might be used as a guide for workshop preparation and delivery. It is aimed at arts leaders, and also groups interested in supporting women and girls in music and sound technology practices.

Collaborative Learning Practice Principles



Together these practice principles provide scaffolding for individual growth and development in audio. Each is enhanced by the whole.

- **Risk:** identifying and reducing risks that constrain practice, creativity and ultimately opportunities for learning.
- **Platform:** creating opportunities for individual expression, and individual voices to be heard in situations of relative safety.
- **Community:** giving confidence through belonging to a network of likeminded people.
- **Collaboration:** giving confidence and learning through talking about work and co-developing work with others.
- **Agency:** centring and supporting the voices, interests, practices and priorities of a community

¹ See references on the last page of this document.



Risk

Yorkshire Sound Women Network lowers risk by creating spaces specifically for women, girls and non-binary people, to meet each other, and lower concerns around broader cultural bias and assumption about gender.² Risk-taking is important for learning but this requires a degree of safety. By identifying and lowering areas of risk, it is possible to increase opportunities for personal expression and contribution; for participants to fully explore, experiment and develop.

Platform

Creating spaces and platforms to speak, present and share ideas or new work, helps provide support for individuals to share ideas and seed new projects. When risk is lowered there is improved opportunity for more people to propose ideas and be supported by a community. Inviting someone to take a platform, is a little like giving 'permission' to share an idea, and their response may be contingent on the first principal. Platforms make it possible to start a conversation, promote personal agency, and develop new projects.

Community

While a quiet and dedicated space for practice is desirable (something that is also a privilege afforded some but not all), women are seeking avenues into music and audio practices are often isolated by circumstance rather than by choice.

Community offers:

- **The chance to talk:** education research promotes collaborative situations for learning because talk and the verbal exploration of ideas (practice and technique) contributes to knowledge development³. For example when you discuss your creative practice your own understanding of it also deepens. It stimulates cognitive work; when explaining a concept like compression or your workflow, you find that you may not have the degree of insight that you believed yourself to have. Talk is the true test, indeed they say that the very best way to learn is to teach, however, once again this is dependent on context (i.e. lower risk, increased trust).
- **Social capital:** access to a network of likeminded peers offers social capital; bringing opportunities such as access to other spaces and equipment, information how a particular music scene operates, advice on how to get established as a self-employed professional, where to find further training, and introductions and jobs that might lead to professional recommendations. While there are certainly times for isolated practice, social capital is a crucial step up towards a professional future.
- **Economic capital:** access to audio equipment is problematic due to the cost, and when you have a budget, purchase decisions are then contingent on experience of using it, particularly as these decisions affect work flow and creative practice. Belonging to a community increases the possibility

² Music and sound technology domains are predominantly white, (cis) male domains (Born & Divine, 2015; Dobson, 2018; Gavanoas & Reitsamer, 2013; Smith, Choueiti, & Pieper, 2018, female:pressures' facts survey). However this situation '*...originates partly in the gendered social construction of technology and partly in the informal character of working environments and social networks in electronic dance music cultures, dominated by images of male artists/musicians/producer/entrepreneur and the sexualised images of (young) women.*' (Gavanoas & Reitsamer, 2013, p54). Against this normalised backdrop that seems to have associated technology with masculinity (Leonard, 2017), women often feel that they are also being held to a higher standard; to work harder in order to be taken seriously, while navigating sexual intimidation and teasing in good humour (McClary, 1991; Rogers, 2010; Wolf, 2019). There is a degree of risk, some vulnerability for anyone working with and learning technology, not all learners possess the same degree of sub-cultural (male) capital (Thornton, 1996), which enables them to take creative/technical risks necessary to learn and develop practical and conceptual knowledge. In music and sound technology practice, there is therefore greater risk of failure and embarrassment, personal exposure, reinforcing unconscious bias (or justifiable concern around this). The creation of groups for women and people of minority genders is part of a broader range of positive action initiatives designed to redress the balance and promote diversity and inclusion in our future audio industries.

³ Lev Vygotsky, 1978



that you can use many kinds of equipment in private, and find out more about it before making your own investment.

Community also provides access to training (fundraising, handling tax returns, self-promotion), and employment pathways and opportunities (such as professional internships).

- **A more powerful collective voice:** when marginalised people come together, share experiences and decompress, individual experiences fuel action. The collective voice offers possibility of organising, and influencing changes that can begin to support and normalise the inclusion of more diverse people. Many communities have been set up with the intention of creating better spaces for women and marginalised people in music.

Collaboration

This practice principle is inspired by Jean Paul Sartre's idea 'the gift of confidence', cited in John-Steiner and Mahn's 'The Gift of Confidence: A Vygotskian view of emotions'. Creative practitioners develop confidence through participating in a collaboration, belonging to a team, and also confidence about the resilience of the collaboration; knowledge that you can navigate collaborative challenges.

Lower risk, platforms and community can offer various modes of collaborative experience, such as these offered by John-Steiner (2000s):

- *Distributed mode:* some collaborations are fleeting conversations (i.e. with strangers on a train, or at an event).
- *Integrative mode:* other collaborations are lifelong professional and personal relationships.
- *Complementary mode:* some depend on individuals bringing complementary skills such as audio engineer, songwriter and vocalist,
- *Family mode:* while others depend on a group having some ability to cover each other's role; such as a team of film score orchestrators who can cover each other at crunch points on a project.

Collaboration in the right environment offers a chance to talk, the possibility of higher mental development, and metacognitive growth about personal practice. It provides opportunities for self-reflection on how you are operating in various situations, an opportunity to experience distributed creativity and work on projects that much greater than the sum of their parts.

Collaboration also enables exploration and investment in relationships that may resource a collaborative grant application and/or new innovative practices.

Agency

This practice principle comes from formal academic situations where students are required to deliver specific projects, vs situations where students are free to develop new projects based purely on their own interests.

In combination, the principles offer 'permission' to play:

- lowering of risks stemming from cultural associations of technology and masculinity,
- platforms to propose new projects,
- community/communities,
- opportunity to collaborate, talk and learn,
- ultimately increase in agency and greater confidence to take risks when the stakes are slightly higher.

Agency must be authentic, and it is contingent on all of these principles. It can be given, but it can also be taken. We can see it built into the fabric of our lecture halls with fixed front facing seating that elevate the teacher's agency, and in this sense it is linked to power and authority. YSWN workshop leaders are encouraged to explore ways of encouraging the voice and agency of the community.



Applying these practice principles to YSWN workshops



These practice principles apply to YSWN workshops, and they are also a resource for new group start-ups. This document focuses on how they can be applied by arts leaders, or by network members when delivering or hosting workshops. All of these suggestions are of course to be determined by the immediate situation as some may be appropriate with young people but a little condescending for others. So they should naturally be used, and developed and explored with your judgement.

Exercises

Risk

Reflect on moments in your own career and practice where you have felt vulnerable, particularly in a workshop situation.

- 1) Reflect privately

Notes:

- 2) Discuss with another person

Notes:

- 3) Discuss with another pair



Scenario example 1

Risk - Speaking in a group (in front of others), or being asked to share an idea, composition, or sound work before feeling ready to do so.

Adjustment – explain that participants won't be singled out or put on the spot at any point, provide opportunities to speak (which don't privilege the loudest voice), allow time for people to gather thoughts before responding, offer alternative modes of response (i.e. using images/response cards, simple gestures such as a nod or thumbs up). Encourage alternative methods of contribution such as thoughts sent to the workshop leader by email after a workshop, or to a Padlet (anonymously). Address the challenges of sharing creative practice i.e. present unfinished work, demonstrate the full process of a project, or show films that show work under construction (such as Fact Magazine's Against the Clock shorts).

Scenario example 2

Risk - When using technology, a fear of accidentally making a sudden loud noise, or breaking equipment.

Adjustment - Provide headphones to facilitate private practice. Do the health and safety check to ensure that the output is limited and not a risk to the user, or provide clear written (illustrated) instruction on how to mitigate this risk.

Develop a scaffolded approach to touching and exploring equipment: demonstrating one function at a time and invite participants to try it themselves, regularly summarising the functions covered (with supporting paperwork).

Start with activities that do not require everyone to touch or use technology directly: using handheld sound recorders in groups where one person controls the recorder, another can be selecting and performing sounds to be recorded. Be ready with other materials that may occupy participants who are struggling to engage (i.e. bring relevant YouTube videos or literature).

5) Thinking about a workshop that you're developing consider the following and add to the Padlet

- Workshop specific risks that haven't been covered here?
- What adjustments might helpfully encourage risk taking and safety in your workshops?

Notes:



Platforms

6) What might constitute a platform?

7) What platforms do you use?

Learning and skills sharing can be facilitated through the use of diverse various platforms.

For example:

- Opportunity to present ideas for new projects (at a group meeting/via email/via Padlet
- Opportunity to deliver a workshop (on a particular technique, piece of equipment, artist or own practice)
- Opportunity to contribute a guest weblog on a shared website
- Collective devising of new platforms, such as a Zine, mixtape, improv night, postcards with project ideas.
- Use of technologies to enable everyone's contribution. For example, Padlet provides opportunity for anonymous contributions to a discussion.

Reflection

- Consider platforms that you've created, or that you're aware of. Are they well established, different, or protected for particular communities? Do they have different audiences?
- What do you notice happening when people take advantage of a platform?
- Are there platforms suitable for the people you would like to support, if not what might they look like?

Notes:

Further thoughts on platforms

- How well do various platforms work for different audiences.
i.e. working with children of different ages?
- What do you notice when people take them on board?
i.e. scope for taking ownership and running with something new?
- What are the best kinds of platforms for the people you're preparing to work with?



Community & talk

Education research shows that talk contributes to knowledge development. Workshop leaders may encourage talk through collaboration in various ways, also building community with the potential for a lasting impact on participants afterwards.

8) How can you facilitate talk?

Notes:

Tips for facilitating talk and collaborative learning

- Encourage group working techniques:

For example, you could use the following 1,2,4 technique:

- 1] When setting a specific task, ask participants to work individually, recording thoughts/sound ideas privately where there is sufficient technical expertise.
- 2] Ask participants to explain their work to one other person, then put both contributions together in a way that works following some discussion and explanation as needed.
- 4] Ask two pairs to join and share their work together. To explore and organise a fuller group response.

Collaboration

Develop various activities that require learners to communicate:

For example you might set up a live sound scenario with designated roles to facilitate problem solving and evaluation. You could create collaborative tasks:

i.e.

- co-creating a short piece of music,
- collaboratively explore equipment or software,
- create a brief skills sharing presentation based on a collaborative task,
- prepare a workshop on a particular article or artist.

Take a moment to consider the techniques that you already use, and others that you might incorporate in your practice.

Notes:

9) Any ideas on how to facilitate Collaboration?

Notes:



Collaborative identity is a really fun way to foster confidence and engagement, especially with young people. Consider your own experience of being in a band or team, and how that has provided a kind of security. You might foster collaborative identity by:

- Discuss and agree agenda together
- Explore common values (for code of conduct)
- Discuss ways to establish greater safety at meetings
- Explore local skill brought by group members
- Take time for collaborative reflection on challenges.
- Celebrate little wins as much as grand accomplishments
- Explore idea of 'critical friends'
- Group name
- Branding/logo

Notes:

Agency

All of these principles combine to promote shared agency however as a workshop leader there are a few additional steps that you can take. This is possibly the most challenging tightrope to walk. Consider other strategies that you're aware of that help promote learner agency.

Notes:

Workshop/event plan

- 1) Draft a workshop plan
- 2) Use these principles to develop it
- 3) Consider where the principles have drawn your attention to anything new, or surprising/different about your own practice assumptions?

Following your workshop

Take ten minutes to consider and note down your thoughts on the following (perhaps overleaf).

- 1) Which principles were adopted?
- 2) What happened when you adopted them?
- 3) How do you feel about adopting these guiding principles in future?
- 4) What aspects of this approach would you, or would you not recommend?



References

If you are interested in the research underpinning these principles you might like to read the following:

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For further information, feedback, or support please do contact the Yorkshire Sound Women Network info@yorkshiresoundwomen.com or Eddie Dobson directly e.d.dobson@hud.ac.uk. We are interested in refining this document so your comments are really welcome.