

“Deñuy jàngal seen bopp” (They Teach Themselves): Children’s Music Learning in The Gambia

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Abstract

The author investigated the teaching and learning processes among children in a suburban community of The Gambia, West Africa. Participants included children and adults in the community ($N = 101$). The researcher used ethnographic techniques of participant and nonparticipant observation, interviews, and song and chant collection. Data consisted of field notes from observations of play and adult-centered musical events, interviews with children and adults, and transcripts of video and audio recordings. On the basis of the data, the researcher identified a music learning process consisting of listening, observing, doing, and combinations of the three. Children seemed to “teach themselves” and one another in many instances; interpretation of data suggested that this was facilitated by three factors: a rich musical environment, expectation to be musical, and motivation to learn. Possibilities for transfer of these three factors to elementary general music classrooms are suggested.

Keywords

ethnographic research, Gambian children’s music, playground pedagogy, world music pedagogy

Music educators are searching constantly for more effective ways to teach music, both music of their own traditions and music from cultures outside their own. One approach to enhancing pedagogy is through the study of teaching and learning, or transmission, of musical practices around the globe (Campbell, 2004). Such study can lead to the identification of elements of transmission that facilitate, promote, or encourage music learning. Music educators can then consider whether it is possible to cultivate similar elements in their own classrooms to improve teaching and learning of musics of many times and places.

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In her 1991 book *Lessons from the World*, Campbell discussed the study of music transmission worldwide and highlighted the centrality of aural learning and imitation in teaching practices around the world, in addition to many other teaching methods, with examples from many world cultures. She noted both the unity and diversity of music transmission practice across world cultures and suggested implications for teaching in the classroom, ensemble, and studio settings. This enterprise is faced with issues of complexity and transfer, however. Schippers (2005) wrote that music transmission processes are complex and suggested that these processes can be analyzed in terms of multiple facets within the categories of learning process, issues of context, and approach to cultural diversity. Understanding music transmission situations is complicated, and applying information in the classroom requires thoughtfulness. Wiggins (2005) acknowledged the tension between prioritizing music learning in the original context and recognizing what meaning or contextual understanding is lost when music is taught and learned outside of the “indigenous location” (p. 16), while still acknowledging that there can be something valuable learned in the later situation. In investigating a musical system, understanding the importance of the individual is key (Rice, 2003). Music experiences, in which individuals interact with other individuals, cultures, and systems, are defined by location, time, and musical metaphor. These metaphors include music as art, music as social experience, music as a symbol system, and music as commodity (Rice, 2003, p. 166). In considering music transmission, not only is the transmission a complex process, but the musical experience itself must be understood.

The study of music transmission among children worldwide is of particular interest to music educators. As detailed in Campbell (2007), there has been a progression in the concept of the child from children as undeveloped adults to children as important agents of music. As such, understanding children’s music making can lead to adult support of it (Campbell, 1998, 2006). Researchers have found that children expressed and embraced musicality in myriad ways, often outside of the music classroom; these music experiences outside of the classroom were influenced more by peers than by adults (Campbell, 1998; Marsh, 2008). Indeed, children’s musical behaviors were complex, sophisticated, and interwoven throughout daily life (Lum & Campbell, 2007). Interviews with children also have highlighted the sophisticated understandings of children regarding music making and music meaning in their lives (Campbell, 1998). This rich music involvement often flourished without the awareness of adults (Marsh, 2008; Merrill-Mirsky, 1988).

Accompanying this understanding of children’s music making and meaning is a body of research on music teaching that occurs among children, often during musical play. Marsh and Young (2006) described musical play as child initiated and controlled, occurring in indirect pathways at times rather than organized sequences. On the playground, children learned from peers or from an older child; they stepped aside at times to practice; and they learned holistically (Marsh & Young, 2006). In studies of Los Angeles children on the playground (Merrill-Mirsky, 1988; Riddell, 1990), African American girls at a Midwestern girls’ club (Harwood, 1992), African American girls in

urban settings (Gaunt 1997a, 1997b, 2006), children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds in communities in the northwestern United States (Campbell, 1998; Lum & Campbell, 2007), Ghanaian children on the playground (Dzansi, 2004), and children from playgrounds around the world, documented in Marsh's (2008) *The Musical Playground*, several themes arose concerning musical play and learning in informal, play-based settings. Musical games typically were learned and practiced holistically, not separated into songs, clapping patterns, phrases, or other units (Harwood, 1992; Marsh, 2008; Marsh & Young, 2006). In some instances, when a mistake was made, children would start over to correct it (Riddell, 1990). The transmission process depended on enculturation and took place during many years (Campbell, 2006; Merrill-Mirsky, 1988). The control children experienced as a result of directing the learning process was a key component of the learning process and was often in contrast to experiences in the classroom in which they had less ownership (Campbell, 1998; Dzansi, 2004; Harwood, 1992; Riddell, 1990).

In addition to the findings on teaching and learning, researchers have pointed out the deeper meanings found in studying children's playful music making. For instance, in Gaunt's (1997a, 1997b, 2006) in-depth studies of African American girls' music play, her results highlighted the agency expressed by girls and women through musical forms and the musical connections of these forms to West African music and other African American genres. She identified the following elements of African American musical style that are found in African American girls' musical games: different musical timbres created by different body parts and placement, backbeat or offbeat rhythms formed through claps, feet stomping that sounds like the thud of an electric bass guitar or string bass, speechlike delivery, the inclusion of nontraditional sounds as part of music, and the manipulation and importance of language (vowels, timbre, consonants) in musical expression. Gaunt went on to argue that although rap and hip-hop, along with other forms of African American music making, traditionally have been viewed as being centered on men, the music making of African American girls at play is reflected in rap and hip-hop and should therefore be acknowledged and valued.

The findings of the studies reviewed highlight features of children's teaching one another music: assuming different roles, dealing with mistakes, and taking ownership of the processes. Researchers from around the world (Campbell, 1998; Dzansi, 2004; Marsh, 2008) have called for greater understanding of children's musical play and peer-to-peer teaching to inform music education both inside and outside of the classroom. Further investigation of how children teach and learn music could lead to areas of possible transfer to the elementary classroom as well as factors that may support a more intrinsic music learning process. With the intent of developing an approach to pedagogy that accounts for cultural elements of specific musical practices, the purpose of the present study was to construct an ethnography of the children's music culture in a suburban community of The Gambia, a small country on the coast of West Africa. The specific problems of this study were to observe and describe the music pedagogical processes evident among children in The Gambia, as well as the forms and meaning of children's music making, and to apply this information to the practice of teaching

world music in elementary general music settings. In this article, I focus on the music pedagogical processes of the Gambian children.

Method

This research was a qualitative study using ethnographic techniques of observation, participant observation, song and chant collection, and interviews to collect data. Data sources were field notes from observation and participant observation, transcripts of interviews, and audio and video recordings of children's play sessions. The main participants in this study were residents, both children and adults, of a neighborhood in Baatiikunda, The Gambia ($N = 101$). Baatiikunda is a pseudonym for the community, used to protect participant anonymity. I observed primary school age children (ages 5 to 13) learning music in school and playing music games on the playground and in their homes. Groups of children, as well as their older siblings, parents, and teachers, participated in interviews.

Fieldwork took place in a primarily Wolof-speaking community. It is a densely populated, suburban area about 30 km from the capital city, Banjul. During 3 months in the Baatiikunda area in the summer of 2005, I observed children playing and making music in home, school, and community settings; interviewed children and adults; attended adult-centered musical events; and learned to play many of the children's music games. I chose to interview adults as well as children to obtain information about the adults' perceptions of the children's music making.

During the first half of my fieldwork, I lived in a house in an upper-class neighborhood and commuted to my fieldwork sites for 6 to 8 hr per day. During the second half of my fieldwork, I lived in a home on a compound among the children with whom I worked and played. This direct contact enabled me to have a more immersive experience in the multisensory world of the children's musical culture.

I studied Wolof, one of the local languages, for a year prior to engaging in the fieldwork and continued language study while in the field; although I was not fluent, my use of Wolof to greet people, bargain at the market, interact with children, and explain my research was helpful in facilitating relationships with community members and research participants. I conducted interviews either in English or in Wolof with the help of research assistants; participant quotes included in this article are drawn from interviews conducted in English unless otherwise noted.

After establishing my presence in the community and becoming acquainted with the children and adults who participated in this study, I video- and audiotaped observations of play sessions and interviews using a digital video camera (Sony Handycam DCR-HC20), audio recorder (iRiver iFP-999), laptop (Sony Vaio), and microphones (Sony wireless WCS-999 lapel microphone for interviews and some observations, internal video camera microphone for observations). I used these recordings in feedback interviews with participants, in which participants responded to recordings of themselves or other children playing and singing. I also used the recordings to transcribe interviews and expand notes on observations. Another main data source was field notes taken after each

observation or interview. Following field note recommendations by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), I typed each field note file from jottings as soon as possible after an observation or interview, usually the same day. During the course of the study, I wrote 175 pages of field notes and recorded 20 hr of video and an additional 15 hr of audio.

In analyzing my data, I read through all of the data multiple times, including the field notes, interview transcripts, and videotape logs. I proceeded to review each individual file, separating information into sentences or paragraphs. To each segment of text, I assigned a code, such as “learning through doing” or “peer teaching,” based on my interpretation, understanding, or analysis of that portion of the event. I used a total of 83 codes in this process; 35 were external codes that I compiled and were based on research literature and expectations from my past research, and 48 were internal codes that arose from the data. I then compiled the codes and examined coded documents for prominent codes that arose in multiple areas of data, building connections that combined specific codes into emergent themes. This analysis follows the protocol laid out in Creswell (2002).

Trustworthiness of the data was addressed through methodological triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), member checking (Creswell, 2002), “prolonged engagement in the field” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127; also Bassey, 1999), and peer review of coding (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Methodological triangulation was sought by collecting data from multiple families, compounds, and settings; conducting interviews with children as well as adults; using participant observation, observation, and interviews; and using multiple forms of data collection (field notes, interview transcripts, video transcripts). In addition to the translations and information offered by two Gambian research assistants, I showed my work to and shared my ideas with interested parties in The Gambia, including adult neighbors on the compound where I stayed, to get feedback on areas I was missing or misunderstanding. To check the trustworthiness of my coding, I asked two peer reviewers with experience in ethnomusicological research, as well as backgrounds in education, to evaluate excerpts of coding of interview transcripts, field notes, and video transcripts, checking for appropriate assignment of codes to events, observations, and participant opinions expressed in interviews (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The reviewers confirmed that my analysis through coding was consistent and thorough.

Results

In my observations in Baatiikunda, I noticed that children ages 5 to 13 were more likely to be engaged in structured musical play than younger children, teenagers, and adults. Younger and older children, as well as adults, also participated in musical activities, but it was the 5- to 13-year-old group who were the main players of musical games I observed, such as competitive rhythmic jumping (e.g., Play Akkara and Bopp), clapping games with two or four players (e.g., Lambera), clapping games for a large circle of players (e.g., Ginte Walli Ma and Competition), Kiribang (a form of Chinese jump rope, described in further detail later), and local games, such as Kii Tank Kii Tank, a

Wolof: Ma	ñëw?	Dee - ded!	Ma	ñëw?	Dee - ded!
English: Should I come?		No!	Should I come?		No!

Figure 1. Call-and-response chant to accompany hide-and-seek game

three-part circle game involving breaking through a chain of players' hands and chasing the one who is "it." Children, both boys and girls, also occasionally engaged in singing and dancing; they gathered in a circle to sing songs, dance, and play drumlike objects, such as buckets, in the manner of adult drumming.

In addition to the singing and chanting that accompanied the games listed previously, I also listened to primary school age children, both boys and girls, singing songs by popular Gambian and Senegalese artists, such as Black Acoustic, Youssou N'Dour, and N'dongo Lô. Chanting also was evident in informal play, such as the rhythmic call and response chanted by 4- and 5-year-olds playing hide-and-seek (see Figure 1). Children sang and chanted during their lessons at school; English songs were more prevalent than local-language songs and were often used by teachers to reinforce counting or vocabulary. As I walked around the schoolyard, I observed many classrooms where children were chanting their reading lessons, learning through a process similar to the manner in which they learned religious material in Islamic school.

The primary school-age children exhibited specialized movements during musical play and games, such as dancing, clapping patterns, steady beat swaying, swinging, and jumping. I also noted dancelike movements by girls while they played hopscotch in which players lifted one leg forward while hopping on the back leg. Dancing was also common during periods of informal play at home or on the playground in which girls gathered in a circle to sing and take turns dancing. Dancing was a way to pass time, as in the case of a 9-year-old girl I observed dancing while waiting for a soccer ball to come her way during a playground game. Children of all ages, both boys and girls, danced at *Sabar* and *Zimba* (Tang, 2007) events, as described later.

In noting the joyful, expressive, skilled musical performances by children in Baatiikunda, I sought to understand more about how children teach and learn music. Ngalla Njie, a master drummer in Baatiikunda, spoke about the way his young sons are learning to drum: "Deñuy jàngal seen bopp," he said: They teach themselves. This idea of children teaching themselves music arose repeatedly in my fieldwork on the musical practice of children's music in Baatiikunda, demonstrated both by children discovering music skills on their own and by children teaching one another. In investigating how children teach and learn music to and from one another in homes, on the school playground, and in the community, I observed three main activities: listening, observing, and doing. In listening, children absorbed the sounds of the musical culture,

either passively or intentionally. Observing focused on movements, from clapping to jumping to dancing, all essential components of musical play. In doing, children tried out the movements and musical elements, often without a successful performance at first; these attempts were a critical part of the learning process. In addition to these three areas of learning, there were combinations of listening plus observing, observing plus doing, doing plus listening, and listening, observing, and doing simultaneously. Sometimes children moved through listening, observing, and doing within a matter of minutes, such as when a child learning a new game listened several times as it was played, watched to see the motions, and joined in. In other situations, the process extended through many years, when infants heard drum rhythms in their mothers' arms at a Sabar (drumming and dancing) event (Tang, 2007), toddlers watched children along the edges of the circle practicing dance moves that fit precisely with the drum rhythms, and the children watched the adults and imitated their movements and expressions. I observed children teaching themselves through each of the activities and combinations during play, at community events, and in school settings. Children also learned music through more formal methods, including direct instruction during school.

During many of my observations, children learned new repertoire through immersion; experienced performers did not typically break a song, dance, or game movements down into manageable chunks and teach novices sequentially. While playing games, older children sometimes helped younger children learn the right way to play verbally (giving directions) or physically (moving a player's hands so they were in the proper position to participate in a clapping game). This is similar to the teaching process Riddell (1990) observed among children in Los Angeles, California, learning and playing clapping games on the playground. Another form of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) occurred when older children sang songs that accompanied games or dances and allowed younger children to participate through movement if they were not yet ready to move and sing.

On other occasions, I observed children teaching one another more directly. Direct teaching in home settings was more common when there was a small group of children (six or fewer) of mixed ages. To have enough players, older children needed to teach the younger children how to play. When more children joined the group to play and there were enough players who already knew the game, younger players were forced to shift to learning on their own. The older children had no reason to teach the younger other than to facilitate play, so they taught as quickly as possible, preferring to play with the individuals who already knew the game. The learners were motivated to catch on quickly and join in so they could play; when someone made a mistake, the player remembered it and was quick not to make the same mistake, because it meant time out of the playing ring. Many of my observations about the learning process and performance practice of handclapping games, such as the importance of players' observing before playing, older players' reluctance to play with younger players who were not yet competent at a game, and the role of motivation in learning, were consistent with those of Harwood (1992) in her study of African American girls' clapping games.

The theme of children teaching themselves and one another carried through my observations of music learning at home, at school, and in the community. As children listened to, observed, and tried different forms of music making, they moved through a learning process. Learning informally allowed children to progress at their own speed through the process; it also provided opportunities for learning to be extended across a long period. One mother spoke to me about the way Gambian children excel at this type of learning:

Researcher: How do you think they learn it?

AC: Sometimes their ears are very quick to catch words, and their brain. Like if I am singing, for them they just put all their mind on me and my actions, the way I am moving. If you are teaching in a small class, and you tell the children, "Come and do what I was doing," you will see your actions, the person will do the same action. If they are dancing, the others are checking the way she lifts up the foot and the hand and the way they make the body. They look at all those things among themselves. And even if you can't [do it at first], then you are able to do it. (personal interview conducted in English, August 1, 2005)

Interpretations: Three Supporting Factors

From an analysis of ethnographic data, I found three factors that may have assisted children to learn using this listen-observe-do sequence: a rich musical environment, expectation to be musical, and motivation to learn. The process of children teaching themselves and one another seemed to be facilitated by these three factors that were rooted in the social and musical elements of Gambian culture. Several of these aspects are similar to those also identified by Kreutzer (2001) as critical to the musical success of children she observed in Zimbabwe.

Rich Musical Environment

The children I encountered in The Gambia were surrounded by music: mothers singing to them, neighbors playing, relatives drumming, teenagers listening to popular music, religious leaders praying and singing. Music was a vital part of daily life and, as a result, was pervasive in day-to-day life. Children were immersed in this musical soundscape before they were born and throughout their early years. I experienced a particularly strong example of the musical environment at the homes of professional drummers.¹ The children who lived on compounds of drumming families received an even deeper immersion in the drum rhythms than other children in the neighborhood, because they heard their relatives practicing and creating new drumming "tracks" on a regular basis. These children also were enculturated into the process of building and repairing the drums through watching their fathers and uncles carve pegs, soak and shave goat skins, and weave ropes around drums. The drummers had learned the art of

drum making by watching their fathers and grandfathers, and their sons were learning it by watching them.

Almost every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evening during my fieldwork, and many weeknights as well, a neighborhood in the Baatiikunda area hosted a Sabar or Zimba (drumming and dancing events; described further in Tang, 2007). The neighborhood hired a drum troupe, such as the professional drummers described previously, for the event. Five or more drummers brought their drums and stands, along with backup players and someone to replenish the supply of *gërëm* (tree branch sticks approximately 12 inches long and the width of a pencil) used in drumming. The organizers borrowed or rented 35 to 50 plastic chairs and assembled them in a circle with a gap for the drummers. The purposes of the event were entertainment, socialization, cultural transmission, and sometimes fund-raising.

Children were usually the first to arrive, gathering as the drummers set up their equipment. They sat in the plastic chairs, swinging their legs and listening to the drummers warming up. As their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers arrived, the children scampered away from the chairs and found places to stand just outside of the circle. During the Sabar, the adults in the audience, mostly women, took turns dancing while the children watched, imitating the adults' dancing from their places along the sidelines.

At a Zimba, the main attraction was one or more dancers dressed in lion costumes. Five-dalasis (US\$0.20) tickets were sold for the event, often to raise money for a cause (such as a new roof for a nursery school). I saw children staring at the Zimba dancers and carefully copying each dance movement from the sidelines, learning through a combination of observing and doing. When they danced along the sidelines, there was little pressure from the community to perform; children had the freedom to experiment with moves and practice coordinating their movements with the drum rhythms. Children had the choice to dance in the middle when they felt confident, showcasing their skills and receiving personal attention from the drummers who responded and modified their patterns to the dancers. At one Sabar, the dancing of two young children, each approximately 5 years old, delighted the crowd, eliciting praise, recognition, and monetary reward for the dancers. The children skillfully executed the dance moves corresponding to the drumming rhythms; they clearly knew the rhythms and had planned their movements.

Some of the children I observed created their own version of a Sabar during their play at home. A group of 20 boys and girls, ages 5 to 12, participated in an organized dance, similar to the adult Sabar. Two boys drummed on buckets, improvising on the basis of two of the drum parts from the traditional dance "Fuy Metti" while the other children took turns dancing in the middle (see Figure 2). While the older children danced, younger children looked on, sometimes practicing the movements from their place in the circle. Each child took a turn dancing; the youngest children bounced and jumped to the beat, and the older children performed the jumping, turning, and twisting movements characteristic of Wolof dance. In addition to serving as a music learning experience, this playful group activity served as preparation for participation in adult-centered community events.



Figure 2. Drum rhythms from “Fuy Metti” used in improvisation during children’s musical play

The sequence of learning through listening, observing, and doing was evident at every adult-centered musical event I attended. Babies in mothers’ arms or on sisters’ backs heard the drumming rhythms that become second nature as they grow. One mother held her toddler and patted the toddler’s sides to the beat of the drumming during a Sabar. Primary school-age children heard the rhythms and murmured the vocables along with the drumming, demonstrating their knowledge of the rhythms. Throughout the events, children were absorbing the rhythms, timbre, dances, and social customs of their culture, all parts of their rich musical environment.

Expectation To Be Musical

Many adults I interviewed expressed the belief that music is an important part of life for all people in The Gambia, not only for the *jalis* or *gèwèls* (praise singers), professional drummers, or other specially trained people. As one teacher expressed it, “Music is not for only those who are [specialized] musicians; music is for every good person. It entertains, educates, and communicates” (TC, personal interview conducted in English, July 5, 2005). He reemphasized this belief when I questioned him as to whether all children are musical: “All of them can either sing, or dance, or clap. . . . All have musical ability.” This belief that music is for everyone could be part of the reason that the children I observed are expected to be musical.

Children are expected to use music during many moments of their days: in their play, through learning English and counting, during religious observance, and in recreation. Music is not something set apart only for a select few, nor are music performances spectator events; at the music events I attended, the assembled community joined in clapping, dancing, and singing along. This is similar to findings of many other ethnomusicologists (Blacking, 1967; Charry, 2000; Chernoff, 1979; Ebron, 2002). Although some families, such as an extended family of professional drummers, were identified as musical leaders in the community, all of the families and children I observed made music as a regular part of their lives.

This expectation to be musical was evident during a games session with first graders I observed on the courtyard at the local primary school. All of the students participated in singing, dancing, and music games during a 45-min session that occurred weekly, and many took turns as leaders or in suggesting new activities. During the games

Ginte Walli Ma

as sung in The Gambia, 2005

Voice

Gin - te wal - li ma, gin - te wal - li ma, *Ny - ima

Njie wal - li ma, Ny - ima Njie wal - li ma, Di - naa

la jee - ge ma, so!

Figure 3. “Ginte Walli Ma” notation

Nyima Njie is the first player’s name; each player’s name is substituted as play progresses.

session I observed, the teacher began the first game, Ginte Walli Ma, which most of the students already knew (see Figure 3). In this game, players stood in a circle and swung their arms to the beat while singing. Each time through the song, one player’s name was inserted, and at the end of the verse, that player squatted down. Play progressed sequentially around the circle. When all of the players were down, the entire process was repeated, with players taking turns standing up. At the conclusion of this game, the teacher then split the boys and girls into separate circles. One or two student leaders took over, leading a progression of other songs and games and organizing the children in the circle. This continued for about 45 min, with rotating leadership, before the children tired of it. The teacher intervened occasionally to suggest a different game in the boys’ circle or to bolster their singing, but the games session was largely student directed with full participation from the children.

Motivation to Learn

Motivation to learn also was fostered during musical play. Because children typically got a turn to play when they were performing accurately, there was a high motivation to learn the appropriate movements and words to maximize playing time. This motivation

extended to dance settings in which children took a turn dancing in the middle; this opportunity to spotlight their skills provided motivation to work at developing their skills in between turns in the middle. Although older children sometimes assisted younger children in learning in ways described earlier, on other occasions, I observed older children push their younger siblings and neighbors out of the circle of play, leaving the beginners to watch and listen. If younger children wanted to join in, they had to perform accurately, as in many of the clapping games and Kiribang, described below. As soon as a child misclapped, the group (players and those watching) proclaimed, "Fail!" (in English), and the player who failed got pushed out of the ring of play while another took his or her place. This created a strong motivation to learn the right moves and to perform accurately so that one had the opportunity to continue playing.

Motivation to learn was strong for children learning Kiribang, the new game in Baatiikunda in 2005. Kiribang, also called Kiribum, Kiribam, and Piribum, is a form of Chinese jump rope. The game was played predominantly by girls; occasionally boys came and teasingly played a few rounds, but they preferred to play soccer or basketball most of the time. In the game, two players placed an elastic loop around their ankles and another player jumped in and out of the elastic, at times crossing over the elastic and at other times hooking it on one foot or the other. As players progressed successfully through a series of routines, the band was raised from ankles to knees to hips to waist. If a player failed, she took a turn holding the elastic and watched as other players progressed through the levels, waiting her turn to try again on the failed level. Kiribang was extremely popular during the summer of 2005, perhaps in part because it was forbidden at the local school. Teachers and school officials told me it was forbidden because girls' underwear showed when they jumped across the rope; adults also felt the game interfered with students' concentration during school because students continued to think about the game during class. Throughout the summer, the passion for Kiribang grew as more children learned it and improved their skills. The children's enjoyment of the game and motivation to learn also grew as their teachers and parents began to disapprove of it; perhaps this disapproval made Kiribang even more attractive. During my play session observations, children played Kiribang for 45 to 60 min before tiring of the game and moving on to other games; after another hour of other games, they often returned to Kiribang.

As a group, the children monitored who was playing and declared if a player had made a mistake. When a child was excluded, she often began to teach herself by practicing the motions outside the ring or with others who were not ready for the full-level competitive performance. On several occasions during my observations of play at home, there were two groups of children playing games such as Kiribang or clapping games: a group of older children (approximately ages 10 and older) who had mastered the game and played competitively and a group of younger children (around 5- to 9-year-olds) who played nearby to learn how to do the clapping routines. One afternoon, I observed two 3-year-olds who jumped alongside of the Kiribang game, practicing movements and trying to figure out how the game worked; on another occasion, three 7-year-olds came and played when the other children were not around. One of them

moved slowly, performing the moves accurately but stepping rather than jumping; this slower pace and modified movement was an intermediate learning step for her. Another of the 7-year-olds did not want to play at that time, choosing instead to observe.

Discussion

The rich participation in musical activities and the musical achievement of children I observed in The Gambia led me to question what caused, enabled, or promoted this musicality. On the basis of ethnographic data of the children's musical practice in Baatiikunda, I identified a learning process through which children seemed to teach themselves and one another. In this article, I have argued that the learning atmosphere that supported children teaching themselves and one another could be related to three factors: rich musical environment, expectation to be musical, and motivation to learn. This possibility has implications for school music and is an example of the deep and rich sharing that can occur when studying the music learning of another culture. Not only can one learn repertoire and cultural information; by listening to, observing, and doing music alongside Gambian children, I learned about the way in which children teach and learn music, which provided insights that may transfer to other music learning settings. Some of the following ideas are based on my own experiences since returning from The Gambia; others situate possible ideas into the goals of the elementary general music classroom.

A rich musical environment can be created in an elementary general music program through immersing students in musical experiences during scheduled class times; promoting musical events, such as concerts for school assemblies; and supporting classroom teachers' use of music. One key way to support the development of rich musical environments in general classrooms is through the Music for Elementary Teachers course taught at many universities; including developmentally appropriate ideas for the environment could help general classroom teachers incorporate ideas such as musical transitions, responses, and setting poetry to chant in the classroom (Fox, 1993). Music educators also could promote the development of students' musical environments by encouraging a two-way exchange of musical ideas and materials: Students could share musical traditions, repertoire, and events they enjoy as part of their home and community as well as take songs, games, and ideas home from music class. Children's rich musical environments could thus be woven both in the school and in the home, guided and inspired by students' own interests and family experiences. Providing students with the necessary skills and knowledge to create and participate in such environments is already a central feature of many elementary general music programs and certainly a chief goal of most (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2005).

Regarding fostering an expectation to be musical, the elementary general music program has an advantage in approaching the idea that all individuals are expected to be musical in that all students typically are enrolled in elementary general music. Operating with the assumption that all people are musical and have the capacity to

make and enjoy music helps the teacher to persevere when a student struggles to find his or her singing voice, to search for new approaches to help a child with a disability play the recorder, and to celebrate the musical progress of all students. Creating a classroom culture built on the premise “we all do music” sends a clear message to parents, teachers, and students that music is for everyone; this could help to break down barriers created by some parents who claim, “My child just isn’t musical.”

Including enjoyable activities in music instruction could increase students’ motivation to learn (Marsh, 2008). Discovering what is enjoyable for one’s students is the key; a particular game may be motivating for one class or one age group but boring for another. Teaching enjoyable activities not only fosters learning inside the classroom; it also puts musical materials into students’ hands that they may be more likely to take outside of the room and continue using (or playing). The music teacher could invite students to share news of their musical play, either on the playground or in home settings, informally as a way to affirm music making outside of the classroom (Campbell, 1998; Marsh, 2008). The possibility and experience of failure, so central to Gambian children’s motivation to learn, is one that will require careful consideration for music educators in the United States. Nevertheless, it is valuable to consider the increased motivation that results from completing challenging musical activities that include the possibility of failure (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 2000). I am mindful of the hazards of perfectionism for musicians of all ages and the importance of being open to making mistakes and learning from them; perhaps acceptance of and use of failure is a deep lesson we can learn from the Baatiikunda playground. The scenario of hearing peers shout, “Fail!” in a clapping game and the mistaken player’s resultant quick recognition of the error, resolve to “get it right” next time, and cheerful (for the most part) time out of the game to observe and refocus has certain aspects of healthy, genuine learning in addition to painful possibilities. A classroom poster with the reminder “Mistakes are welcome here!” could be one small element of encouraging this atmosphere of learning through mistakes.

Further research is needed in measuring the impact of cultivating a rich musical environment, expectation to be musical, and motivation to learn on student learning both inside and beyond the classroom, in a range of settings, and with a variety of populations. Research also could focus on identifying efficient and effective strategies for fostering these factors. Finally, studies may consider how to incorporate observations and insights drawn from “playground pedagogy” into methods classes for teacher training.

Author’s Note

This work is based on the author’s doctoral dissertation, “Children’s Music Making in The Gambia: Pathways to Culturally Informed Music Pedagogy,” completed at Michigan State University, 2006. This research was carried out with the permission of the Region One Education Directorate and the National Council for Arts and Culture, Research and Documentation Division, of The Gambia.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article:

Fieldwork for this research was supported by an institutional dissertation completion fellowship; language learning was supported by a U.S. Department of Education Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship.

Note

1. The professional drummers were hired by local communities as well as tourists to provide drumming for group events. Members of the drum troupe had other occupations as well (welding, sales, taxi driving).

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Submitted January 27, 2009; Accepted October 20, 2009.