

6.4 **A DIY music pedagogy**

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× **Abstract**

In the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, a self-managed network of women dedicates themselves to promote musical experiences to girls and women, seeking to strengthen their self-esteem and awaken in them, musical interest. The members are artists and feminist activists, many connected to the punk scene of Porto Alegre, which is predominantly occupied by men. With the objective of understand the musical pedagogy practiced by them, I am doing a qualitative study, for my doctor degree, centered in women's experience, as lived, and described by them. I've joined this network, collaborating in the musical actions, and I am doing in-depth interviews with the group's members and participants of these actions. I hope to demonstrate the importance of these actions for fighting gender inequalities in music education and music practices in general.

Keywords: musical education, musical pedagogy, feminist methodology.

1. **Introduction**

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I will present in this paper a research communication related to my doctor degree in music education. I am currently a PhD candidate at UFRGS (Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul) and Professor Doctor Jusamara Souza is my advisor. She is also the leader of the research group 'Music Education and Everyday Life' (Educação Musical e Cotidiano), which I am part of, since 2014. I am also a professor at IFRS (Federal Institute for Education, Science and Technology of Rio Grande do Sul), which has granted me with a scholarship for integral dedication to my research.

The objective of my research is to understand the music education that a group of women, in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, promotes in projects dedicated to the creation of safe spaces for girls and women to have music experiences, while also strengthening their self-esteem and awakening in them, music interest.

The former group that organized this project of music education, in 2016, was formed by artists and feminist activists, many connected to the punk scene of Porto Alegre, which is predominantly occupied by men. Nowadays, this group has changed considerably, with artists and other professionals coming from a variety of backgrounds other than the punk scene – however, the predominance of men in their professional spaces remains a common issue between them, which makes them to embrace these projects of music education exclusive for female-identified people. Organized in a horizontal system and identified with anarchism and DIY perspective, they have refused institutional connections, using their own resources to provide music experiences for girls and women.

I have joined this group in 2019, when I first volunteered in the girls' rock camp project, organized by them, which is a music camp based in rock bands, only for female-identified people. I remember I was absolutely amazed by what I have seen and heard. Being a music educator myself with a classical piano training, I had, personally, a very different experience with music learning and performance. I have internalized that you supposed to study music many years before you could express yourself through your playing. Instead,

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in the girls' rock camp I have worked, I have seen those women, who are musicians, producers, and artists, embracing the girls with an enthusiastic support, motivating them to express themselves by any possible music means. As the result of the combination of these experienced musicians with this inclusive approach and openness to any music expression, I have heard amazing music made by beginners, music that they could really be proud of – and the women that were teaching them were making sure that they knew that.

I was starting my doctor degree in music education by the same time, and I decided to talk with the women who had started that movement in Porto Alegre. In this process, I have come to know that the girls' rock camps were part of a bigger, worldwide movement, so I started to search other works about it, to learn more about its history and development.

2. The Girls Rock Camp – A Worldwide Movement

The Girls Rock Camp had its first edition in 2001, in Portland, a city in the USA. The idea of a music camp based in rock music only for girls was articulated by Misty McElroy, as her final undergraduate project. McElroy decided to do it because, being 26 at that time and having begun as roadie by the age of 18, she was tired of having to be so defensive all the time, by being almost always the only woman in the crew. In her own words: “When you’re a woman in rock, you have so much more to prove,” she explains. “In every context I was in, it was assumed that I didn’t know what I was doing, whether it was engineering, a tech situation, loading, whatever. I was always talked down to.” (McElroy in interview for Dunn, 2002: n/p).

Willing to change this situation, McElroy took this undergraduate requirement as an opportunity to make a Rock Camp only for girls, where she could “provide an opportunity for as many girls as possible to possess something that she never had as a child: a sense of entitlement to her own voice and place in the world” (Origins, n/d.).

Since its first edition, the camp turned out greater than McElroy could expected. As she explains: “After watching it transform the lives of the participants and the instructors, we had to go on” (McElroy in interview for Dunn, 2002: n/p).

Today, there are more than a hundred independent camps around the world, all of them connected, since 2007, through an international alliance, where organizers can gather and share their experiences in running these projects in their own communities and help each other’s in finding solutions for common problems.

Now, 20 years after its first edition, there are many papers and research about the girls' rock camp, and many of them, relating the camps with the Riot Grrrl movement.

The Riot Grrrl was a “feminist punk movement and female-oriented subculture” that happened in the 1990s and was a “a feminist response to the aggressive, testosterone-fueled hardcore punk scene in DC” (Ali, 2012, p. 144). Ali summarizes the relations points she sees between the camps and the Riot Grrrl movement:

³¹⁴Girls Rock Camp uses the creation and performance of music as a means for campers to assert an unapologetic sense of self, while simultaneously taking part in a strong community of collective female identities. By using active participation for girls as its most valuable educational tool, the camp is able to teach campers to play instruments by using Riot Grrrl values, while incorporating various practices that have come to represent the Riot Grrrl movement as a whole, the camp’s methods also consciously point to both why and how dominant cultural discourses of women in rock should be challenged (Ali, 2012, p. 142).

Here in Brazil, there are also a few research relating the GRC and the Riot Grrrl movement, especially the work of Gellain (2017).

In Porto Alegre, however, even though this may have been the case back in 2016, when the first edition of this girls' rock camp was being prepared, in 2021 the scenario has changed quite a few. None of the collaborators of the research have mentioned the Riot Grrrls movement and most of them seem to have no historical or emotion connections to it. Even rock and punk are no longer an omniscient presence in the music produced in the camp – a situation that, it seems, is happening all over the world, as the international alliance itself has entered in a process of changing its name to contemplate a wider concept of organizations (others than camp), musical practices (others than rock) and gender (others than girls). However, its heritage regarding its pedagogical and music practices remains, even though its origins may not be clear to all participants.

3. Methodological Approach

To pursue my research objectives of understanding the music education practiced in these projects here in Porto Alegre, I am conducting a qualitative study through a sociological perspective. This perspective underlies a reflexive approach, based in Melucci (2005) and Giddens and Sutton (2017), which argues that, in the late modernity, understood as a “‘detraditionalized’ context” (Guiddens & Sutton, 2017, p. 64), individuals are “forced to be continually reflective about their own life and identity” (Guiddens & Sutton, 2017, p. 64), due to their isolation within the social structure (Sutton, 2017). In research practice, as “the discoveries of sociological research become part of society’s knowledge pool” (Sutton, 2017, p. 64) and interact with the reflexivity of individuals in their decision-making process, the positivist approach to the study of an ‘external world’ becomes increasingly meaningless, “as the gap between researcher and research subject is eroded” (Sutton, 2017, p.64). Thus, the “concept of reflexivity became fundamental for the creation of social theories and for the methods of sociological research, emphasizing the inevitable connections between the two” (Sutton, 2017, p. 65).

The reflexive approach in the methodology is important because this is research made about women, for women and by a woman. As woman and musician, I can many times relate with what I see and hear in the empiric field. I share, at least partially, a point of view with the collaborators of the research. However, I am also a PhD student, a member of the academy, and, therefore, I am also talking and writing from a different perspective from the women integrating the field. To be aware of our differences and similarities, to make these movements between being both a member and a foreigner in the field, to register, to consider it in the analysis of the data and reflect upon it, it’s something made possible by a reflexive posture from the researcher.

The methodological tool chosen for building the data was the in-deep interview, based in the work of Oakley about interviews with women (1981, 2015) and Limerick, Burgess-Limerick and Grace (1996), about the power relations in interviewing.

For Oakley (1981, p. 41), is clear that “in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship”. The author develops her positioning in a second paper (Oakley, 2015), where she discusses the power relationships in the interview process in dialogue with and Limerick, Burgess-Limerick and Grace (1996). In this paper, the authors argue that the dynamic of power in the interview is nether fixed or asymmetrical, but, instead, it shifts “according to the phase of the interview process and the unique research relationship established between researcher and participant” (Limerick et al., 1996, p. 458). In this scenario, the interviewee is “reconceptualized as an active participant in the production of knowledge in the research process” (Grace, 1996, p. 458).

Based in these authors, the interviews for this research have turned into rich moments of exchange and construction of knowledge. Oakley (1981, 2015) and Limerick, Burgess-Limerick and Grace (1996) have encouraged me to celebrate – instead of ignoring – and value the relationship I have built with the collaborators of the research while also working with them in the music-pedagogic actions. The result were rich conversations and a great amount of data that, through the analysis, will enable the understanding of the music education practiced in these musical-pedagogic actions made for and by women.

4. A brief look on first results

I will now present a brief look over some excerpts of the research. For this communication, I will focus on the pedagogical aspects that have surge from the data so far and that can be connected to a specific line of music education, that is the Community Music.

According to Banffy-Hall and Hill (2017) Community Music “means active group music creation, through which music is developed as an expression of that community and reflects its social context” (Banffy-Hall & Hill, 2017, p. 1). Its origins can be traced up to the pos-war Europe and, in the 1970’s, it intertwined with the punk scene in London, where, as Higgins points out, “both punk and community musicians rebelled against the focus on consumerism perpetrated by the self-styled “music industry” (Banffy-Hall & Hill, 2017, p. 50), claiming that music was, mainly, an act of participation.

20 years later, in the 1990', the act of participation remained as one of the foundations of the Riot Grrrl movement, in which girls were inspired to form their own bands, make their own music, publish their own zines – in other words, to produce their own culture instead of consuming what was being served to them. By doing their culture themselves they could reestablish the control over their self-images, plans, desires, ways of fighting their own fears. And they were not doing that alone, but as a community, that celebrated each other's participations, by attending concerts and festivals where those girls' bands were performing, consuming the music produced by them and exchanging letters and zines across the country.

Inspiring girls and women to make their own music is precisely what remains behind the rock camps for girls (and women) till today. The focus of the camp is not to “teach the girls the correct way of playing” (Campbell, 2017, p. 183), but to show them alternatives forms of producing music. As Campbell points out, “technical skill can often be a mechanism of exclusion from participation in music scenes, and rather than only offer a corrective that merely seeks to repair this skill deficit, [the camp] also seeks to foster alternative means of participation” (Campbell, 2017, p. 183).

The meeting between such pedagogic perspective with children so young, that many still don't have developed the self-censorship, which is usually what imposes to adults a great challenge in learning music, results in fascinating events. Children and this participatory perspective seem to fit together almost perfectly, and this ends up by reflecting very strongly in the adults that follow up this process, as demonstrated by this report from one of the interviewed women:

My bass player (from the band I worked with in the girls' rock camp) was smaller than the bass, she was 8 years old, in the last day of the camp, she had band Aids all over her fingers, because it hurts, right? And then I thought: why am I not playing, you know? (laughing) I am there, thinking that I can't play the three notes I know in the bass (laughing) Actually, they have empowered me, in the end, the whole process, sometimes, I think it is more empowering for the adults than for the children. For them it is... A vacation moment, really

(Note from interview).

This volunteer, precisely thinking on how adult women seem to need more help regarding their encouragement for expressing themselves through music creation and practice, is currently dedicating herself in create more projects as the girls' rock camp but now for adult women.

5. Conclusion

By being together with other women and working with children, these volunteers feel musically fulfilled, even if they didn't go through years of resilient music study. Because of this, they can assume new projects and take their currently works up to new levels. This is a pedagogic approach which celebrates the engagement and the participation of everyone, starting from where she is and what she can offers, believing, indiscriminately, that everyone is always giving their best – and that, by being their best, it is good enough.

Many of the women I have met in these projects are not formally trained as music educators – some of them wouldn't even considered themselves as musicians! – but these women are some of the best music educators I have ever met. They start from their own music experience and incentive the participants to take ownership of the instruments, playing without concerning regarding what could be considered right or wrong. In actions that can last less than a week, girls and women confirm that they are able to occupy a stage and musically express themselves. It's a pedagogic strategy that, as the music that inspires it, is furious and intense, and, in this case, focused on girls and women. The objective is clear: Keep [the learning] simple, make [the music fulfillment] fast.

As a music educator, I understand that the study of pedagogic projects and practices as these will contribute with the establishment of music education practices that are less inhospitable and more dedicated to help people to accomplish music fulfillment. It is important that the music education practices don't reproduce the same social structures that make harder the music participation of individuals. The girls rock camps demonstrated to be a successful project regarding the engagement of more girls and women in music practices and the understanding of the music education made there will contributed for a music pedagogic approach more engaged and more aligned with questions of fighting gender discrimination that are relevant to our contemporary times.

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