

Article

Sites of Becoming: How Non-Formal Music Learning Helps Forge Musical Selves in Culturally Diverse Contexts

Annie O. Mok ^{1,2} 

¹ Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, Hong Kong 999077, China; aonmok@gmail.com

² Department of Music, Faculty of Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, Hong Kong 999077, China

Abstract

This paper explores how non-formal music learning functions as a powerful agent in forging musical selves. Through a qualitative re-analysis guided by reflexive thematic analysis, this study re-examines data from three previously conducted case studies through the lens of non-formal learning as “site of becoming.” These cases represent diverse music-making practices in Hong Kong: an amateur sacred choir, a traditional Chinese Chaozhou *xianshi* ensemble, and diasporic Filipino music-makers. Through this analysis, I generate five distinct facets of their musical selfhood: the performer, spiritual, heritage, social, and transcendence self, reviewing how participants form and negotiate these facets. Ultimately, this study illustrates the interplay between these sites and the formation of lived, embodied musical selves, offering insights into the educative potential of non-formal learning.

Keywords: non-formal music learning; sites of becoming; musical selves; identity formation; community music; reflexive thematic analysis; amateur choir; Filipino; Chaozhou *xianshi* ensemble

1. Introduction

Non-formal music learning holds a vital yet often overlooked position within the landscape of music education. While researchers have widely discussed informal learning over the past two decades across the globe (see Weatherly et al., 2025), the distinctive educational potential of non-formal learning remains comparatively underexplored. To ground this domain, Johnson and Majewska (2022) offer a foundational baseline, defining non-formal learning (NFL) through a distinct set of structured, intentional, and voluntary activities. When applying this framework specifically to music learning scenarios, learners direct their own music-making pathways and claim ownership over their progress through both communal practice and self-directed learning (O. N. A. Mok, 2011c). Critically, this educational approach acts as more than just a functional learning method; the learning process allows participants to generate dynamic “sites of becoming” (Creech et al., 2024; Higgins & Willingham, 2017; Higgins, 2024). These sites function as lived spaces of engagement where individuals do not merely acquire technical music skills, but actively perform, construct and transform their musical selves through shared practices, mutual support, and lifelong development.

To trace this transformation, I position the three core variables—non-formal learning, sites of becoming, and musical selves—in an interrelated chain sequence. Within these dynamic pathways, participants find the safe and relational lived spaces to develop



Academic Editor: Luca Tateo

Received: 29 April 2026

Revised: 20 June 2026

Accepted: 26 June 2026

Published: 2 July 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the author.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

their musical identities. Much like a blacksmith forging raw metal into enduring form through intense heat, learners shape their musical selves through sustained commitment and emotional investment within the site. In this sense, learner agency operates as an active process where individuals construct and reconstruct their selves by navigating challenges over time.

Through this framework, I investigate the ways diverse non-formal spaces empower individuals to anchor their own musical selfhood by revisiting three previously published Hong Kong case studies selected for re-examination through the lens of non-formal learning. These include an amateur sacred choir consisting of local Hong Kong people (A. O. Mok, 2015, 2020), the Chaozhou *xianshi* ensemble (O. N. A. Mok, 2011a, A. O. N. Mok, 2013), and diasporic Filipino domestic workers (O. N. A. Mok, 2011b). Utilizing reflexive thematic analysis, this study aims to reveal how non-formal music learning functions across diverse community and cultural settings as a dynamic site for forming musical selves.

2. The Landscape of Non-Formal Learning

2.1. *The Evolving Continuum: Beyond the Formal-Informal Divide*

Over the past few decades, educational researchers have significantly reinterpreted the conceptual trinity of formal, non-formal, and informal learning. In short, educational institutions structure formal learning as a top-down, highly institutionalized environment that follows a prescribed curriculum (Johnson & Majewska, 2022), to the extent that Higgins and Willingham (2017) label it the “normal” form of education. Informal learning, on the other hand, functions as a non-sequential, spontaneous, and unstructured process of learning which can occur anywhere (Green, 2001). The learning encompasses both the tacit knowledge unnoticed by the learner and unanticipated conscious absorption (Johnson & Majewska, 2022). Finally, non-formal learning occupies a distinct hybrid mid-tier space, where members maintain a clear intention to accomplish a task in a relatively preplanned, systematic way (O. N. A. Mok, 2011c).

Nonetheless, previous studies have cautioned against a simple formal–informal dichotomy, placing the two learning modes on a continuum (Folkestad, 2006). Recent review studies yield updated syntheses of their meanings and practical applications, clarifying the unique characteristics of each mode while exploring the intersections between them (see Johnson & Majewska, 2022; Storsve, 2024). Ultimately, these modes function as relational concepts rather than absolute classifications (Sefton-Green, 2013).

Given the fluid boundaries between these three modes, contemporary researchers increasingly view the NFL as a dynamic, interconnected, and context-dependent framework (Cain, 2013; Lonie & Dickens, 2016; Sefton-Green, 2003). Despite these baseline distinctions, researchers often struggle to establish a consensus definition for non-formal learning due to its vast spectrum of activities and ambiguous boundaries (Creech et al., 2020; Werquin, 2010). Even so, music education scholars continue to examine NFL within real-world community-music contexts, including community ensembles, youth clubs, music studios, and band activities (Beynon, 2020; Higgins & Willingham, 2017; Higgins, 2024; Kuoppamäki & Vilmilä, 2024; Lonie & Dickens, 2016; O. N. A. Mok, 2011c; Sefton-Green, 2013).

2.2. *Foundations of Becoming: The Living Sites of Non-Formal Learning*

To map the landscape of non-formal music learning, I developed a thematic synthesis of the existing literature, isolating four core sub-themes:

- **Intentionality and Recognition**

Non-formal learning is relatively systematic and pre-planned, which differentiates it from loosely structured informal learning (Green, 2001, 2005). Learners engage in non-formal activities with a clear intention to accomplish specific tasks or master defined competencies (Coombs, 1974; Johnson & Majewska, 2022; O. N. A. Mok, 2011c; Werquin, 2010). Although learners have clear intentional learning goals, they usually do not receive standardized accredited certifications from formal institutional boards (Johnson & Majewska, 2022; OECD, 2025). Consequently, members may pursue alternative forms of recognition, such as certificates of attendance or competency diplomas (Schugurensky, 2000). For instance, the Instrumental Music Training Scheme, managed by the Hong Kong Music Office, serves as a prime example of this non-formal learning mode (Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2026). The scheme provides a structured yet non-accredited framework of weekly, fundamental music training in both Western and Chinese musical instruments for people of different ages. Learners register with the explicit intention and clear goal of mastering a specific competency, such as music reading and playing an instrument. Although the scheme offers comprehensive training from beginner to grade 8 level, these courses do not offer official academic qualifications. Rather, students are awarded a certificate of attendance to validate their active participation and milestone completion.

- **Learner-Centeredness and Autonomy**

A learner-centered orientation is a core feature of NFL. This approach shifts the traditional educational power to prioritize the specific needs and interests of the members. Within this framework, individuals exercise autonomy, actively directing their own musical agency and choosing their unique learning pathways (Kuoppamäki & Vilmilä, 2024), thereby taking charge of their development and claiming ownership over their personal growth. Through these experiential and self-directed choices, learners express their personal identity and aspirations, transforming new experiences into a creative vehicle for self-actualization (Usher, 2018). Driven by voluntary participation and learner-centered structures, this “bottom up” dynamic endows individuals with the capacity to choose their learning contents, pace, and the depth of involvement (Johnson & Majewska, 2022; Public Compass Association et al., 2023; Schugurensky, 2000). The Hong Kong community-based pop choral ensemble WAO! Singers (WAO: We Are One) exemplifies this dynamic. Operating outside conventional structures, the ensemble integrates choral music with movement and theatrical creation (WAO! Singers, n.d.). The director designs a learner-centered platform tailored specifically to the aesthetic and artistic aspirations of modern youth. Within this non-formal space, the performance form changes fluidly because the young people’s contemporary desires drive the staging, movement, and interaction. Moving beyond the “stand-still-and-sing” model, this new structure enables young participants to actively co-create their musical experiences while connecting deeply with the wider community. In practice, the ensemble shifts the traditional conductor’s power to its young members, who collaboratively discuss the entire program, the repertoire, and determine the performance order. Furthermore, individual learner agency is fostered directly through creative contribution, as several members actively compose and arrange the musical pieces. This high degree of learner autonomy was vividly manifested in their 2026 community choral theater production, *Respite* (WAO! Singers, 2026). The production broke traditional performance boundaries through an immersive layout, explicitly inviting the audience to sit on floor cushions while choir members physically blended into the crowd. Rather than passively executing a predetermined score, the singers engaged in live vocal improvisation based on the natural flow of the performance. The audience could freely

choose to actively participate in the process or remain silently listening. This flexible spatial and structural design ultimately extended the autonomy philosophy to the community.

- **Facilitated Learning and Mentor-Learner Symbiosis.**

Non-formal learning commonly involves facilitators or mentors who help learners refine raw personal experiences into practical skills (O. N. A. Mok, 2011c; Werquin, 2010). Further, the NFL also encompasses intergenerational mentorship for the transmission of oral histories, traditional esthetics, and collective memory (Higgins & Willingham, 2017). To achieve this, mentors channel the process of “learning by doing,” a core tenet of progressive education introduced by Dewey (1938). Building on this experiential foundation, the combination of the mentor’s guidance and the learner’s personal drive forms a robust foundation for lifelong improvement (Higgins & Willingham, 2017). Within this non-formal framework, mentors provide instructional scaffolding that aligns with the learner’s zone of proximal development (Vygotskiĭ, 1978). This dynamic is evident in the group-learning environment documented by Leung (2020), who observed a community class for children aged 6 to 15 years old at the Hong Kong Children and Juvenile Chinese Opera Troupe. While Leung categorizes these pedagogical practices as “demonstration and imitation” and “hands-on guidance,” they function as responsive social modeling and physical scaffolding. Through interactive teaching and repetitive practice, master artists systematically break down complex operatic skills, dynamically adjusting their support within the students’ zone of proximal development, thereby fostering peer modeling and reciprocal growth. To larger global networks, coordinators at Ethno music gatherings design workshops that explicitly incorporate turn-taking leadership roles to distribute power evenly among all members (Creech et al., 2024). Similarly, performers in a North American community wind band mirror this equal relationship by actively replacing an authoritative “my way or the highway” instruction style with a more collaborative facilitation approach (Higgins, 2024, p. 44). Driven by this collaborative spirit, some community music circles challenge the notion that teachers must act as authoritative experts or rigid models during music transmission. Instead, facilitators and learners cultivate an equal, horizontal, and non-hierarchical partnership to practice “a blanket of hospitality” (Higgins, 2024, p. 31).

- **Lifelong Learning, Empowerment, and Inclusion.**

To maximize community participation, NFL organizers remove economic and social barriers to entry (Ng, 2020). For instance, some nonprofit organizations offer songwriting workshops at low or no cost to guarantee community accessibility (Kuoppamäki & Vilmilä, 2024). As a critical component of the lifelong learning spectrum, such non-formal programs enable participants to develop their full potential across their life course (Jarvis, 2010; OECD, 2025; Public Compass Association et al., 2023; Radovan, 2011; Werquin, 2010). Since educators design these flexible programs to adapt directly to real-world needs, such offerings serve as a primary learning pathway for most adults at some point in their lives. By supporting members as they develop self-directed musical skills and build confidence, these non-formal educational designs guide individuals through life challenges, promote social inclusion, and return control of their lives to them (Higgins & Gibson, 2024). In Hong Kong, underprivileged children in the Music Children Foundation’s training program achieve agency and social inclusion through free, collaborative music education (Music Children Foundation, 2026). Beyond simply providing music learning opportunities and experiences, this initiative equips grassroots children to actively build self-discipline, confidence, and resilience against social and financial constraints. Similarly, a study on vulnerable teenagers participating in a socio-educational orchestra program in Argentina found that non-formal education facilitated their career construction, leading toward decent employment and an enhanced quality of life (Valenzuela et al., 2022). These di-

verse contexts are essential for developing “musical possible selves”, enabling these learners to envision and sustain their musical identities across their lifespans (Creech et al., 2020).

3. Musical Selves in Diverse Contexts

3.1. Sites of Becoming: Music and the Fluid Selves

A “site” represents a lived space of engagement. These sites function as hubs where people engage in non-formal learning and music-making. Here, learning intertwines deeply with lived experience in music-making, shared experiences, cohesive communal belonging, and cultural participation, creating a fertile environment for learners to negotiate their musical selves. In this paper, I deliberately use the plural term “selves” to signify the multiple, evolving dimensions of selfhood that individuals encounter throughout their lives. Here, “musical selves” refer more specifically to those dimensions of identity forged through musical participation and practice. More broadly, identity, serves as a broader umbrella concept that encapsulates personal, social and cultural dimensions of selfhood.

To contextualize how musical selves develop, it is necessary to examine the two lenses of the broader concepts of identity: essentialism and constructivism. Essentialists view identity as fixed and unchanging, defined by ethnicity, race, class, and gender. Rice (2017) describes this as the “politics of nationalism,” where communities view identity as a set of enduring qualities “that are thought to exist from time immemorial” (p. 145). Within this framework, musicians utilize music primarily as a static mirror or carrier of pre-existing cultural heritage.

In contrast, constructivists view identity as a fluid process of “becoming” rather than “being” (Frith, 2011; Hall & Du Gay, 1996). As Frith (2011) argues, music or performance does not reflect the people and their experiences. Instead, musicians construct and negotiate identity through their musical and esthetic experience. From this perspective, music-making does not merely reflect who they are; it actively helps shape who they become over time. In the same vein, sociologist DeNora (2000) holds that individuals locate the sense of self in music. She describes music as a “technology of the self” through which individuals regulate emotion, construct meaning, and navigate daily social life. In this sense, individuals use music as an active tool to construct diverse facets of their musical selves through everyday musical activities such as selecting repertoire and participating in an ensemble.

3.2. The Snowball Self: Layers of Identity in Motion

When Rice (2017) asks, “How many identities do we possess?” (p. 148), researchers can observe these multiple layers of identity particularly clearly within non-formal music learning contexts. As individuals continually construct a fluid identity across their lifespan, musical selves become the active manifestation of this construction process. To explain this process, Froehlich and Smith (2017) provide a useful three-level model for identity realization, conceptualizing identity as a complex, multi-layered structure.

- The “Snowball Self”: This represents a core self like a snowball rolling down a hill. As individuals move through life, they continuously accumulate experiences, memories, skills, relationships, and musical tastes. This self never stops growing and changing.
- Intersecting Identities. Individuals simultaneously hold multiple overlapping social roles; for example, a single person can act as a musician, a teacher, and a friend—all at the same time.
- Contextual Identities: The identity which individuals perform or bring to the front in a specific context. For example, individuals in a non-formal learning setting might emphasize their identity as performers when they are on stage, and as heritage keepers when they are teaching their traditional instrument to the young generation. Depend-

ing on the context they are in, individuals negotiate and navigate who they are from moment to moment, hour to hour, and day to day of their lives.

To see this model in practice, an empirical study on in-service music teachers reveals the above process (Chua & Welch, 2021). The authors describe a teacher's identity as a life-long transformation journey, matching the metaphor of a snowball self that accumulates new experiences over a long career. Through this empirical investigation, they illustrate how teachers continuously reconstruct their identities across different stages of their professional lives.

3.3. Musicking: Social and Cultural Negotiation

The forging of various musical selves remains inherently a social act. When individuals engage in NFL sites within a communal atmosphere, they build cohesive communities through shared experiences and mutual mentorship. Small's (1998) proposes the concept of "musicking", while Turino's (2008) examines participatory music, with both authors emphasizing the vital role of music-making within social and cultural contexts. Through "shared human action" (Blacking, 1973), members align themselves emotionally and physically, experiencing a sense of communal belonging. Music therefore functions not merely as a cultural product but as a dynamic social force.

Non-formal musicking often unfolds within rich cultural activities where members engage with music embedded with distinct social meanings. Turino (2008) elaborates on the cultural significance of participatory musicking, noting the ways in which broad participation anchors communal engagement. For example, in the United States, participatory music often takes the form of simple group singing, such as campfire songs that feature a low barrier to entry that allows everyone to join regardless of skill level. In contrast, within Shona communities in Zimbabwe, musicking operates as a vital spiritual and functional ceremony. Community members participate through dancing, singing, drumming, and handclapping, viewing successful performance as a good social life. Through musicking, people form immediate connections, and this shared experience sustains the community beyond the performance itself. Turino captures this dynamic:

Successful participatory performance is a good social life. In the moment, the experience is just what it feels like. After the ceremony is over, the feelings are practically remembered and help maintain or improve day-to-day relationships within the community, for a while until the next ceremony or festival offers this potential again. (p. 138)

The communal music lives of participants demonstrate how non-formal musicking, often culturally rooted and community-based, serves as a vital site for forging musical selves within culturally diverse settings.

4. Methodology: Crafting the Inquiry

4.1. Research Design: Re-Engaging Past Voices

Secondary data analysis allows researchers to breathe new life into existing qualitative data (Flick, 2023). Conventionally, this involves re-purposing data collected by others to address new questions or explore new perspectives. Corti (2022) describes secondary analysis as asking new questions of extant data, emphasizing that datasets can be re-examined through different theoretical frameworks, goals, or contemporary issues. Such re-interpretations allow researchers to generate new knowledge without conducting new data collection.

Flick (2023) identifies three primary sources for qualitative secondary data analysis.

- Data, such as interviews and observations, collected from an earlier study but now used for a different purpose and a new focus.
- Data collected by other researchers that may not be officially available for public access.
- Officially archived data made available upon receiving permission for use.

The present study utilizes the first and second sources: data from my previously published work and an unpublished conference presentation, as well as an unanalyzed subset of interview data collected from the Filipino participant cohort during that same original study.

The disadvantage of using existing qualitative data for secondary analysis includes a potential lack of contextual insight since the secondary researchers were typically absent from the firsthand experience of the original fieldwork or setting. This absence limits their insider knowledge and reduces opportunities for rich interpretation (Flick, 2023). Furthermore, assembling sufficient contextual information can be challenging if supporting documents are incomplete (Corti, 2018).

This study, however, differs from typical secondary analysis. While most researchers using this approach work with data collected by others, I originally gathered and published the datasets here in earlier projects. Therefore, this study employs a form of qualitative data re-use and re-interpretation. By applying the new lens of non-formal learning as sites of becoming, this analysis constructs a fresh understanding of musical selves. This approach aligns with the core principles of secondary analysis, focusing on re-interpretation of qualitative data, but benefits significantly from my firsthand experience and deep familiarity with the original contexts. The raw qualitative data available for this re-analysis comprise full interview transcripts, field notes and musical repertoire lists from each of the three original research projects.

I originally collected these qualitative datasets from the Filipino and Chinese *xianshi* participants between 2007 and 2008, and from the amateur sacred choir participants in 2013. This significant time gap presents a clear chronological limitation, as these datasets are dated and reflect specific historical milestones rather than the contemporary socio-cultural climate of Hong Kong. Nevertheless, this temporal boundary does not compromise the study's theoretical relevance or qualitative transferability. In qualitative research, such historical data provide invaluable, stable baselines of grassroots community musicking that capture organic processes of identity formation at specific moments in time. To ensure ongoing transferability and bridge this chronological gap, I connect these historical cohorts directly to four contemporary non-formal learning examples in Hong Kong in the literature review part: the structured yet non-accredited music training scheme of the Music Office, the learner-centered WAO! Singers, the facilitated learning in a Cantonese opera community training, and the inclusive programs of the Music Children Foundation. This cross-temporal alignment demonstrates that while Hong Kong's social and cultural landscape has evolved over the past two decades, the core structural mechanisms of non-formal learning and their relationship to the cultivation of musical selves remain consistent and theoretically transferable over time.

4.2. Data Analysis: Unveiling the Five Selves

I employed a reflexive thematic analysis approach to understand musical selves across culturally diverse non-formal learning contexts. Reflexive TA procedures require a high level of theoretical awareness and operational transparency, highlighting the researcher's active role in knowledge production through continuous self-reflection (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2022). As they explain, themes do not emerge passively from the data or the coding process itself. Instead, researchers actively construct or generate themes through their "reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful

engagement with the analytic process” (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594). To maintain the nature of reflective thematic analysis, I conceptualized coding and theme development as an organic, subjective, and deeply reflexive process driven by my own engagement with the text, rather than a mechanical sorting of data into pre-defined frameworks.

To ensure methodological transparency, I implemented the data analysis across three interconnected, recursive steps, which condensed Braun and Clarke’s (2022) six-phase framework for reflexive thematic analysis to position my active and analytical role in the process:

- Step 1: Data Immersion and NFL-Identity Coding. I began by re-reading the published case materials, unpublished raw transcripts, and conference notes to deeply familiarize myself with the narratives. This coding process involved manually generating initial codes by highlighting text segments where the defining elements of non-formal learning, such as voluntary participation, learner autonomy, intentionality, and horizontal mentorship, directly intersected with, and shaped, the participants’ shifting expressions of their musical selves and life journeys.
- Step 2: Mapping Initial ‘Musical Selves’. In this intermediate stage, I clustered these related codes to explore how various non-formal learning environments catalyzed different dimensions of music identity across the three culturally diverse groups. This stage focused specifically on identifying the preliminary versions of ‘musical selves’ that were constructed during the initial stages of non-formal engagement, mapping how their NFL experiences intersected with their musical-self identities. Through this initial clustering process, a preliminary map consisting of seven tentative themes of musical selves as “patterns of shared meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 593) was generated. The seven themes are: performer, spiritual, heritage, ritual, social, transcendence, and integrated self. This map serves as the baseline for further refinement.
- Step 3: Facet Refinement and Definition. The final phase required reviewing and reflecting upon the analytical outputs of these seven tentative themes against the entire dataset to evaluate their conceptual distinctiveness and boundaries. Furthermore, meticulous cross-checking ensured that the final themes were firmly grounded in the participants’ lived experiences rather than artificially imposed by pre-existing theory. Finally, through this interpretive refinement, I collapsed the initial seven themes into the final five distinct facets of musical selves: performer self, spiritual self, heritage self, social self, and transcendence self. Specifically, I merged the ritual self into the heritage self, while the integrated self was subsumed into the transcendence self.

To ensure consistency across this paper, interview quotes retain the pseudonyms used in the original publications.

4.3. Research Sites and Participants: Portraits of Musical Becoming

- Amateur Sacred Choir Members

Members join a structured but unaccredited choir and participate in weekly voluntary rehearsals led by a conductor. The choir holds these two-hour sessions once a week in the evening. Clear intentions to accomplish singing tasks and gain musical competencies drive the participants’ voluntary non-formal learning involvement. The repertoire ranges from Bach, Mozart, Verdi to locally composed works. The members are locally born Hong Kong Chinese, reflecting a hybrid of Western and localized culturally situated identities. Out of approximately 50 members, I purposively selected 15 participants for individual interviews, comprising six sopranos, five altos, two tenors, and two basses. I established two selective sampling criteria: first, participants had to attend rehearsals regularly as active members, and second, they had to participate consistently in community performances and out-of-town music exchange concerts alongside the annual Hong Kong concert. At

the time of the interviews, their choir membership spanned from 5 to 37 years, and participants' ages ranged from the early 30s to mid-60s. I conducted all individual interviews in Cantonese and later translated the transcripts into English. Besides weekly conductor-led rehearsals, members exhibit varying degrees of individual or peer-collaborative, self-directed learning. For many, this pathway represents a normal trajectory in their lives, illustrating their lifelong learning potential. Notably, I have maintained an active membership in this choir since 2009, which provides an insider perspective for the analysis.

- Chaozhou *Xianshi*¹ Musicians

The Chaozhou *xianshi* musicians belong to a *xianshi* music club in Hong Kong. The club offers free, open rehearsals without auditions, ensuring low entry barriers for music lovers. I utilized a purposive criteria framework for this group; eligible participants must have been born and raised in their hometown of Chaozhou, migrated to Hong Kong as adults, and resided in Hong Kong for more than six years to navigate diaspora identity. Because this ensemble forms a small, tight circle of only six to eight active players, I interviewed the five available players who met these parameters.

The group operates without an expert conductor, utilizing a horizontal peer system where members take turns leading. Members choose their own learning content, progress pace, and extent of participation. Participants have played this repertoire since childhood or adolescence and continued after migrating to Hong Kong, reflecting the influence of their Chaozhou heritage and migration identity. At the time of the interviews, participants were in their late 50s to 60s. I conducted interviews in Cantonese and subsequently translated the text into English. As a space for lifelong learning and inclusion, the group maintains exchanges with musicians still residing in Chaozhou.

- Diasporic Filipinos Domestic Helpers

Filipino participants in this study migrated to Hong Kong to work as domestic helpers. I interviewed six female participants aged between their 30s and 50s. Having arrived as adults, they received their formal education and early musical enculturation in the Philippines. In Hong Kong, they transitioned into new modes of non-formal music learning to navigate cultural hybridity and a minority identity. I purposely sampled participants who were registered students at a local seminary where I taught part-time. This shared academic space allowed me to leverage a pre-existing connection and build deep personal rapport, which facilitated the collection of authentic, uninhibited narratives. I conducted these interviews entirely in English, which was their medium of communication in Hong Kong. This intentional choice also mitigated the severe socioeconomic power imbalances felt by these participants. Because five participants had attended my classes previously, they treated me as an equal companion, calling me "Annie" directly. They are choir members within local Filipino churches, where their varied NFL pathways demonstrate learning-oriented and self-authored musical agency through Western church music, CDs, Radio 4 (a classical music channel), and DVDs from diverse music cultures. Their non-formal music learning experiences support them as they navigate life challenges and foster social inclusion within this diverse community.

The wide variety of non-formal learning practices across these three cases provides a rich baseline. This heterogeneity allows for a rich examination of how non-formal music learning functions across culturally varied groups.

4.4. Theoretical Reframing: Moving Beyond Informal Learning

In my previous publications, I categorized some aspects of music learning, such as self-regulated learning, and other structured activities, under informal learning. However, this study reconceptualizes those activities within the broader framework of non-

formal learning (NFL). As outlined in the foundation section, non-formal learning is distinguished by its intentionality, structured nature, facilitation, and communal dimensions—characteristics that distinguish it from what was labeled as informal learning. Storsve (2024) also explains that NFL is defined in diverse and sometimes conflicting ways within music education research. Nevertheless, the data show that NFL occupies a vital hybrid space within the learning landscape (Johnson & Majewska, 2022). This conceptual refinement and the re-examination reflect the versatile and encompassing nature of non-formal learning, illustrating the evolving understanding of these concepts and their application within sites of musical identity formation.

4.5. Ethical Considerations: Guardians of Trust

Ethical considerations for this study include the use of previously collected and fully anonymized data to protect the informants' privacy. The original research projects received ethical approval and informed consent, and the participants' confidentiality was strictly maintained prior to publication. For this re-analysis, no new data collection or contact with the informants took place; therefore, the text reveals no identifiable information.

5. Emergent Facets of the Musical Self in Non-Formal Contexts

To guarantee empirical data traceability, I apply three distinct levels of chronological attribution. First, I anchor direct participant quotations to their specific publication year. Second, for previously unreleased materials derived exclusively from 2008 diasporic Filipinos' interviews, I apply a descriptive phrase like "the unpublished raw data from 2008" directly within the narrative text, rather than using a parenthetical reference citation. Third, to preserve readability and narrative flow, and to avoid sentence-level tagging, I implement paragraph-level block attribution: a citation placed at the immediate conclusion of a paragraph denotes that the entire preceding paraphrased narrative or illustration stems directly from that single source.

5.1. The Performer Self

Through the amateur choir's non-formal approach to weekly rehearsals and self-directed study, participants develop musical proficiency and musicianship. They successfully perform challenging works, such as Brahms' *Requiem* and Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb*, during their annual performance in professional concert halls. They emphasize learner autonomy and independently mastering their parts. Henry uses his own markings to indicate important changes in the music, explaining: "I use markings which I can understand myself. But if the key changes are too frequent ... I will mark the intervals with a symbol" (A. O. Mok, 2020). Some also use a keyboard to check the accuracy of the notes of their voice parts. Florence recalled using one hand to play the notes, while Henry stated he would play it very slowly with one finger. Yvonne said, "After I take the score, I play the notes out when I have time. That is, the more I play it, the more familiar I become with it" (A. O. Mok, 2020). The participants also share that being part of this community choir helps refine their singing techniques, improving pitch accuracy, beat counting, and sensitivity in employing varied vocal techniques suitable for different venues. Through a diverse choir repertoire, participants encounter songs and music interpretations they otherwise might never encounter, providing an unforgettable experience of challenging repertoire (A. O. Mok, 2015).

Similarly, Filipino music-makers acquire their music skills through weekly church choir rehearsals and non-formal learning opportunities. They acquire piano skills in multiple ways: some by observing and practicing alongside their employers' children. Although a tutor is present, Elma primarily learns by intentionally observing and listening

to the employer's children's piano lessons, rather than through direct instruction. She said, "Yes, when the teacher comes, I learn it. My ears, I am doing the duties and hear, this is how you play" (O. N. A. Mok, 2011b). On the other hand, some learn to play the piano in a three-month course on Sunday afternoons during their days off at a seminary outreach center in Hong Kong. They took this short-term piano course aiming to better serve their church musically (O. N. A. Mok, 2011b). In addition, the following unpublished raw data from 2008 further highlight the experiences of four participants. Marilou shares that, despite a busy schedule, she practices guitar and keyboard, pursues piano lessons, and works continuously to improve her conducting and leadership skills in church. Diana gradually takes up conducting as she feels a responsibility to lead in the absence of other leaders, demonstrating her initiative and confidence-building through active engagement. Both Marilou and Joy embrace leadership roles in choirs, emphasizing their desire to help others develop musically and to lead groups meaningfully.

The *xianshi* musicians are highly versatile and competent players who express their personal identity and aspirations through experiential, self-directed learning. As Chen explains:

I mostly [learned to play the instruments] by a process of self-learning. For instance, when I was learning the *xiao* (Chinese bamboo flute), I bought a *xiao*, a book [on learning how to play the *xiao*], and some other books from different publishers. I read them at night and followed [the instructions on] how to play. I followed [the instructions] and played without taking any lessons because I didn't have time. I followed on my own because I was interested in it. (O. N. A. Mok, 2011a)

During their weekly Friday rehearsals, which can last three or four hours, they play mostly from memory throughout the session. These regular rehearsals provide structured non-formal learning opportunities to collaboratively develop solid musical skills. Listening to their rehearsal resembles attending a concert. Unlike formally trained Western orchestral musicians who typically specialize in one instrument, many *xianshi* musicians frequently change instruments and positions without prior arrangement, sometimes after only one or two pieces. Most can play several instruments and have no fixed position in the ensemble. For example, Yang regularly takes turns leading on different instruments, such as the *erxian*, *erhu* (both two-string bowed fiddles), and *yangqin* (a hammered dulcimer played with bamboo mallets). Without a formal conductor, this flexible rotating leadership system directly reflects their horizontal peer-learning, where leadership and roles are negotiable and emergent (A. O. N. Mok, 2013).

5.2. The Spiritual Self

The amateur sacred choir serves as a site of spiritual meaning-making and the cultivation of spiritual-musical selves within a non-formal learning context. Members view their singing as a form of spiritual service, dedicating their musical talents as gifts from God for ministry and outreach; for instance, they undertake two mission trips a year. Paul explained that he chooses to "focus more on serving, bringing people closer to God" (A. O. Mok, 2015). Sharon shared, "it helps one to feel being closer to God" (A. O. Mok, 2015). Through singing, participants deepen their faith and experience God's presence. They feel touched by God's presence through praises, viewing choir participation as a blessed opportunity to glorify God and fulfill a spiritual calling. They expressed a responsibility to use these divine gifts for service as well as to share and promote sacred music.

Similarly, from the unpublished 2008 raw data, all Filipino music-makers describe singing not merely as performance but as a means to express spiritual devotion and ministry. Diana prays continually to nurture her singing voice to serve God better, and she views her musical talent as a spiritual gift entrusted to her for ministry:

So it's my prayer, that's why I want to serve God. I want to sing for Him, serve him, as much as I can to use it wisely because I don't want to be...like... my talent to be given to others. I want the Lord to give me more so that I can do more for Him.

Joy also shares that "because my heart is just ah... deciding to improve the music ministry." Marilou and Mildred express a strong motivation to use music to help others spiritually and emotionally for God's ministry. Similarly, Elma and Teresa emphasize using music and singing to glorify God and serve in church contexts, Elma said:

I'm still learning... in my own concept... I want to use my life for this ministry... to sing for the Lord... that's my main... not need other thing... I just want to use my life for glory of the Lord, our Lord. That's all.

5.3. The Heritage Self

The music club functions as a vital site of collective cultural preservation. Specifically, the *xianshi* group within the club maintains a commitment to transmitting their cultural heritage to the younger generations as authentically as possible, with minimal modern alterations. The club provides not only a venue to play traditional Chaozhou music but also a social space where members enjoy drinking their *gongfu* tea, a traditional Chinese method of brewing tea skillfully, enhancing the holistic and aesthetic cultural experience (A. O. N. Mok, 2013).

Playing Chaozhou music reflects deeper Chinese cultural and philosophical values. Participants describe learning and practicing their instruments as a form of self-cultivation, through which they maintain and embody the traditional Chinese spirit. By participating in the club, participants preserve of a Chinese identity while simultaneously shaping their heritage musical selves. Lu expresses this intergenerational pride clearly:

Right! Folk arts are very peculiar. This tradition passes down from one generation to another without stopping. Though old masters pass away, there are always young people starting to learn. Here we have a young child who plays *pipa* (a four-stringed, pear-shaped Chinese lute) very well. He is just eleven years old. (A. O. N. Mok, 2013)

At first glance, this heritage appears to invoke an essentialist discourse of authentic cultural preservation and historical continuity. However, following Hall and Du Gay (1996), I interpret this phenomenon not as evidence of fixed cultural essence, but as narratives that participants construct within specific diasporic situations. Storytelling constitutes identity here. The 11-year-old boy becomes a symbolic figure within a narrative of continuity which flows from past to present. This narrative embodies Hall and Du Gay (1996) constructivist concept of becoming. The club functions as a space where members negotiate identity through this story.

The musicians' strong sense of Chinese national identity is linked to the historical experience of upheaval, including colonialism, invasion, and migration. Through collective memories of suffering and resistance, the older generation fosters national cohesion. In the analytical terms of Hall and Du Gay (1996), identity formations are shaped by historically specific processes. In this case, colonialism, war, displacement, and diaspora status drive these identity formations, rather than any timeless cultural essence.

In light of the above, the heritage practices in the club exemplify "the changing same." This process represents not a simple return to their fixed heritage roots, but a "coming-to-terms-with routes" (Hall & Du Gay, 1996, p. 4). These routes embody the lived displacement experiences of the diaspora. The *xianshi* musicians who migrated to Hong Kong rearticulate Chaozhou musical traditions within a new social context. Through their

weekly gatherings, intergenerational mentorship, and embodied musical practice, they sustain a living heritage that connects ancestors and future generations (O. N. A. Mok, 2011a, A. O. N. Mok, 2013).

5.4. The Social Self

While these five facets are interconnected, their prominence varies. For instance, the *xianshi* musicians most vividly illustrate the social self, reflecting their particular cultural and communal musicking. The music club provides a learning site that goes beyond pure performance, establishing a shared social context for peer-based learning and collective interaction. Participants embed this social self through ongoing weekly connections and a community of practice (A. O. N. Mok, 2013).

For example, the Friday night dinner in the music club is free and prepared by one or more members. The members cook for themselves, which is atypical for Chaozhou men, as traditional cultural norms historically designate culinary labor as “women’s work.” However, they do so willingly because of their close interpersonal bonds and their strong sense of belonging. Gathered around a large table, they chat freely in their native dialect, enjoying moments of brotherhood before rehearsals (A. O. N. Mok, 2013).

Playing music as a group not only creates shared musical experience but also helps develop a sense of belonging and bonding. Yang explained that the most valuable thing for them as lay workers in their workplaces is helping each other. This feeling of brotherhood holds them together through life’s ups and downs and has kept them united in the same music club for many years. While playing, a tacit understanding exists among the musicians. Sitting in a circle, they rarely need to look at one another. Their tacit musical communication is largely non-verbal and embodied. They feel the music with their bodies, knowing the music and each other so well that their playing feels as natural as breathing. Even when certain musical phrases slow down or accelerate, everybody has already internalized the musical pulse and moves as one. This shared musical breath sustains their lifelong friendship (O. N. A. Mok, 2011a).

This sense of brotherhood also stems from their learning practices. Chen recalled that when he was in Chaozhou, the group of “brothers” would take turns playing different instruments. Sometimes he would play the *qin*, while others played bowed strings, and then they would rotate roles. Yang also said he rarely stayed in the same position for long. By taking turns and changing positions, they foster a cooperative spirit and deepen mutual respect (O. N. A. Mok, 2011a).

Similarly, amateur choir members emphasize the choir as a social group that provides strong bonds, lifelong friendships, and shared spiritual experiences. Paul, Henry, and Heidi express that choir singing fosters teamwork, allowing them to enjoy harmonies together. The collective experience of choir singing in parts and harmonies creates powerful musical and social connection that solo singing cannot achieve. They also reflect deeply about their mission trips. These experiences unite members around a shared spiritual and musical vision, acting as a catalyst for experiencing God’s presence, forming collective memories, and deepening their understanding of one another. Both hardships and joyful memories draw members closer together and strengthen their bonds (A. O. Mok, 2015).

5.5. The Transcendence Self

For the *xianshi* musicians, participation in their music club functions as a powerful medium for transcending time and space, creating a symbolic bridge between past and present. My observations reveal that these musicians play entirely from memory and often with their eyes closed, entering a “flow” state that facilitates deep immersion in the music-making process. This evokes a feeling of mentally and emotionally returning to their home-

town of Chaozhou, despite having lived in Hong Kong for several decades. Their enduring and lifelong engagement in the club seems to facilitate the construction of an “imagined community”—a miniature Chaozhou within the diaspora. Their musical practice transcends geographic boundaries and sustains a collective sense of belonging that symbolically brings them “back home” across borders. In this way, their involvement in the music club exemplifies non-formal learning as a dynamic site of cultural transmission and identity preservation. They maintain an identity that “transcends” their current environment, bridging personal and communal pasts with their present realities (O. N. A. Mok, 2011a, A. O. N. Mok, 2013).

Just as the Chaozhou musicians mentally maintain a connection to their hometown through playing in the club, the Filipino music-makers also negotiate their “away-from-home” identities through music practices. Their listening and singing become non-formal methods of transcending their difficulties. In the unpublished 2008 raw data, three Filipino music-makers highlight the transformative power of music. Elma shares that music enlightens and uplifts her spirit, easing feelings of loneliness and burden. Joy and Teresa coincidentally use the metaphor of “medicine” to describe music:

Joy: To me [music] is a medicine to me, ya, to me, it’s a great medicine. If I was distressed, [or] I was discouraged, [or] I was full of worries, I always sing... The song is “Never Give Up”—my favorite song... That is really what I’m singing: “I will never give up.” A ministry is sometimes, it was discouraging, and sometimes it was so hard to cope [with] the time, the practice here, whatever. But if I was thinking to quit, I just sing it... that is the reason... for me, music is part of my life.

Teresa: It [music] is my life. Well, music is very powerful, you know. It’s like medicine. When you’re happy you sing, when you’re lonely you sing. So music has been my life, especially when I’m in Hong Kong, away [from] my family. So before I go to sleep, I make sure my earphones are on. So, I even sleep when my earphones are on, and then it just switches off by itself. So music has been my life.

The self-directed engagement, including singing, humming, or listening, serves as a non-formal pathway to emotional regulation. Musicians utilize music as an active strategy for building resilience against stress, worry, anger, and discouragement, enabling participants to cope emotionally and spiritually even when life is hard.

By the same token, amateur choir participants mention that choir participation serves as an emotional balm during stressful or difficult times, offering psychological relief and encouragement. Mary explains that “after memorizing a song, some lyrics will stay in your heart and become your comfort when you are reminded that God is love, reminded of the joy and hope in Him” (A. O. Mok, 2015). Therefore, the lyrics and the sacred repertoire become their sources of hope and emotional connection, strengthening their resilience in life. Further, participants describe singing in the choir as an enjoyable and life-enriching experience. It provides them relaxation and emotional expression that integrates their faith, deepening their relationship with God. Matthew summarized his intention, “living out the vision to serve God by joining the choir” (A. O. Mok, 2015).

Synthesis and Closing Reflections

This study illustrates how non-formal music learning spaces function as dynamic sites of becoming, where musical selves are continuously shaped and reshaped over time. The findings demonstrate how non-formal learning helps forge musical selves in diverse yet interconnected ways across contexts. It does so through distinct characteristics: voluntary participation, learner autonomy, horizontal relationships, lifelong engagement, and cul-

turally embedded practice. Across the five identified facets of musical selves—performer, spiritual, heritage, social, and transcendent—non-formal learning provides fertile ground for creation and co-creation. Further, these facets do not operate in isolation but intertwine dynamically, reflecting fluid musical selves that follow culturally grounded pathways of becoming. While all three groups express performer and transcendent dimensions, the spiritual self is most prominent among amateur choir members and Filipino music-makers, whereas heritage and social selves emerge most prominently within the *xianshi* group. This variation underscores the culturally situated ways in which musical selves are forged through non-formal music learning.

The flexibility and inclusivity of non-formal spaces empower individuals to shape their musical selves on their own terms. For instance, Filipino music-makers engage in personal, self-directed learning to acquire piano skills, whether through “secret” observational learning or participation in community-organized courses. The foundations of intentionality and learner autonomy are further exemplified by the amateur choir members, who practice independently and master their parts before rehearsal. Through a relatively systematic and intentional approach to skill development, these participants pursue specific competencies in a self-directed way. Further, engaging in reflection through prayer and collective rehearsals enables both Filipino music-makers and amateur choir members to develop their spiritual and musical selves socially and dynamically. Such empowerment extends beyond skill acquisition, fostering their emotional resilience and sustained engagement across the lifespan, which is particularly evident in the transcendence facet. Similarly, the *xianshi* musicians’ lifelong engagement in playing their music, alongside the collaborative practice of rotating instruments and leadership roles during rehearsals, demonstrates a facilitative and flexible learning space grounded in a horizontal, peer-learning relationship.

Navigating culturally diverse contexts, meanwhile, Filipino music-makers, as a minority with a diasporic identity, transcend physical and social limitations, enabling inner comfort, spiritual uplift, and the ongoing shaping of their musical selves. Within these fluid and transformative sites of music engagement, this process functions as a vital mechanism for negotiating cultural hybridity, promoting psychological well-being, and supporting their evolving musical selves. Similarly, as Small (1998) and Turino (2008) explain, musicking is inherently a social act, deeply connected to culture and society. The music club, serving as a site of becoming for diasporic *xianshi* musicians, helps them form their heritage musical selves through embodied practice. They sustain their heritage while embodying mutual brotherhood. Learning here extends beyond music-making. It encompasses cultural values, moral cultivation, collective memory, and philosophical reflection.

Most importantly, non-formal learning is realized as a holistic site of becoming, where individuals cultivate their identity, formation, emotional resilience, spiritual intimacy, and personal growth by playing their instruments, singing, listening, and sharing music. The active agency of the three cases is evident across all sites, illustrating how musical selves are authored and continually negotiated, echoing Frith’s (2011) notions of fluid identity as becoming. As explained by Froehlich and Smith (2017), the core of oneself is like a snowball picking up snow while rolling down a hill growing and expanding as reflected in the five facets of self.

Musical selves are not statically preserved but actively renewed through this ongoing, non-formal practice at the site. Like a blacksmith’s workshop, these sites involve intentional effort, perseverance, and engaged practice, where musical selves are crafted through ongoing challenges and collaboration. They are not merely physical locations but dimensions of social and cultural interaction, where the musical selves of the three diverse

groups are actively constructed, negotiated, and performed. Within these safe and vibrant spaces, participants express evolving versions of their musical selves.

Overall, the study highlights how musical selves are continually developed and forged within diverse non-formal “sites of becoming.” It illuminates the complex interplay among intentional learning practices, cultural traditions, social relationships, and individual agency across both historical data and the contemporary cases analyzed earlier. Ultimately, the findings affirm the transformative potential of non-formal music learning in fostering lived, embodied, and multifaceted musical selves. These insights call for greater recognition of non-formal learning as a vital educative force within contemporary musical and cultural landscapes, and for increased funding and support of these influential sites of becoming.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created.

Acknowledgments: During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI GPT-5.3 Instant model) and Gemini (Google’s Gemini-3.5 Flash model), both operated via the Poe platform for the purposes of grammatical proofreading, language refinement and stylistic editing. The author has reviewed and edited the output and take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Abbreviation

The following abbreviation is used in this manuscript:

NFL Non-formal Learning

Note

- ¹ Chaozhou is a city in the eastern Guangdong province of China. It is roughly 360–390 km northeast of Hong Kong. Xianshi is a form of silk and bamboo folk music ensemble using string and wind instruments.

References

- Beynon, C. (2020). The formal and non-formal teaching of singing in the studio and choral environment: Exploring diverse views. In H. R. Gudmundsdottir, C. Beynon, K. M. Ludke, & A. J. Cohen (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to interdisciplinary studies in singing* (1st ed., pp. 171–181). Routledge. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Blacking, J. (1973). *How musical is man?* University of Washington Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Cain, T. (2013). ‘Passing it on’: Beyond formal or informal pedagogies. *Music Education Research*, 15(1), 74–91. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Chua, S. L., & Welch, G. F. (2021). A lifelong perspective for growing music teacher identity. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 43(3), 329–346. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Coombs, P. H. (1974). *Attacking rural poverty: How nonformal education can help*. John Hopkins University Press.
- Corti, L. (2018). Data collection in secondary analysis. In *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection* (pp. 164–181). SAGE Publications Ltd. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Corti, L. (2022). Secondary qualitative data analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research design* (Vol. 2, pp. 535–554). SAGE Publications Ltd. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Creech, A., Varvarigou, M., & Hallam, S. (2020). *Contexts for music learning and participation: Developing and sustaining musical possible selves*. Springer International Publishing. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

- Creech, A., Varvarigou, M., Lorenzino, L., & Corric, A. (2024). Ethno pedagogy: Valuing one another through experiential learning. In L. Higgins, & S.-J. Gibson (Eds.), *Ethno music gatherings: Pedagogy, experience, impact*. Intellect Books.
- DeNora, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. The Macmillian Company.
- Flick, U. (2023). *An introduction to qualitative research* (7th ed.). SAGE.
- Folkestad, G. (2006). Formal and informal learning situations or practices vs formal and informal ways of learning. *British Journal of Music Education*, 23(2), 135–145. [CrossRef]
- Frith, S. (2011). Music and identity. In *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 108–127). SAGE Publications Ltd. [CrossRef]
- Froehlich, H. C., & Smith, G. D. (2017). *Sociology for music teachers: Practical applications* (2nd ed.). Routledge. [CrossRef]
- Green, L. (2001). *How popular musicians learn: A way ahead for music education*. Ashgate.
- Green, L. (2005). The music curriculum as lived experience: Children's 'natural' music-learning processes: Students in music classrooms can learn to make music using the informal music-learning strategies of popular musicians. *Music Educators Journal*, 91(4), 27–32.
- Hall, S., & Du Gay, P. (1996). *Questions of cultural identity* (1st ed.). SAGE.
- Higgins, L. (2024). Pedagogy. In L. Higgins (Ed.), *Thinking community music* (pp. 62–84). Oxford University Press. [CrossRef]
- Higgins, L., & Gibson, S. J. (2024). *Ethno music gatherings: Pedagogy, experience, impact*. Intellect Books.
- Higgins, L., & Willingham, L. (2017). *Engaging in community music: An introduction* (1st ed., Vol. 1). Routledge. [CrossRef]
- Jarvis, P. (2010). *Adult education and lifelong learning: Theory and practice* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Johnson, M., & Majewska, D. (2022). *Formal, non-formal, and informal learning: What are they, and how can we research them?* Assessment Research Report. Cambridge University Press. Available online: <https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/665425-formal-non-formal-and-informal-learning-what-are-they-and-how-can-we-research-them-.pdf> (accessed on 23 February 2026).
- Kuoppamäki, A., & Vilmilä, F. (2024). Young people navigating musical lives: Considering arts participation as agency in cultural authorship. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 46(2), 202–216. [CrossRef]
- Leisure and Cultural Services Department. (2026). *Instrumental music training scheme*. Music Office. Available online: <https://www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/mo/training/outreachinterestclassprogramme.html> (accessed on 18 June 2026).
- Leung, B. W. (2020). A proposed model of transmission of Cantonese opera in Hong Kong higher education: From oral tradition to conservatoire. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 19(2), 144–166. [CrossRef]
- Lonie, D., & Dickens, L. (2016). Becoming musicians: Situating young people's experiences of musical learning between formal, informal and non-formal spheres. *Cultural Geographies*, 23(1), 87–101. [CrossRef]
- Mok, A. O. (2015, July 10–13). *A dedication to God: The motivations and values of singing in an adult community sacred choir* [Paper presentation]. 10th Asia-Pacific Symposium on Music Education Research, Hong Kong, China.
- Mok, A. O. (2020). 'I can follow': Self-directed informal learning strategies adopted by choristers in an adult amateur choir. *Music Education Research*, 22(4), 421–431. [CrossRef]
- Mok, A. O. N. (2013). The indigenous culture of Chaozhou xianshi music and diaspora musicians in Hong Kong. In *Creative arts in education and culture* (pp. 243–251). Springer. [CrossRef]
- Mok, O. N. A. (2011a). Diasporic Chinese xianshi musicians: Impact of Enculturation and learning on values relating to music and music-making. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 12(1), 1–12.
- Mok, O. N. A. (2011b). From homeland to Hong Kong: The dual musical experience and identity of diasporic Filipino women. In L. Green (Ed.), *Learning, teaching, and musical identity: Voices across cultures* (pp. 47–59). Indiana University Press.
- Mok, O. N. A. (2011c). Non-formal learning: Clarification of the concept and its application in music learning. *Australian Journal of Music Education*, (1), 11–15.
- Music Children Foundation. (2026). *The Hong Kong jockey club community project grant: Happy music together programme*. Available online: <https://musicchildren.org.hk/en/> (accessed on 12 June 2026).
- Ng, H. H. (2020). Towards a synthesis of formal, non-formal and informal pedagogies in popular music learning. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 42(1), 56–76. [CrossRef]
- OECD. (2025). *Trends in adult learning: New data from the 2023 survey of adult skills, getting skills right*. OECD Publishing. [CrossRef]
- Public Compass Association, VEZ Trade, & DUTH University. (2023). *Tools for better learning (TOBE) project* (Project No. 2023-2-BG01-KA220-YOU-000177242). European Union. Available online: <https://youthtraining.eu/project/> (accessed on 20 February 2026).
- Radovan, M. (2011). Validation of non-formal and informal learning—Research results. *AS. Andragoška Spoznanja*, 17(1), 24–31. [CrossRef]
- Rice, T. (2017). *Modeling ethnomusicology*. Oxford University Press.
- Schugurensky, D. (2000). *The forms of informal learning: Towards a conceptualization of the field* (WALL Working Paper 19; The Research Network for New Approach to Lifelong Learning). Centre for the Study of Education and Work.
- Sefton-Green, J. (2003). Informal Learning: Substance or style? *Teaching Education*, 14(1), 37–51. [CrossRef]
- Sefton-Green, J. (2013). *Learning at not-school: A review of study, theory, and advocacy for education in non-formal settings*. MIT Press.
- Small, C. (1998). *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*. Wesleyan University Press.

- Storsve, G. (2024). Formal, informal, and non-formal learning as analytic categories for research in music education. *International Journal of Music Education*, 44(1), 37–55. [CrossRef]
- Turino, T. (2008). *Music as social life: The politics of participation*. University of Chicago Press.
- Usher, R. (2018). Experience, pedagogy and social practices. In K. Illeris (Ed.), *Contemporary theories of learning* (2nd ed., pp. 189–203). Routledge. [CrossRef]
- Valenzuela, V., Aisenson, G., & Duarte, M. E. (2022). Youth and children's orchestras: Analysis of the educational experience and some reflections from the field of lifelong guidance and counseling. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, 22(3), 689–711. [CrossRef]
- Vygotskiĭ, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- WAO! Singers. (n.d.). WAO! Singers 簡介 [WAO! Singers profile]. Art-Mate. Available online: <https://www.art-mate.net/doc/55091> (accessed on 17 June 2026).
- WAO! Singers. (2026). 「喘息」社區合唱劇場 [“Respite” community choral theater]. Art-Mate. Available online: <https://www.art-mate.net/doc/94653> (accessed on 18 June 2026).
- Weatherly, K. I. C. H., Weatherly, C. A., Chen, Y., & Lau, P. (2025). A scoping review of empirical studies on informal music learning. *British Journal of Music Education*, 42(1), 46–64. [CrossRef]
- Werquin, P. (2010). *Recognising non-formal and informal learning: Outcomes, policies and practices*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Available online: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/recognising-non-formal-and-informal-learning_9789264063853-en.html (accessed on 23 January 2026).

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.