Self-Guided YouTube Piano Lessons: A Case Study

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Introduction

- Over the past ten years, new media and social science researchers have developed frameworks and theoretical models designed specifically for conceptualizing investigations of online communities.
- User-generated content (UGC) such as YouTube videos play an important role in theoretical discussions and in framing investigations of online music community for various reasons.
- "[YouTube] creates spaces for engagement and community-formation. Uploading [YouTube videos] serves as a way for [online] groups to talk among themselves, and to the broader community, using the same media texts that bring them together. The discussions that take place there spill over into other sites of everyday culture, meaning, identity, and practice" (Burgess and Green, 2009, p. 80).
- YouTube videos can play a powerful role in the evolution, growth, dissemination of information and continued sustainability of online music communities.

Purpose/Need

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the methods, materials, mentality, and motivation of an individual beginning piano lessons in a completely online environment. This research is changing with the technology and had applications for music education.

Previous Research

- YouTube can be a valuable resource and asset for learning and instruction.
- Self-guided online instruction utilizing UGC poses its own unique pros and cons.
- The research is emerging as the technology is emerging and stabilizing.

Methodology

- Case Study/3 interviews—emergent coding
  - 1, 2, and 3 months after beginning online lessons
- Practice Log, YouTube playlist, performance videos
- Participant—male, college freshman, pre-med major, no piano experience, no musical training past elementary school

Findings

- Materials/Setup
  - Digital piano, pedal, phone, laptop
  - YouTube, sheet music
- Process of Learning/Practice—Repetition
- "So what I do is I…look at a piece of sheet music. And because I'm still learning, reading music is a bit hard. So I'll go through a YouTube video of someone who [is] actually playing…. [The video has] the notes

highlighted above it as they play it. So I can learn the notes with the sheet music….. I have my monitor to my left, I have the sheet music up there and then I'll have the [YouTube] video in front of me. I'll go by like five seconds at a time. And so I'll learn to play each five seconds of the video and also follow along to the sheet music…that way I can get that visual aspect, the physical aspect, and reading the music…. I can learn it all at once."

- Evaluation Process—Recording self, playback, compare to model performance.
- Pros
    - "I can learn on my own time and pace without having to go to [an] instructor."
    - "I don't have to pay money to watch YouTube."
    - "…The fact that I can look at it, look at someone play, understand where their finger placements [are] instead of, you know, relying on the sheet music to teach me everything…. I can get [the] visual aspect of it, of someone playing. So that way it's a faster learning process for me than if I were to learn how to read music and solely learn a piece of music [from the sheet music] if there [were] no recordings."
    - Learning theory on YouTube as well. This informs his piano playing.
    - "I can go in any order I want, even if it's not the right order."
- Cons
    - "I would want someone to be there to tell me when I'm doing wrong….. Cause the only thing I have is to rely on [is]… me recording myself and listening to it."
    - "I can go in any order I want." Missing a scaffolding to guide large-scale learning.
    - Teacher as a constant source of motivation/accountability.
- Interview 1—Excited/Practiced Frequently
- Interview 2—Awareness of Musical Deficiencies/Motivation
- Interview 3—More Technically Driven/Self-Reflective
    - "If you are just told the answer, you're not going to try to discover it. But since I on my own, I have to think about it. I [have] to go through every single step of solving this problem. I have to use every single bit of knowledge I know previously or if something comes up and I don't know it, then I have to look for it. So, it's just a sense of trying to get to the end result."

Discussion
- Finding Quality Digital Materials—challenging
- Must be highly motivated and dedicated to endure this process.
- Extreme Self-Reflection
- Spiral process of learning, reflecting, and reinforcing—messy at times
- Blend of Individual and Formal Instruction?

"Music itself is its own world…. It's its own everything. To…people that are outside the music world, [they] don't understand that there's a lot to do…. It's nowhere near as easy as people make it look."

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