

Reflections on the Trajectory of an Online Literature Cafe through Its Music and Arts Activities

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Abstract : Social distancing measures due to the COVID-19 crisis had a severe impact on music and art practices based in community settings. They had to re-think how to connect with their dispersed community using online tools. As the social distancing continues, there is an urgent need to investigate the possibilities of online community music and art practices. Are they sustainable actions that can have positive impacts on the community and the quality of lives of people over time? The Online Lindgren Café (hereafter 'OLC') is a monthly online literature event which started in June 2020. In the OLC, up to 14 members meet online to discuss the works of Astrid Lindgren and similar authors. Members come from various places in Japan and Norway, with a variety of expertise from music therapy, music education, psychotherapy, music sociology, storytelling, and theatre, and their family members join them. In these meetings, music and arts activities emerged in response to interests among the members. The resources and experiences of the members helped to develop these activities further. This paper first introduces one of the music and art activities in one specific event, a collaborative picture book-making with music, which was initiated and led by the second author. The third author chose the music, and the activity itself was recorded. This is followed by the description of a reflecting event, where the recording of the collaborative picture book-making activity was shared to facilitate further creations (drawings, haiku, and fabric weaving) as well as group reflections on the trajectories of the Online Lindgren Café. Finally, we will discuss the preliminary findings using the data collected at the reflecting event. Key findings suggest that the resource-driven approach of the OLC leveled the relationships among the intergenerational, multi-cultural, and interdisciplinary members. This enabled the members to set aside their professional and/or predominant identities, which allowed them to discover their own and others' resources. The relaxed, unstructured, and liminal phenomenon at OLC can be regarded as a form of *communitas*, where members gain a sense of liberation and belonging in a different way from in-person communications. Participation from one's home, as well as a video conferencing function that allowed the members to position themselves among the other participants in equal-sized windows, seems to have enabled members to feel safe to express themselves openly at the same time feel a sense of belonging. Furthermore, in the OLC, music and arts activities acted to inclusively connect and re-connect dispersed, intergenerational members with each other. For instance, in a music and drawing activity, music acted as a means for each member to engage in their own 'drawing space' while still feeling connected with the others. The positive experiences from these activities inspired the members to use similar approaches outside of the OLC. The finding suggests that, because of its resource-driven approach supported by the music and arts activities, the OLC could be developed further as a permeable and sustainable action even after any current social distancing measures are lifted.

Keywords : *communitas*, COVID-19, musical affordances, online community of practices, resource-driven approach

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