Chapter 14
Meta–Literacy in the Online Music Classroom: Opportunities for Instructor and Librarian Collaboration

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ABSTRACT

Studying music in an online setting requires that students and instructors leverage digital resources and participatory technologies with understanding and intentionality. Meta-literacy, a framework promoting critical thinking and collaboration, is an inclusive approach to understanding the complexities of information use, production, and sharing in a digital environment. This chapter explores the implications of meta-literacy for the online music classroom and identifies ways in which the librarian and music instructor can collaborate to promote student self-reflection on the use, creation, and understanding of musical information or content.

INTRODUCTION

Studying music in an online setting requires that students and instructors leverage digital resources and participatory technologies with understanding and intentionality. Meta-literacy, a literacy framework promoting critical thinking and collaboration, is an inclusive approach to understanding the complexities of information use, production, and sharing in a digital environment. Academic librarians have information literacy expertise, experience providing digital resources and interactive research services to students, and a commitment to student learning (Kuh & Gonea, 2003). By collaborating with librarians, music instructors can supplement their discipline-specific knowledge with librarian support for digital and information literacies, and promote student use and understanding of a variety of music information sources both inside and outside of the online classroom.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5109-6.ch014
The term “meta-literacy” is not new; it was used as early as the 1980s by education researchers Watson and Shapiro in a study of early childhood literacy (1988). It has more recently been employed by academic librarian Trudy Jacobson and education researcher Thomas Mackey in the field of information literacy (Jacobson & Mackey, 2013; 2016; Mackey & Jacobson, 2011; 2014). However, the more robust meta-literacy framework discussed in this paper was first introduced in Mackey and Jacobson’s 2011 article “Reframing Information Literacy as a Metaliteracy.” The authors were responding in part to a skills-based information literacy that was grounded in the American Library Association’s (ALA) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education: “we suggest changes to the way information literacy is perceived as a primarily skills-based approach to learning” (2011, p. 70). In a rapidly changing digital environment, task-related skills do not translate well beyond their immediate domain and may quickly become obsolete; however, the underlying theories seldom do.

This theoretical paper explores the implications of meta-literacy for the online music classroom. Based on established models of librarian and instructor collaboration, the article identifies ways in which the two can promote student self-reflection on their own use, creation, and understanding of digital content (Witek & Grettano, 2013). Online classes aspire to provide students equal access to the institutional resources that on-campus students enjoy, but their experiences will be shaped by how the instructor leverages the online environment. By employing meta-literacy as a framework through which students can understand unique challenges and opportunities in the online environment, instructors can make explicit the ways in which the format and delivery of information shapes how that information can be used and understood. This chapter details both conceptual implications of meta-literacy in the online music environment, and practical ways in which librarians may support those classes to help achieve equitable access to information resources and services for online music students.

BACKGROUND

The online music classroom presents several unique challenges to learners and instructors. The literature demonstrates that various Course Management System (CMS), Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), or Learning Management System (LMS) applications have been developed to create online environments analogous to, or even better than, those experienced in-person (Koszalka & Ganesan, 2004; Lonn & Teasley, 2009). Nonetheless, many essays have outlined the variety of ways in which online learning is inherently different from the learning experienced in traditional, in-person classrooms (Harasim, 1996; Keengwe, & Kidd, 2010; Meyer 2003; Rovai, 2002; Swan, 2001). Harasim noted that “anytime, anyplace communication makes group interaction and collaboration in online media distinctive” (1996, p. 204). Such differences highlight the need for a more inclusive understanding of the various literacies essential to online teaching and learning.

Literacy

Definitions of literacy have become increasingly specific. Most traditional definitions of literacy are based on the consumption of print content; literacy in this context meant that one could read and write in one’s native language. Additionally, most definitions include or imply an element of critical thinking. A pre-schooler may be able to decipher familiar printed words, but would not likely be described as literate until her reading comprehension and contextual understanding of sources were more firmly
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