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**Examples of non-formal and informal learning in music**

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In her research plan Rineke Smilde, lector of the Lectorate Lifelong Learning in Music, remarks that: 'More than ever before, musicians are confronted with questions of how to function in new contexts and how to exploit opportunities.'

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Purpose of the Lectorate is:

*to create adaptive learning environments in which students of music colleges can be trained to function effectively in a continuously changing professional practice.*

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Environments in which

- connecting to context (asking yourself questions like: who am I going to perform for or make music with? and what do I have to offer them as a musician?)
- self-regulated learning (knowing how manage your own learning and professional development)
- reflective and reflexive practice (modes of learning and coaching that help practioners to evaluate and improve their practice)

are key elements of the learning process.

These elements were incorporated in the two projects for conservatoire students, initiated and monitored by the Lectorate, which I will present here in more detail.

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Project 1: Vocal Students as Animateurs

This project took place in September-October 2005 with students of the Royal Conservatoire in co-operation with Yo-Festival and the GSMD.

## Project 2: Project Week Professional Orientation

This project was organised for all first year students of the Prince Claus Conservatoire and took place in December 2004.

### Project 1: Vocal Students as Animateurs

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#### What is an animateur?

*An animateur is a practicing artist, in any form, who uses her skills, talents and personality to enable others to compose, design, devise, create, perform or engage with works of art of any kind'. (Animarts, 2003)*

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#### Aim of the project:

Vocal students from the classical and jazz singing departments of the Royal Conservatoire get acquainted with the role of animateur.

The project was part of the students' personal professional development programme in which they were challenged to reflect on their functioning as a musician and to experiment with new professional roles.

In this project it was not expected of them to become fully skilled animateurs, but to encounter what it means to be an animateur.

#### Learning context

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The project is an example of Non-formal learning because learning:

- was embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning but that contained an important learning element (learning to entertain an unknown audience with music in a particular public context, like a shopping center, a station hall, a community of nuns)
- referred to an organised educational activity outside the formal educational system (it was not part of the formal curriculum of the conservatoire; the training programme was devised mainly by the external partners and the students were coached by coaches from outside the conservatoire)
- was structured by a flexible curriculum that was tailor made, adapted to the needs of the learner group (vocal students getting acquainted with parts of the role of animateur: restricted to performing and inviting the audience to join in now and then)

- depended on reflecting in and on action fostered by an expert in the field, self-assessment and peer learning (students reflected in and on their actions with various experts in community music making).

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Content of the project:

The target group consisted of 25 **vocal students** from the Royal Conservatoire. Most students were 3<sup>rd</sup> years, but there were also enrolments from other years. The project was not compulsory, all students participated voluntarily.

The project was realised in close co-operation with the Yo Festival, that provided the actual framework (a community opera festival), facilities and the workshop leader.

The project had three phases:

The **first phase** consisted of a whole training day at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague. The training was supervised by Sean Gregory, head of the Professional Development Department of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Sean was assisted by two workshop leaders, graduates from the same department (and professional singers). The workshop focused on developing the creativity of the students, the rediscovery of *making* music, and trying out ways of communicating through music. They learned a few songs which were easy to improvise with. In the afternoon they prepared their performance at The Hague's central train station that was to take place at the end of the day. The first phase was an introduction to the next two phases.

The **second phase** was longer and more demanding. During three days of workshops and performances, the nine selected students worked on various aspects of community music making. They learned what it means to be a community musician, and how to 'arrange' music for use in the community. Apart from workshops in the studio of YO!, there were also try-out sessions on various locations around the city. These were arranged by the YO! Opera Festival. There were try-outs in, among other locations, a secondary school, a community of nuns and a shopping centre.

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The final afternoon they worked on the performances on the bus, that would take place one week later (phase three).

The students went through an intensive process during the second phase of the project. They were confronted with a very different way of working with music than they usually encountered.

The **third phase** consisted of the actual ‘performances’ during the YO! Opera Festival. Students, in groups of three, performed as amateurs on a city bus in Utrecht. For about thirty minutes they worked with each other and with the passengers to make the bus ride as musical as possible. They sang for the passengers and with the passengers and invited them to participate in musical games. Participation was voluntary, some passengers participated, others would not. Assessment took place by the students themselves: self assessment, but also peer assessment as they observed each other during the bus rides.

The whole project was monitored, evaluated and set up by two researchers of the Lectorate (Ninja Kors and Peter Mak). One of the aims of the research was to find out what can be learned from a project like this in order to accommodate and facilitate further non-formal learning projects in the conservatoire.

In the light of this aim the following outcomes are relevant:

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### Outcomes

#### **Empowerment**

Working from the strengths of the students proved to be a powerful means in motivating them to explore new roles as singers. If students were allowed to do what they were good at, using their vocal qualities to communicate with a broad and unknown audience in a particular public context, they were motivated to try out this new professional role; they were very creative in working out musical games for interaction with the passengers, and most convincing in their performances. If they were not allowed to work from their strengths, which was the case in the beginning of phase two, it was very hard for them to identify with their new role. They felt it was not ‘their thing’ and a few students even considered quitting the workshop.

#### **Peer learning**

The students gave each other tips, helped each other and inspired each other to make their musical activities more attractive and better fit for the purpose. As in many non-formal learning contexts there was a lot of informal learning during the project. Students used their free time (during breaks, lunches and transport) to discuss things and speak about their work.

### **Coaching fit for purpose**

The quality of the coaching was very important. In order to learn from what they were doing in these complex situations the coach had to reflect with the students on what they were doing and why. The coach had to stimulate the students' thinking by asking questions (starting a reflective conversation) and by giving them hints for further exploration. Without sufficient and adequate coaching students would have felt they were not learning anything.

### **Partnerships**

The partner who was taking the lead in organizing this kind of projects had to invest much time in communicating with the other partners about the goals of the project, about what was expected from the students and about what was expected from the partners in terms of support facilities and feedback. In this project we saw the differences between try-outs that were well communicated and try-outs where mutual expectations did not match. These try-outs resulted in a failure and were very demoralizing for the students.

### **Project Week Professional Orientation (project 2)**

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Aim of the project was:

Opening the minds of students.

Students reflected on their mission as a musician (the Project Week was the start of their study career counseling programme).

They were confronted with questions such as:

- What kind of musician do I want to be?
- What is my role as a musician in society?
- What are my strong and weak points?

Such questions often come up spontaneously when music students are immersed in unusual musical practices

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For this purpose:

All first year students of the Prince Claus Conservatoire performed an improvised composition in mixed groups for a special audience: children of a primary school and residents of a nursing home. The performances took place in the primary school and in the nursing home, so the location where they performed was unusual as well.

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The learning process in the groups was facilitated by fresh graduates from the Department of Personal Development of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. They worked with the students on an equal (non-hierarchical) base, empowering them by working from the strengths of the students, helping them to structure their composition and taking care that all members of the group contributed to it.

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The project is an example of informal learning because learning:

- was self-discovering, self-determined, open-ended, explorative, non-threatening, and enjoyable
- was not curriculum based (there was no training programme)
- was related to a number of self-regulatory processes such as self-initiated learning and self-monitoring of progress (the students had to decide what to do and how to do it; the tutors from the Guildhall were only facilitating this process, not supervising it)
- made an explicit appeal on intrinsic motivation (what do I like)
- was directed and mediated by peers
- was based on a collective, informal type of assessment (feedback) and self-reflection.

## Content

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During the week, working sessions were alternated with moments of reflection regarding the working process and the progress that was made.

On the third day a presentation was given by a member of the staff who informed the students about the children in the primary school and the residents of the nursing home. Students asked questions about the music they liked, the optimal length of the performance and the possibilities for interacting with the audience. The information they received was used for working on their compositions.

The performances took place on the fourth day: in the morning they performed in the primary school and in the afternoon in the nursing home. At the end of each performance there was an interactive moment of music making between the music students and the audience, lead by Sean Gregory.

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After the performance the students had informal conversations with members of the audience about how they experienced the music and the performance. At the end the students evaluated their performances with member from staff of both institutions.

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A few pictures of the performances in the primary school and the nursing home

On the last day there was an evaluation of the whole week in the morning and a performance for all the students and staff of the conservatoire at lunch time. The project week was concluded in the afternoon with a reflexive conversation between all first year students and Peter Renshaw about personal choices in the profession.

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During the week there were three sessions in which the students talked with their tutors of the Guildhall and their mentors of the Prince Claus Conservatoire about their role as a musician in society.

The whole week was monitored by a researcher of the lectorate. Students were not assessed on their performance. The lectorate asked students to fill in a questionnaire about what they liked and disliked this week, how they saw their future functioning as a professional, what expectations they had about studying at the Prince Claus Conservatoire and what they considered their strong and weak points in realising their ambitions. 71% of the students filled in the questionnaire.

In this lecture I would like to focus on the outcomes regarding the central aim of this project: opening the minds of students.

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### Outcomes

#### 1. **New ways of music making**

86% of the participating students highly appreciated the Project Week Professional Orientation. What they liked most about it were the things they usually never did: improvising, making your own composition, playing together with students from other departments. Students from the classical department asked for improvisation lessons in their curriculum. Quite a number of students asked for continuation of this kind of music making in the coming years of their study (that it would be not only for first year students).

## 2. **New audiences**

Most of the students had no experience with performing for children in a primary school or residents of a nursing home. They were moved by the enthusiastic reactions during and after the performance. The informal conversations with members of the audience after the performance in the nursing home made students realize what a great impact music can have on people in difficult circumstances.

## 3. **New possibilities in the profession**

The majority of the students mentioned that the view they had on their future functioning as a professional musician did not change dramatically as a result of their experiences in this project. But they realised that there are more possibilities than performing in a concert hall/a jazz club and/or teaching pupils who want to sing. A few students asked for further training in workshop leader skills.

## 4. **Connecting with other students**

The collaboration between students caused some students to let go of prejudices they had about their own musicianship and the musicianship of students from other departments. One student from the composition department said that during this week she had felt acknowledged as a performing musician by her fellow students for the first time. Some students from the jazz department were astonished to find that classical students were able to improvise; and some of the classical students were astonished themselves that they could improvise.

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## **Concluding remark**

*What can be learned from these projects?*

Working together with external partners was a crucial part in the success of both projects. It proved to be very important that the external partners involved in the project were well informed about what could be expected from the students and what their role was in the learning process. Students did not just come to perform at a free concert, they did these projects to acquire certain competencies.

The success of non-formal and informal learning projects therefore depends to a great extent on mutual agreement between the conservatoire and the external partner about aims, content, coaching and quality criteria. If the organization doesn't meet these standards students feel they don't learn anything and consider projects like these a waste of time.