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## **Lifelong Learning for Musicians**

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Our students face major changes in the cultural life and the music profession, and we need to ask how these future professional musicians are going to deal with this, how they will learn to function in new contexts and exploit opportunities (Smilde, 2004). I will address these issues, trying to clarify how the concept of Lifelong Learning can be of use, and what the challenges are.

The context of this research paper is a study called 'Lifelong Learning in Music', which I am carrying out with an international research and development group at two colleges in The Netherlands, namely the North Netherlands Conservatory in Groningen and the Royal Conservatory in The Hague. Furthermore, the Association of European Conservatories (AEC) has started a significant study on the music profession in Europe, on trends and changes in the cultural environment and what this means for future musicians and their required competences. I am involved in that project as well, and both are of course closely connected.

First, I would like to clarify of the Lifelong Learning Study and its research questions. I will then address these questions by pondering the issues of the changing musical and cultural landscape and the connecting needs of graduates. Following that I will discuss a conceptual framework of lifelong learning for preparing future musicians for the profession and reflect on which impacts this might have for their vocational training. Finally, I would like to give some examples of practice, as carried out in The Netherlands as pilot projects of this Lifelong Learning Study, and draw some conclusions.

I will start with a summary of the study "Lifelong Learning in Music" and then go into more depth in clarifying the different issues. The study examines the concept of Lifelong Learning and its consequences for musicians. The purpose is

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

To this end, the lifelong learning concept and its implementation are being investigated on the level of educational organization, curriculum, teachers, students and graduates. For this purpose we collect, process and generate knowledge in order to identify and apply a conceptual framework of lifelong learning. We test this framework through pilot projects with external partners and evaluate the projects in order to implement it in teaching programs or modules. The framework should generate adequate development of teachers' competence and culminate in a system of continuing professional development. We hope that improving skills in adaptation will lead to the increased employability of professional musicians in the future.

In this research the following questions are investigated:

- How do musicians actually learn?
- Which generic skills are needed to function effectively as a contemporary musician committed to self-management?
- What knowledge, attitudes, values, and artistic/creative skills are of importance?
- What are the changes in the music profession and what are the implications for graduates?
- How can their training and environment enable graduates to anticipate and respond to changes and what core competences do they need?
- What is the meaning of the concept of lifelong learning for the contents and design of education for students and graduates?

## **I The Changing Landscape and the Needs of Graduates**

The Research Group on the Music Profession of the AEC started to explore the changing cultural landscape in Europe and requested feed back during its annual congress two weeks ago in Birmingham. The challenges and implications of these changes and trends for the development of the music profession are numerous.

### *New Developments in Technology*

We see emerging changes in the area of technology, where new developments can lead to new ways of creating art and new ways of consuming art. There is a big diversity in the delivery of music. We see the interaction with other art forms becoming increasingly important.

### *The Changing Nature of Consumers*

The changing nature of consumers leads to different artistic programming (often shorter, more focused, cross-genres) and thus to new audiences. It requires knowledge and understanding about different art forms and multimedia, communication skills, and the ability to interact with the audience. The change in the age pyramid of people leads to a need for cultural offerings for leisure time.

### *Multicultural Society*

We deal with a multicultural society, which asks for political and cultural awareness, gives new artistic opportunities, and also leads to new audiences. The knowledge and experience of other (including oral) music traditions create new challenges and opportunities for cross-arts and cross-genre collaboration and in music education (think of new and different learning traditions and styles).

### *The Changing Nature of Musicians' Careers*

The nature of musicians' careers is changing: they have no longer a job for life, but a portfolio career. Entrepreneurship and other generic skills, including the ability to interact appropriately with presenters and promoters, become more and more important. The changing nature of musicians' careers asks for lifelong learning strategies, for transferable skills, and for personal and professional development. The research report "Motivating Students for Lifelong Learning" (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2000) stated that many of the eighteen-year-olds in 2000 would by 2010 be doing a job that has not yet been

invented. They will be using skills that do not currently exist. The changing nature of work makes lifelong learning imperative.

### *Standards of Excellence*

The standards of excellence required, (higher artistic quality, higher educational quality, leadership etc.), keep rising.

Earlier research by the AEC into continuing professional development for musicians and the needs of graduates (AEC, 2000 and 2001) showed that graduates encounter a variety of problems, nearly all of which are related to using generic skills and finding (or generating) work. Former students felt that the vocational preparation they received gave little indication of the world they would enter. The strongest needs expressed in their responses were for *life skills* (e.g. management, health issues, marketing, stage presentation, networking, skills of leadership), all the result of the new demands arising from the rapidly changing music profession.

The British report *Creating a Land with Music* (Youth Music 2002), which describes a research project on the work, education and training of present day professional musicians, gives an interesting overview of the broadening cultural landscape and the changing career patterns for musicians in the United Kingdom. The roles or areas of engagement for present-day musicians were looked at, and more than fifty multirelated roles or skills were identified. These were divided into related areas, and from there four central roles were defined: those of *composer, performer, leader and teacher*. These roles are overlapping and they are relevant in all genres of music.

For musicians, this means, according to the report, that training needs to be provided that offers quality, accessibility, diversity and flexibility. Recommendations encourage music colleges to provide a wider curriculum in which the students will be engaged in diverse music activities.

## **II The Conceptual Framework of Lifelong Learning: What Does the Concept of Lifelong Learning Really Mean?**

Lifelong Learning may be defined as a concept spanning an entire lifetime in a process of “...transforming experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and the senses” (Jarvis, 2002). The lifelong learning concept goes further than ‘continuing education’: it is an important conceptual framework for the improvement of people's employability and adaptability. The innovative dimension of the Lifelong Learning concept lies in a new approach of the process and context of learning (Fragoulis, 2002).

Characteristics important to the concept of Lifelong Learning include:

- a distinction between formal and informal learning;
- an emphasis on *learning* as opposed to *training*;
- different approaches to learning, including, for example, learning on the job or learning applied to the setting;
- professional and personal development;
- context-related assessments (through work-related situations).

When considering the lifelong learning concept, it is important to take a closer look into the definitions of formal, non-formal and informal learning.

- *Formal learning* can be defined as: learning within an organized and structured context that is explicitly designated as learning and may lead to a formal recognition. Learning is primarily *intentional*. Knowledge is mainly *explicit*. Formal learning takes place in Music Colleges and University contexts (Mak, 2004).
- *Non formal learning or education* can be defined as any organized educational activity outside the established formal system, “covering flexible and informal education, highly contextualized, and highly participatory” (Rogers, 2004).
- *Informal learning* is defined by Lucy Green (2002) as: “a variety of approaches to acquiring musical skills and knowledge outside formal educational settings.” She sees informal music learning as a set of ‘practices’, rather than ‘methods’, which can be both conscious and unconscious. Learning experiences can include interactions with other musicians who do not act as teachers as such, or by development of self-teaching techniques.
- *Links between formal and non-formal or informal education/learning* are critical for a conceptual framework of Lifelong Learning. Learning in non-formal situations can, in principle, generate the same competences as learning in a formal learning environment (Duvekot, 2002). Key qualifications of lifelong learners lie less in their knowledge of facts, theories and rules (knowing *that*) than in their ability to apply this knowledge to specific social, organizational and technological settings (knowing *how*) (Bjornavold, 2002). “There is a growing awareness that the skills and knowledge acquired in the course of formal education and training are no longer sufficient to cope with the rapid pace of technological and economical changes” (Fragoulis, 2002).

### *How should musicians learn?*

A musician has to function in different contexts, with roles including those of performer, composer, teacher, mentor, coach, leader, and so on. A musician will thus need to learn to respond accordingly to the variables in environmental contexts. This is why a conceptual framework of lifelong learning is important to underpin curricula in the music college. It implies creating adaptive learning environments in which music students can be trained to function effectively in a continuously changing professional practice. The music college’s educational practice in the conceptual framework of lifelong learning should be developed in association with professional organizations. Maintaining a strong relationship with the professional field and a strong network of relevant partners is crucial. Moreover, this educational practice should be relevant to the current and changing cultural landscape, explore different contexts, be intervention oriented, lead to relevant learning experiences, and illuminate attitudes and values.

Central to this educational practice and underpinning the earlier mentioned *life skills* is the notion of leadership of musicians; within personal, artistic, educational, business and community contexts. Therefore the following roles for future musicians should be explored:

The musician as:

- innovator (explorer, creator and risk taker)

- identifier (of missing skills, and means to refresh them)
- partner/co-operator (within formal partnerships)
- reflective practitioner (engaged in research and evaluative processes; able to contextualize experiences)
- collaborator (dialoguing with professional arts practitioners, students, teachers etc.)
- connector; in relation to conceptual frameworks (interconnection between different frames of references, interrelationships etc.)
- entrepreneur; job creator

These roles are crucial and can be applied to all kinds of practitioners in the music profession.

### **III What Does This Conceptual Framework Mean for Vocational Training?**

If the concept of lifelong learning is to be implemented successfully in the music college, it has to be organically connected and interwoven at all levels of the college: the (educational) organization, curriculum, teachers, students and alumni. Let us look at what this means for these different levels.

#### *Educational Organization*

A dynamic synergy between the college and the outside world is needed. Strategic alliances and partnerships are important to help reinforce the learning environment of the music college. The music college needs to fine tune and adjust constantly to the needs of the profession, and vice versa.

Schools should provide learning environments where students like to be - where they experience feelings of self-worth, excitement and challenge. Research shows that in order to be motivated for lifelong learning, children must “learn to learn” under self-motivated and self-managed conditions before they leave the formal education system. A challenging learning environment in the music college is created by establishing crossovers within musical disciplines and encompasses informal learning in non-formal learning contexts. The music college should be transformed into an artistic laboratory that supports a learning culture.

#### *Curriculum*

A curriculum emerging from the conceptual framework of lifelong learning is based on acquiring competences, requires team-teaching and receives feed back from external partners. It values both tradition and change. It is reflective of the outside world. It reevaluates existing knowledge.

Such a curriculum can be very individual, with different learning paths, and it can include portfolios, context-related assessment, and peer learning. Assessment and learning go hand in hand: what can be learned can be assessed, what can be assessed can be learned. Assessment in lifelong learning should give students the confidence, enthusiasm and commitment to face new challenges.

New forms of learning must be mirrored in examinations. Lifelong learning requires flexible curricula, individualised learning paths, and a continuing exploration of new technologies.

### *Teachers*

If curricula and assessment are to be reshaped, the nature of teaching will have to change. The most critical factor in high-quality teaching is high-quality learning. Teachers need to be lifelong learners in the first place (OECD, 2000).

The successful implementation of a lifelong learning conceptual framework in the music college is highly dependent on teachers' competences. Teachers are powerful role models for students in music college environments; they model the musician's future career by demonstrating a capacity to adapt to change and put this into practice both as a teacher and as a professional. Teachers can be pivotal in the transformative processes. Without this example, students are not likely to be motivated to become lifelong learners. Balancing between tradition and change in the curricula need not mean that music colleges have to get rid of master-apprentice schemes, but the "master" should invite and encourage curiosity, discovery, and the ability to question. Reflective practice and personal development for teachers is essential. Teachers are encouraged to become "enablers" rather than transmitters of knowledge.

### *Students*

A personal development plan should be central for students, leading to a relevant development of their portfolios, guided by teachers whose role is to be mentors. Self-management should be encouraged by asking basic questions such as 'what do I want to contribute as a musician to the society' and 'where do my strengths lie'? In short, *questions of identity* should be facilitated.

### *Alumni*

A solid alumni program is important for the provision of continuous information about the relevance of the curricula and changing needs in the profession to which alumni (musicians) will need to adapt.

## **IV Examples of Practice**

I would like to finish with some examples of practice in the framework of lifelong learning that have been carried out as pilot projects in the context of the study. Referring to the diverse levels of implementation of lifelong learning, these pilot projects are destined both for teachers' and students' professional development.

### *Artistic/Reflective Practice*

An artistic /reflective project for freshmen took place at the North Netherlands Conservatory nearly one year ago as the very first pilot project. It was developed in cooperation with creative workshop leaders and the head of the Department of Professional Development of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London. The aim was to help first-year students take a first step in realizing a personal development plan by working collectively to create and perform a composition and then reflecting on its realization. Four different improvised compositions were prepared for two different contexts: a primary school and a nursing home for elderly and disabled people.

The students were divided into four groups which were mixed by instruments and by principal study area. While composing their piece, the groups always had to bear in mind the audience for which they were going to perform and thus the context.

After two days of preparation the performances took place. Every student and workshop leader kept a personal journal during the project for evaluation and self assessment.

A majority of the students were positive about the idea of continuing to learn more about this kind of creative work. They also realized the great value of improvisation and composing for their development and growth as performing musicians. According to Sean Gregory, head of the Professional Development of the Guildhall School "...it was immediately apparent that this group of freshmen were already showing signs of becoming more informed, open minded and flexible musicians able to adapt not only to their immediate conservatory environment, but also to the two contrasting contexts of a school and a nursing home for elderly people"(Gregory, 2005).

### *Mentoring*

A second project currently taking place is centered around mentoring. This project encompasses the professional development of mentors. The target group comprises those teachers who will be the future study-career coaches, playing an important role in guiding students in such areas as their personal development plan, individual study pathway, portfolio, teaching, and entrepreneurship and in developing key competences like learning to learn - self-management; reflective thinking, and action. Mentors also facilitate such issues as self-assessment profiles and career choices.

The training centers around four key areas – a spectrum of related but distinct roles, the mentoring process, key qualities of a mentor, and the relationship between the mentor and the musician. It involves components like having dialogues with the students, enabling them to be inquiring and ask questions, and connecting the artistic potential of the student with reflective practice. In the end it will lead to the emergence of a wider model of continuing professional development for mentors in various environments (conductors in orchestras, orchestral musicians, teachers in high schools or in community music schools, and teachers in conservatories).

### *Animateurs*

As part of a Community Opera Festival which took place in the city of Utrecht in October, a pilot project called 'Opera in the Bus' was created, in which singers took upon themselves the role as *animateur* on a bus line. An animateur can be described as "a practicing artist, in any art form, who uses her or his skills, talents and personality to enable others to compose, design, devise, create, perform or engage with works of art of any kind"(Animarts, 2003).

Some twenty vocal students both from the classical and jazz department of the Royal Conservatory in The Hague took part in this pilot project. First, in September, a day of training took place, focusing on aspects of animateurship. At the end of the day, a presentation, engaging the audience, was given at The Hague Central Station.

At the beginning of October, nine of these students went on to work for three days under the guidance of a community musician, to prepare the 'Bus project' to take place one week later in Utrecht. These days were filled with musical exploration, developing communication skills, and working out ideas for lyrics and musical material for songs. The nine students each kept a journal.

During the weekend of the Community Opera Festival, the students, in groups of three, eventually took upon themselves the role of animateurs during rides on bus 5 (which ends in a

very multicultural area). The others acted by turn as peers, traveled along as passengers in the buses, and reflected on the project as a result of a number of questions.

The results are a description of an evaluative case study, which includes monitoring the process, mapping the tactics, and describing the skills and the use of the animateurs' personalities. This will be compiled together with the ingredients necessary to successfully implement this kind of informal learning in non-formal contexts into the conservatory curriculum, thus broadening the professional development of the singers.

Critical here was leading through doing: the bus was on the move, passengers got on and off the bus, and the animateur had to keep it going without stopping or explaining.

How did the students feel about it? The comments we got back through evaluations were very encouraging. Students mentioned:

- renewing personal motivation
- strengthening courage, confidence, and self-esteem;
- understanding the importance of teamwork and cooperation
- becoming more aware of roles and responsibilities in a team
- grasping the challenges of leadership and shared leadership
- building up trust in oneself and in the group
- thinking on one's feet and acting in the moment;
- becoming aware of the need for quality
- seeing the need to create new forms of music-making.

## V Conclusions

The connection with the *learning by doing* concept of lifelong learning in these projects is clear: it is a critical component of the concept of lifelong learning. Schön (1987) observes that

“the paradox of learning a really new competence is this: that a student cannot at first understand what he needs to learn (...). He cannot make an informed choice yet, because he does not grasp the essential meanings; he needs experience first. He must jump in without knowing what he needs to learn.”

The work in these projects is what Schön (1983) describes as “reflecting-in-action”. He gives an example of jazz musicians: they ‘reflect-in-action’ on the music they are collectively making and on their individual contributions to this. They reflect less in words than “through a feel for music.” Schön states that “in such processes reflection tends to focus interactively on the outcomes of the action, the action itself, and the intuitive knowing implicit in the action.” In his later work Schön defines this way of working as a “reflective practicum”: learning by doing, coaching rather than teaching, a dialogue of reciprocal reflection-in-action between coach and student.

In his study *Communities of Practice*, Eugene Wenger (1998) points out that learning transforms who we are and what we do, and he calls it as such an experience of identity. “It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming.” Wenger speaks about a “transformative practice of a learning community” as one which offers an ideal context for developing new understandings. Further, he states that the combination of engagement and imagination, or two ‘modes of belonging’, results in *reflective practice*.

## **Eight Challenges for the Future**

Several important outcomes arise from the study and its pilots relative to new educational approaches and new learning environments.

### *1. Collaboration with Shared Responsibility*

Working on an artistic product, where everyone is equally engaged in creating a composition does not involve a hierarchy. The learning environment is nonjudgmental, although there is a commitment to achieving quality.

### *2. Cross over within music disciplines using adaptive attitudes and communication skills*

Cross-genre work with a mix of students from different courses and countries (which is often the case in Europe) is both artistically and socially valuable. Having to adapt to different audiences and educational contexts helps foster new communication skills among participants.

### *3. Exploring and risk taking in a safe environment*

Growing trust in groups is an important process taking place, leading to self-confidence.

### *4. The music college as an artistic laboratory*

By providing a challenging learning environment, reflecting the workplace, encompassing informal learning in non-formal learning contexts and connecting to strategic partnerships, the music college provides a living, experimental and experiential experience to its students. Its ethos and culture are important contextual factors contributing to the motivation of students (OECD, 2000).

### *5. Entrepreneurship is essential to musicians*

In the words of a colleague at the Eastman School, entrepreneurship means “transforming an idea into an enterprise that creates value.” Many opportunities exist in this area, and it our task as educators to make students aware of this and weave it organically into the curriculum.

### *6. Personal development emerging from an awareness of one’s identity as a musician.*

Lifelong Learning means enabling musicians to develop personal pathways and an awareness of identity while fostering self exploration and reflection.

### *7. Strategies for motivation*

In order to sustain a strong intrinsic motivation for lifelong learning among students, it is important to be effective, ambitious, innovative in terms of curricula, teaching and learning and partnerships.

### *8. Continuing professional development is taken for granted.*

The implementation of a conceptual framework of Lifelong Learning in vocational training leads to the emergence of informed musicians who can interact in different professional contexts, whose attitudes are open-minded and sensitive, who can listen and respond, who can be flexible and adapt, and for whom a culture of continuing professional development is taken for granted.

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