

**LECTORATE**

**LIFELONG LEARNING IN MUSIC**

**Prins Claus Conservatoire, Groningen and the Royal Conservatoire,  
The Hague, The Netherlands**

**Lector, Rineke Smilde**

**LIFELONG LEARNING FOR MUSICIANS**

**A FRAMEWORK FOR MENTORING MUSICIANS**

**Peter Renshaw**

**Creative Learning Consultant  
Member of the Research Group of the Lectorate**

**March 2007**

This Framework has been modified from a Research Report by Peter Renshaw on *Lifelong Learning for Musicians: The Place of Mentoring*, published in May 2006 for the Lectorate Lifelong Learning in Music. Full details of the Report (ISBN 90-811273-2-2) and the research project, Lifelong Learning in Music, can be found on the website [www.lifelonglearninginmusic.org](http://www.lifelonglearninginmusic.org)

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**A FRAMEWORK FOR MENTORING MUSICIANS**

This proposed framework for mentoring musicians is intended to act as a guide for those individuals and organisations seeking to develop forms of lifelong learning that are rooted in a culture of reflective and reflexive practice. The principles underpinning the framework can only have resonance when applied to specific contexts. The substance of any mentoring scheme will vary depending on the purpose of the programme but the form of the mentoring process will embody the approaches to learning that are central to reflective and reflexive practice.

### **Definitions**

The term ‘mentoring’ and the ways in which the process is approached can vary enormously. Much depends on the purpose and context in which the mentoring is taking place. In this Framework the following definitions are used, thereby providing a spectrum of related but distinct roles:

#### *Buddying*

Buddying is an informal, friendly ‘confessional’ process in which experiences and insights are shared. It offers low-level support with little sense of progression and is generally only short-term, assisting a transition to a new job or new role.

#### *Shadowing*

A job role can be shadowed by a musician with an interest in learning about the role, without necessarily aspiring to do that particular job. The reasons for wishing to gain experience through shadowing and observation need to be clear and understood prior to the activity taking place. Shadowing might take the form of peer-to-peer conversation about their shared observation of practice. This could develop into a continuing professional peer relationship – i.e., peer mentoring.

#### *Counselling*

At the centre of counselling lies a conversation about personal development issues that arise from professional practice.

#### *Advising*

Advising constitutes a conversation about professional issues that arise from practice in a specific context (e.g., career orientation; possible new directions for the future; professional development opportunities; new networks and partnerships; marketing; budgeting).

#### *Tutoring*

Tutoring is an intentional, goal-oriented activity aimed at fostering the understanding and learning of knowledge through the process of questioning, critical dialogue.

#### *Instructing*

Instructing comprises a didactic form of imparting and passing on specialist knowledge and skills with little scope for dialogue – i.e., a mechanistic model of transmitting knowledge.

#### *Facilitating*

Facilitating is a dynamic, non-directive way of generating a conversation aimed at enabling or empowering a person(s) to take responsibility for their own learning and practice.

### *Coaching*

Coaching is an enabling process aimed at enhancing learning and development with the intention of improving performance in a specific aspect of practice. It has a short-term focus with an emphasis on immediate micro issues. (e.g., How can I improve my performance in this particular area? How can I strengthen my workshop practice? What are the most appropriate ways of making my team work together more effectively?)

### *Mentoring*

Mentoring is a more developmental process, including elements of coaching, facilitating and counselling, aimed at sharing knowledge and encouraging individual development. It has a longer-term focus designed to foster personal growth and to help an individual place their artistic, creative, personal and professional development in a wider cultural, social and educational context (e.g., Why am I doing what I do? How do I perceive my musical identity? In what ways does this impact on my professional life and work? Where am I going? What determines my long-term goals?).

## **Main elements of a mentoring process**

### *Quality of the learning environment*

- Developing a non-judgemental, non-threatening working relationship based on empathy, trust and mutual respect.
- Establishing a safe, supportive learning environment.
- Creating conditions that encourage openness, honesty, informality and risk-taking.
- Defining boundaries and ground rules before commencing the process.
- Building rapport and a clear understanding of who does what and why.
- Allowing the musician being mentored to determine their own agenda.

### *Reflective practice*

Reflective practice or 'reflection-on-action' entails adopting a critical perspective about the reasons and consequences of what we do in different contexts. By focusing on the why rather than the how, this process of self-observation and self-review enables a person to evaluate where they are coming from and to redefine their future actions. A reflective conversation helps a person to shift their perspective, change their behaviour and develop a sense of responsibility and ownership of their professional practice in a wide range of social and cultural contexts.

### *Facilitating a reflective conversation that focuses on:*

- Asking open questions – active listening – absorbing – rephrasing – reflecting – mirroring back – responding by leading and challenging the musician or student (i.e., the 'mentee') in a non-directive way.

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- Drawing out and enabling the musician to step outside and become a detached spectator on their own practice and on their own learning.
- Empowering the musician to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Encouraging the musician to develop listening and analytical skills that help them to build up a strong sense of ownership of their practice in different contexts.

- Deepening the musician's awareness and conviction in what they are doing by fostering a greater understanding of context and place.
- Strengthening the musician's ability to challenge their preconceived views, to take risks, to make new connections and to shift their perspective.
- Enabling the musician to clarify the principles underpinning their work, thereby strengthening their sense of critical engagement.
- Empowering the musician by asking neutral, open questions that encourage critical self-reflection and a sense of curiosity. This non-judgemental process, starting from where the musician is in practice, helps to shift their inner dialogue in a search for greater understanding of broader conceptual issues.
- Enabling the musician to examine the realities of their world, making explicit the process used by the person in building up their world view.
- Helping the musician to map out their future vision, suggesting new frames of reference for thinking about their practice in a wider cultural context.
- Encouraging the musician to adopt a critical perspective about the reasons and consequences of their practice. By focusing on the why rather than the how, this process is fundamental to our evaluation of what we do and helps to inform subsequent action.

### *Reflexive practice*

Reflexive practice or 'reflection-in-action' focuses on how the quality of a person's inner listening, attention and awareness can help them to identify their core purpose and motivation. This inner reflexive conversation, which sometimes cannot easily be put into words, strengthens a person's sense of identity and deepens their self-awareness and understanding of how their personal motivation, values and emotions can affect their professional practice. Being able to connect one's own inner listening to that of others is central to a sensitive mentoring relationship.

### *Facilitating a reflexive conversation that focuses on:*

- Helping the musician to clarify their motivation, to identify their core purpose, and to articulate and come to know their own central question.
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- Enabling the musician to find their own voice and to deepen their understanding of who they are.
  - Encouraging the musician to explore and verbally articulate the emotional interconnections between their identity (e.g., artistic, creative and cultural identity), motivation and professional practice.
  - Assisting the musician to develop an understanding of their relationship with their own music-making (e.g., What does it mean for you? Why do you do what you do?)

What do you care about in your music-making? What function does music-making play in your life?).

- Helping the musician to connect their self-awareness and sense of identity to their outer world – i.e., to the context in which they work and live.
- Encouraging the musician to reflect on their own story, their own biography, as a means of clarifying and deepening their understanding of themselves, their history and their personal and professional journey.
- Connecting the musician's tacit or implicit understanding with their explicit knowledge of their particular situation.
- Creating the possibility for the musician to engage with their emotional intelligence by:
  - becoming emotionally self-aware;
  - developing the ability to manage their emotions and feelings;
  - understanding how to use emotions for the benefit of their self-motivation;
  - recognising and responding to emotions in others through the use of empathy;
  - strengthening their interpersonal skills and understanding.

This brief analysis illustrates that effective mentoring conversations have to understand the importance of the dynamic relationship between reflection and reflexivity, between the outer and inner thought processes of the person engaged in mentoring. By drawing out the interconnections between the musician's artistic, personal and professional development, fundamental questions regarding identity, motivation, meaning and personal creativity become the heart of a continuing reflective and reflexive dialogue.

### **Key qualities of a mentor**

- Credibility and experience in the particular field. Breadth of knowledge and skills to be able to make personal, artistic and professional connections.
  - Having the ability to let go of one's own ego, status and authority in order to understand the life of the musician and adopt a listening, supportive role. The mentor must feel comfortable in this role.
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- Empathy and interpersonal skills in order to ask appropriate questions regarding the personal development of the musician.
  - Understanding what it is to be a musician. A person's inner musical voice can sometimes best be illuminated by observing and listening to how they engage in music-making, rather than just talking about it.
  - Having the skills and insight to act as a sounding board for the musician. This is central to any developmental process aimed at enabling a person to clarify their sense of direction, to identify their strengths and realise their potential.

- Having a flexible range of language registers in order to frame appropriate questions, respond to different personal narratives and communicate meaningfully, understanding where the musician is coming from.
- Having the ability to be self-reflective and self-aware in order to nurture these qualities in others (e.g., questioning motivation; separating out professional from personal issues).
- Being open and non-judgemental in relation to the musician's individual and professional context.

### **Relationship between the mentor and the musician**

- A one-to-one relationship in which the mentor has the knowledge and skills to empathise and understand the position of the musician. Mentoring musicians, whether they are professionals, students or young people, has to be approached with understanding and sensitivity, especially as the 'conversation' could include non-verbal dialogue or exchange. Most musicians have chosen music as their primary means of communication. In general, they connect with each other through making music together, less through verbal, analytical, reflective processes. This can affect the dynamics of the mentoring relationship.
- A reciprocal relationship in which the mentor respects the musician's potential for professional and personal development, and acknowledges their motivation for extending themselves and reviewing their work.
- A confidential relationship based on trust and parity of respect. Details held in confidence cannot be divulged to other individuals or organisations.
- An effective relationship depends in part on the strength and integrity of a working partnership that is sometimes bound by an unwritten contract where mutual roles, responsibilities and expectations are made explicit.
- Clear boundaries have to be established within the personal, artistic and professional domains if the relationship is to work. For example:

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- A mentor acts primarily as a facilitator enabling the musician to make their own informed judgements. Advice is most appropriately offered about those professional issues that might arise from practice in a specific context.
- In the personal domain a clear distinction has to be maintained between the roles of coach, mentor and counsellor.
- In the artistic domain the focal point of the mentoring has to be the music practice itself (e.g., performing, composing, leading and teaching). The distinct roles of mentoring, counselling and advising have to be understood and respected.

- The mentoring relationship should be time-based with a beginning and an end. It should not be ongoing as compared with peer professional relationships or peer mentoring.

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## FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON MENTORING

### Mentoring in the cultural sector

The following view of mentoring is drawn from the work of Clutterbuck and Megginson (1999) and it is cited in the *Coaching and Mentoring Report* prepared by Tessa Brooks (2006) for the Cultural Leadership Programme of Arts Council England.

#### *Definition of mentoring*

Mentoring is off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking (Clutterbuck et al, 1999, p.3).

#### *Characteristics of mentoring*

- one-to-one
- off-line but often between individuals having a shared organisational context
- developmental
- about *mutual* learning and growth
- focused upon personal and professional growth, often specifically in the area of professional development
- on-going and which may last over a long period of time
- one in which the mentor is typically more experienced than the ‘mentee’ (not exclusively so) and it is this experience which is brought into the relationship.

#### *Competencies of effective mentors*

Self-awareness (understanding self)	_____	Behavioural awareness (understanding others)	
Conceptual modelling	_____	Communication competence	
Sense of proportion/humour	_____	Professional savvy	
Commitment to own learning clarity	_____	Interest in developing others	Goal
		Relationship management	

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Clutterbuck points out that fulfilling such exacting demands “requires not only self-awareness and high level skills but also development for the mentor. It is this which is often neglected in setting up mentoring schemes with the resulting risk of failure in the establishment of productive relationships and disappointment on both sides. Not everyone makes a good mentor” (see Brooks, 2006, p.13).

#### *Structure for mentoring*

A structured approach to mentoring would aim at focusing on:

- an adequate supply of suitable mentors for different contexts
- high quality mentor training
- a skilled matching process
- shared clarity of purpose
- on-going review and evaluation.

According to Tessa Brooks ( 2006) “structured arrangements are absolutely essential .... but that within these, the relationships themselves should be encouraged to be as informal as possible (p.22)”.

### **Technical definitions of reflective and reflexive practice**

#### *Reflective practice*

Reflective practice or ‘reflection-on-action’ entails adopting a critical perspective about the reasons and consequences of what we do in different contexts. By focusing on the why rather than the how, this process becomes fundamental to the evaluation of what we do and helps to inform our subsequent action. Critical reflection enables us to transform our learning and change the way we make sense of our experience, our world view, our understanding of people and knowledge of ourselves. This perspective becomes integral to our conception, planning, delivery and evaluation of any activity or project. Basically, it sharpens our capacity for self-evaluation and critical self-review.

#### *Reflexive practice*

Reflexive practice or ‘reflection-in-action’ focuses on the quality of listening, attention and awareness that enables processes and performance to be monitored, modified and shaped from the inside in the moment of action. Much of the knowledge gained cannot be put into words. It remains tacit in the form of implicit understanding, which is more often caught and learned through a process of apprenticeship. What people know about what they do and why they are doing it is largely carried in their ‘practical consciousness’. This tacit knowledge, so central to our understanding of ourselves, of others and of our historical and social conditions, is rooted in human action within different social contexts. Although often embedded in collaborative practice that enjoys a shared history, values and forms of understanding, tacit knowledge has a personal quality that makes it impossible to formalise and describe in verbal language. Being able to connect ones reflexive awareness to the tacit understanding of others is fundamental in an effective mentoring relationship.

### **Key questions connected to the mentoring of musicians**

- What is the place of reflective and reflexive practice in the lifelong learning of musicians?
- What modes of learning are central to the mentoring of musicians?

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- What role might the mentoring process play in the experiential learning of musicians?
- In what ways can mentoring help musicians understand and connect to the different contexts in which they work?
- How far is effective mentoring dependent on understanding the ways in which musicians are rooted in different communities of practice?
- To what extent should the mentoring process facilitate a reflective conversation that encourages musicians to question the assumptions underlying their professional practice?
- How far can the mentoring process help to generate an institutional conversation that can contribute to shifting the culture of an organisation?
- In what ways might a mentoring conversation help to draw out the relationship between reflection and reflexivity, between the outer and inner dialogue of the musician being mentored?
- How might one characterise the nature of reflexive practice or ‘reflection-in-action’ in ways that make sense to musicians?

- To what extent might the mentoring process include a ‘musical conversation’ that encourages the musician to be reflective about their music-making or improvising in the moment of action? How far might this approach help to capture those subtle nuances and implicit understandings that are caught in the moment but are not easily put into words?

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