

LEARNING MUSIC IN FORMAL, NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONTEXTS

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1. Introduction: Lifelong Learning and the Music Profession

In her research approach of the lectorate *Lifelong Learning in Music*, Rineke Smilde, head of the lectorate, makes the following remarks on the changes in the musical profession and the consequences of these changes for the education of future professional musicians:

Today's musicians face major changes in their work place, changes that are taken place at an ever-increasing pace. This results amongst other things in a career consisting of several successive, brief and/or part-time periods of employment, in which one can encounter different disciplines as well (portfolio career). More than ever before, the future professional musician is confronted with questions of how to function in new contexts and how to function adequately in a continuously changing professional practice (Smilde, 2004, p.5).

The student/graduate is well trained as a musician, is able to reflect on his own abilities and thus knows his strengths and weaknesses. He has the skills and the flexibility to explore new roads and find new possibilities. He has a reflecting and pro-active attitude (Smilde, 2004, p. 7).

Given the many unpredictable and changeable issues arising in the music profession today, young professionals cannot be expected to have a ready made answer to everything. It is far more useful if they acquire the skills to find out the answer for themselves.

The challenge facing education and vocational training is to equip people not only with the ability to adapt to change, but also with the ability to shape the direction of change. Laying the foundation for learning later in life should be a major objective of initial education. Education and training should be developed within a framework where lifelong learning is seen as the overarching concept (Wurzburg 2002). In terms of content, it would encourage the provision of key skills and a broad competence base, interdisciplinary approaches, as well as the ability for individuals to learn in an autonomous and creative manner. In terms of learning processes, it would imply adapting them to individuals' needs and reformulating the teacher/learner relation as an active interaction promoted by support, counselling and guidance services to facilitate the creative use of knowledge. In terms of outcomes, it implies the need to develop possibilities for greater visibility, validation and mutual recognition of the learning outcomes achieved in all three learning settings (formal, non-formal and informal; Fragoulis, 2002).

Having excellent musical performance skills only is no longer a guarantee in finding a job or holding it. Generic skills are equally important because these skills enable musical professionals to be adaptive, enterprising and performative, to meet the demands of today's music business. Common elements of various listings of generic skills are:

- basic/fundamental skills - such as literacy, using numbers, using technology;

- people-related skills - such as communication, interpersonal, teamwork, customer-service skills;
- conceptual/thinking skills - such as collecting and organising information, problem-solving, planning and organising, learning-to-learn skills, thinking innovatively and creatively, systems thinking;
- personal skills and attributes - such as being responsible, resourceful, flexible, able to manage own time, having self-esteem;
- skills related to the business world - such as innovation skills, enterprise skills;
- skills related to the community - such as civic or citizenship knowledge and skills.(<http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr2102b.pdf>.)

These skills cannot be acquired between the walls of the conservatoire only (in a formal learning context). Incorporation of learning contexts that resemble real professional situations is a necessity in achieving this goal. These non-formal and informal learning contexts are highly connected to experiential learning. Reflection is a powerful means to learn from experiences, to make explicit what is implicit acquired.

In this article I explore the various learning contexts (formal, non-formal and informal), which are relevant for the training of professional musicians as lifelong learners. The learning contexts will be distinguished from each other in terms of definition, learning and teaching tactics, and learning outcomes. Special attention is paid to the kinds of learning processes and outcomes that take place within in these various contexts. Subsequently I indicate how the various learning contexts can be interrelated for the benefit of the training of professional musicians.

2. Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning: a Conceptual Analysis

Before entering deeper into this subject matter the following crucial terms have to be defined briefly first. *Formal, non-formal* and *informal learning* has to do with the context in which learning takes place. In the conservatoire as part of the curriculum (formal), outside the conservatoire but organized (non-formal) and/or as a form a self-initiative (informal). The kinds of learning within these contexts are *intentional* (purposeful learning) and *incidental learning* (learning as a by-product of doing). The learning results are *explicit* (the student can verbalize what he knows) and *implicit* (the student acts adequately in the situation she is in, without being able to explain why and how).

2.1 Formal Learning

Definition

Learning that:

- occurs within an organized and structured context (e.g. within the conservatoire), that is explicitly designated as learning;
- is based on a curriculum (structured in terms of learning objectives, duration, content, method and assessment);
- aims at the acquisition of relevant musical competencies that are specific for the music profession;
- is structured in 1st cycle studies (e.g. Bachelor) and 2nd cycle studies (Master) programs, which include major/minor components;

- is credential based and leads to a formal recognition;
- requires specific entry competencies from students.

Learning and teaching

Learning is primarily intentional: aims (what to learn), learning tactics (how to learn) and performance levels (when is it sufficient) are specified. The learning process is, especially in the 1st cycle, primarily teacher-directed, and the instruction is given by qualified teachers or mentors.

Outcomes

Assessment is related to intentional learning and explicit knowledge (knowledge that can be verbalized). Incidental learning and implicit knowledge (unintended learning results) are not formally recognized.

2.2 *Non-Formal Learning*

Definition

Learning that:

- refers to any organised educational activity that takes place outside the established formal education system (outside of the conservatoire);
- is highly contextualised, intended to serve identifiable learning clientele and objectives (www.infed.org);
- can be tailor-made, adapted to the needs of the learner group (Rogers, 2004);
- is based on a curriculum that is less structured in terms of learning objectives, content, method and assessment than formal curricula are;
- aims at the acquisition of generic skills related to the musical profession;
- is mostly short term (less than one year) and part-time;
- can be credential based but this is not necessary.

Learning and teaching

Learning is intentional as well as incidental. The focus here is on learning by doing. Learning from fellow students/participants is as important as learning from the teacher or mentor. Coaching is the dominant teaching tactic in this context. Coaches don't have to be always qualified music teachers, musical experts and other experts related to the professional field. Staff members of orchestras and music schools etc. can be involved too.

Outcomes

Incidental learning outcomes are as much valued as intentional learning outcomes. Reflection is a powerful means to learn from experience, to make explicit what is acquired implicit.

2.3 *Informal learning*

Definition

Learning that:

- contains unplanned and planned learning activities resulting from daily life situations (Bjornavold, 2002);
- is highly related to the personal learning drives and motives of the individual learner;
- is not structured in terms of formally described learning objectives;
- does not lead to certification but can be assessed as such in a formal learning context (prior acquired competencies).

Learning and teaching

'By 'informal music learning' I mean a variety of approaches to acquiring musical skills and knowledge outside formal educational settings. I will in general terms refer to informal music learning as a set of 'practices', rather than 'methods'. Informal music practices may be both conscious and unconscious. They include encountering unsought learning experiences through enculturation in the musical environment; learning through interaction with others such as peers, family, or other musicians who are not acting as teachers in formal capacities; and developing independent learning methods through self-teaching techniques (Green, 2002 p. 16).

Musicians working in the field of classical music learn a lot from talking and working with colleagues in the professional field. The culture of the professions classical musicians are traditionally working in (orchestras, music schools) is often very directive and has strong implicit standards about how to behave (Price, 2002).

Outcomes

Learning can be *intentional* (but not teacher-directed) as well as *incidental*.

Young popular musicians largely teach themselves to play music, through processes of skill and knowledge acquisition that are both conscious and unconscious. One central early learning practice is solitary and involves purposive and attentive listening linked to the close copying of recordings, as well as more distracted listening leading to close imitation and improvisatory adaptation. The written is always secondary to the aural. Another central practice involves learning from each other in pairs and groups, through casual encounters and organized sessions, both aside from and during music making. Through such interaction they copy and exchange ideas, knowledge and techniques, learn to play together, including making covers, improvisations and compositions, of original music (Green, 2002 p. 97).

The learning results can be implicit as well as explicit. It doesn't lead to a qualification but it can be recognised within a formal context (see under definition of informal learning). Musicians working in the field of classical music are constantly expanding their repertoire by choosing and practicing new pieces of music by themselves. By this they not only learn new repertoire but they also improve their practice routines (Price, 2002).

3. Learning Context and the Training of Professional Musicians

In a *formal learning context* learning is abstracted from real life contexts (de-contextualized). The learning results are skills and knowledge that are meant to be applicable in various life/professional contexts. The curriculum is hierarchic: elementary skills and knowledge are acquired first on which more complex forms are built. In conservatoires educational emphasis in formal training is put on the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are directly related to mastering the trade (e.g. mastering the violin). The kind of learning that is focused on is highly intentional. The student knows what to learn and how to learn, and what will be assessed (and how). Motivation often drops if the students don't see the connection between what has to be learned and the personal or professional benefit of it. The learning results that are assessed and formally recognized are of an explicit nature. Assessment is more focused on product than process. Qualified teachers are responsible for the training process. Formal learning is related to initial education in higher vocation education contexts, a long (more than one year) and intensive (mostly full time) training, preparing students for entering the profession.

In a *non-formal learning context* learning is related to, and often situated in, a real life (professional) context. The skills, knowledge and attitudes that are learned have a high practical value and are often acquired on the working spot or directly applied in the working situation. The context in which the student has to act and to learn is complex and requires not only knowing *that* (facts, skills) but also knowing *how* (how to apply them). The focus here is more on learning by doing than learning from books or instructions. Performativity (utility) will be a major criterion in legitimating knowledge, which is experimental, practical and pragmatic. Metacognition and generic skills are equally important as skills in operating successfully. The social component in the music profession nowadays is becoming more and more important (Kors, 2005). Reflection is a powerful means for operating successfully in these complex situations.

Implicit knowledge as a result of learning by doing is conditional for reflecting on these real life experiences and for making this kind of knowledge explicit. This making explicit is conditional for transferring this knowledge to other more or less similar instances.

Assessment is focused as much on the product (what did the student learn) as on the process (how did the student learn) of learning. In non-formal learning contexts the teacher is not always a qualified teacher. Because not only musical knowledge and skills are relevant in a professional situation, the teacher in a non-formal musical learning context can be a musical as well as another expert in the working field. Learning from fellow students is an important aspect too. Motivation is less a problem because learning itself takes place within the context of the musical profession. In the context of training (future) professional musicians non-formal learning is related to programmes of professional integration (work placement) and to programmes of continuing professional development. The training takes less than one year (often much shorter) and often can be attended part time. The outcomes can lead to the acquisition of a formally recognised diploma, but need not; it can also lead to a certificate.

In an *informal learning context* the learning context is real life without interference of any kind of educational authority. It involves all learning without a (qualified) teacher. All aspects of learning – what to learn, how to learn and for how long – are controlled by the individual learner. Learning is strongly motivated and directed by personal needs. In music informal learning takes place when musicians are working together on a more or less equal base. Listening to each other, imitating others and asking questions are important learning tactics in such a context. Learning itself can be highly intentional (the individual wants to master a particular song or technique) as well as incidental (becoming familiar with a particular style of music by playing examples of this style). The learning result is often more implicit than explicit. Reflection on what is learned is optional and often limited. The acquired knowledge and skills are highly applicable to the context in which they have been learned, transference to less similar contexts is often problematic and requires intensive practice. (Popular musicians e.g. who are highly skilful in playing within a particular style of music, have great difficulty in making use of their knowledge and skills in performing music in a not-familiar style). Recordings, peers and experts (not in a teaching role) act as models for learning. Assessment of learning is highly personal and mostly product related (fitting the purpose of learning within the specific context). Learning outcomes need not lead to a diploma or certificate.

4. Learning Contexts in the Education of Professional Musicians

Earlier we stated that professional musicians of today and in the future have to be excellent musicians, be able to adapt their skills to various working contexts and to take the lead in their

professional development. To install the professional musician with these competencies, formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts are of benefit.

To summarize: in a formal learning context the purpose, the tactics and the outcomes are well specified. Fundamental musical knowledge and skills are effectively and efficiently transferred and learned in a formal learning context in which qualified teachers help the student in guiding his learning process. Mistakes are prevented where they harm the further development of the musician. A problem can be the experienced relevance of that what is learned. In non-formal learning contexts students learn how and when to use their musical skills and knowledge, adapted to the purposes of the particular context in which they work and learn. Metacognition and generic skills are trained to adapt the present musical knowledge and skills to the context in which they are used. The learning is fostered by reflecting on the learning experience by the student himself and other persons who are present in the learning situation (experts, fellow students). Besides these skills a lot of relevant attitudes like openness to other people and working ethos are moulded in non-formal learning contexts. Informal learning contexts are relevant too for the education of professional musicians. In such a context the student is totally responsible for his learning and learning results. Learning here is strongly connected to personal needs and desires. Students learn to take responsibility, and take the lead in their professional development.

Institutions for the education of professional musicians have to make use of the various learning contexts for educating professional musicians. Change of context makes that the student can master the various competencies that are necessary to engage in the music profession of today. Offering students a solid musical base, learning them to adapt their skills to differing contexts and to shape their own professional development means alternation between learning within the environment of the school building and learning outside the school building: in guided work settings or in a setting chosen by the student.

The connecting feature between learning in these various contexts is reflection. Wenger (1998) points out that learning transforms who we are and what we do, and calls it an experience of identity. "It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming". He speaks about a "transformative practice of a learning community" as one which offers an ideal context for developing new understandings. Learning from experience is the motor to lifelong learning.

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