

Musical Diversity in Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Music Education

Navigating in a rapidly changing cultural landscape is the main challenge of today's musician. Major societal changes take place and they are a major influence on the development of the profession. Musicians are confronted with questions of 'how can I function in a flexible way and exploit opportunities in new and rapidly changing cultural contexts'?

We can argue that the main trends and changes in post-modern life, with its reciprocal relationship between on the one hand the focus on the local and on the other hand the aspects of globalisation, are found extensively in the arts and in music. New art forms, new music and new artistic languages, often using new technology, are shaping a diverse cultural landscape. Musical diversity is the response to the changing cultural landscape, and music education needs to resonate with where people are.

The sociologist and philosopher Zygmund Bauman (2005) stresses that in no previous time has the necessity for making *choices* been so prominent, one reason being that people fear to be 'left behind' or excluded because of failing to commit to new demands. This has major implications for education and learning. Learning, Bauman says, should be lifelong, because lifelong learning equips us to make our choices, and it especially helps us "to salvage the conditions that make choice available and within our power" (p. 128).

We can define lifelong learning in a nutshell as: *a dynamic concept of learning that enables us to respond to the needs generated by continuous change*. Lifelong learning should enable us to function in a flexible, responsive and pro-active way. Characteristic for the concept of lifelong learning is in a nutshell that there can be different approaches to learning, and, very important, the interconnection of professional and personal development. The innovative dimension of lifelong learning lies in a new approach to the process and context of learning (Fragoulis 2002).

Lifelong learning and its implications clearly range from the global world to the local region, or, as we may say: on the level of society at large, on the level of the educational institution and learning environment, and on the level of the individual in society. The role of education is no longer restricted to the first phase of people's lives but is more and more of importance throughout the life course. Education is permeating all life phases. This is why the concept of 'lifewide' learning is important as well, because people do not learn only throughout a lifelong process but also in an often intensive way from transitions in their lives. Learning cannot be seen apart from people's biographies.

The changing cultural landscape shows itself in the careers of today's musicians. They don't have 'jobs for life' anymore, but have flexible career patterns. They are increasingly self-employed and therefore need to be entrepreneurs. They are challenged to collaborate with practitioners in other arts and societal cross-sector settings (like business, health care, young offenders, educational projects, etc.). It is not an easy task to function successfully as a professional musician within the various demands of today. Being talented and having many artistic skills is no longer enough. Musicians need transferable skills, like self-management, decision-making skills and business skills. On top of it we also need to get rid of a too narrow definition of quality, which cannot be limited to only quality of performance. When making qualitative judgments arising from various processes, projects and performances in different

contexts, contextual variables *need* to be taken into account. Let us listen to Peter Renshaw (2010):

“This challenge to re-engage people in their creative and cultural lives raises fundamental questions as to what might count as quality and excellence in the wide range of contexts in which artists work. It also has major implications for the learning and continuing professional development of all kinds of arts practitioners – performers, improvisers, composers, choreographers, artists DJs, curators and producers. Many of these practitioners are increasingly extending their roles and working closely with teachers and community leaders. In the near future this is likely to become the norm as flexible patterns of work are embedded in their portfolio careers.”

The most important feature required within today’s music profession is indeed the need to connect to the context. Any musician who wants to make sense of today’s complex world and really connect to new audiences must be able to respond artistically to changing societal contexts. We might call it a sort of holistic musicianship which reflects today’s change. A good community musician is able to do this. (I don’t like the word by the way, because for me every musician is a community musician. I use the word here, because then we know what we speak about in any case). ‘Community musicians’ devise and lead creative workshops in health care, social care, in prisons and the like. Creative workshops are developed by music leaders in very diverse venues and are underpinned by the notion that the improvisational nature of collaborative approaches in workshops can lead to people expressing themselves creatively, instilling a sense of shared ownership and responsibility both in the *process* and in the final *product* of the workshop (Gregory 2005). Exchange of ideas and skills among the participants (‘participatory learning’) is an integral part of the process.

The example of the community musician shows clearly that musicians today have to respond to the variables within different cultural contexts, in other words to diversity, and take up various interrelated roles that include those of performer, composer, teacher, mentor, coach, leader and many more. They need to be innovative, reflective, responsive, collegial and entrepreneurial. Listen to the account of Sean Gregory (Smilde, 2009a):

“The roles can differ. You can be a leader, a facilitator, a composer, arranger, a supporting instrumentalist, you can be the person who just makes it happen; you can shift roles. Artistically it comes back to this trying to capture both the essence and the practice of this work, what it actually is, without putting it into a box, and at the same time defining it enough so that it stops being just called ‘outreach’ or ‘educational and community work’. The principle is the notion that you are with a group of people, that you encourage them to come out with their own ideas (...) The key part is that *together you develop something into something else*. That can go for young children with no skills whatsoever or a highly trained dancer or a West African musician, searching and exploring new meeting points, new languages and possibilities.”

How then do we create space for ‘diversity’ in music education?

Biographical research which I conducted amongst musicians showed clearly that three interdependent incentives appear fundamental to the process of shaping musicians’ self-identity, motivation and learning: the first being *singing and informal music-making throughout childhood*, the second *improvisation*, and the third was *engagement in high quality performance*. I observed strong informal learning processes of musicians within formal

settings, sometimes within non-formal contexts. Learning which took shape in this way strengthened musicians' feeling of ownership of their learning. Furthermore it showed that where musicians encountered an adaptive learning environment in music educational contexts which gave them space for their own 'artistic laboratories' where they could develop their (professional) identities, they then functioned in the best way.

A third important given for musicians was their leadership, emerging through collaborative artistic practice, underpinned by qualities like informed decision making adaptability, flexibility and committed values and attitudes. The ability to lead by example and attitude, while developing and using transferable skills and social skills is highly relevant when connecting as an artist to different cultural contexts.

When we really want to address diversity we can learn from the 'informal' settings which we encounter within cultural diversity, where motivation and identity are so organically interwoven. Why not connect this to our formal educational system? This means that we need 'T shaped musicians', who combine depth (specialized professional knowledge and skills) and breadth (transferable life skills, with a deep understanding of the context).

For music educational settings this means that we would want to create:

- a collaborative learning environment which is non-judgmental, with a strong commitment to quality and knowledgeability;
- curricula, teaching and learning, as well as relevant professional partnerships which are effective, ambitious and innovative and thus establish a strong intrinsic motivation for lifelong learning amongst learners;
- the possibility to explore and take risks in a safe environment, thereby leading to increased self-confidence;
- an educational laboratory whose challenging learning environment reflects the workplace, encompassing informal learning in non-formal learning contexts;
- enhanced cross-over between musical, cross-arts, cross-sectoral and trans-cultural disciplines, fostering a capacity to adapt and be flexible, and the development of new communication skills through interactions with different audiences, social and cultural contexts;
- a culture in which ideas can be transformed entrepreneurially and where the concept of leadership in a variety of contexts is valued and woven organically into the curriculum;
- increased personal development emerging from an awareness of one's identity as a musician, fostered by self-exploration and self-management;
- continuing professional development integrated into all aspects of music education.