

# Lifelong Learning as a Challenge for Music Colleges

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A formação  
continuada como  
um desafio às  
Faculdades de  
Música

## Abstract

The concept of *lifelong learning* refers to the several skills able to provide for needs of music graduates. Such as it occurs with other areas, the domain of music is in constant modification, either for the incorporation of new technologies, either had the cultural demands or for the multiplicity of activities that music has accumulated. Observing the deficits in the formation of the students, the *lifelong learning* appears as an alternative to enable the acquisition of tools which improve continuously the professional. The *lifelong learning* includes a new notion of knowledge that brings together the formal, non-formal and informal teaching, making possible experiences of knowledge objective and practical, as a way to consider the several challenges that appear to the profession. To hold the *lifelong learning* in the Music Colleges as an objective many changes are requested, and all the structures of the Music Colleges must be engaged.

Keywords: lifelong learning, knowledge, Music Colleges

## Resumo

O conceito de *formação continuada* refere-se a uma série de ferramentas capazes de suprir necessidades de alunos graduados em música. Tal como ocorre com outras áreas, o domínio da música está em constante modificação, seja pela incorporação de novas tecnologias, seja devido a demandas culturais ou pela multiplicidade de atividades que a música tem abarcado. Partindo da consideração de pontos deficitários na formação dos alunos, a *formação continuada* surge como alternativa para facilitar a aquisição de ferramentas que capacitem continuamente o profissional. A *formação continuada* engloba uma nova noção de aprendizagem que congrega o ensino formal, não-formal e informal, possibilitando a transformação de experiências em conhecimento objetivo e prático, considerando os diversos desafios que se apresentam à profissão. Assumir a *formação continuada* como alternativa implica modificações e engajamento de todas as estruturas das Faculdades de Música.

Palavras-chave: formação continuada, conhecimento, Faculdades de Música

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## Introduction

**O**ur students face major changes in the music profession, and Music Colleges need to ask themselves questions about how future professional musicians learn to function in new contexts and exploit opportunities (Smilde, 2004). In this paper I will address these issues, trying to clarify how the concept of Lifelong Learning in Music can be of use, and what the challenges are for Music Colleges.

The context of this research paper is a project on Lifelong Learning in Music, which I am at present carrying out with a research and development group at two colleges in The Netherlands, namely the North Netherlands Conservatoire in Groningen, and the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague.

This paper consists of four parts: in **part I** I will go into needs of graduates and the changing industry; **part II** will be about using a conceptual framework of Lifelong Learning for preparing future professional musicians for the work place, in **part III** I will reflect on what this means for the Music College and **part IV** will give an example of practice of Lifelong Learning in the Music College.

## I Needs of graduates / Changing Industry

### The needs of graduates

Research by the European Association of Conservatories into Continuing Professional Development for Musicians and the needs of graduates (AEC, 1999 and 2001) shows 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 three top skills that they had missed during training at the conservatory were: health issues, improvisation, and participation in chamber music and larger ensemble performance. The three top skills that, according to the respondents, should be offered after graduation were further instrumental and technical training, marketing and further development of teaching skills.

The strongest needs expressed in the responses were for *life skills* (e.g. management, health issues, marketing, stage presentation, networking, skills of leadership in different contexts).

### A changing music profession

This is of course due to the new demands arising from the rapidly changing music profession. The report *Creating a Land with Music* (2002), which details 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 UK.

The roles or areas of engagement for the present day musicians were looked at, and more than 50 multi-related 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 music colleges need to provide training that offers quality, accessibility, diversity and flexibility. Recommendations encourage music colleges to provide a wider curriculum through diverse music activities in which the students will be engaged.

Although this research was performed in the UK, outcomes can, when comparing results of research on European level, count for a larger part of Europe.

## **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 'permanent 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 to learning.

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 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, (and that is) highly contextualized, and highly participatory” (Rogers, 2004).

## **Informal learning**

Green (2002) defines informal learning 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 and 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).

As a musician one has to function in different contexts, with roles including those of performer, composer, teacher, mentor, coach, facilitator, and leader. 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. Doing so implies creating adaptive learning environments in which music students can be trained to function effectively in a continuously changing professional practice.

The development of the music college’s educational practice in the conceptual framework of Lifelong Learning should take place in association with professional organizations. Maintaining a strong relationship with the professional field (workplace, organizations) 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; leadership within personal, artistic, educational and community contexts.

The following roles for future musicians should be explored:

The musician as a(n):

- 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.

Renshaw (2005) observes that: "music leaders need to engage in continuing professional, artistic and personal development if they are to produce work that is effective and of a high standard. The challenges confronting musicians working in non-formal contexts are increasingly complex, whilst the growing demands arising from cross-sector collaborations are opening up new possibilities. By widening the scope of music leaders, opportunities for their ongoing development have to be built into their career portfolio".

He summarizes a number of principles for professional development of music leaders which should inform the development of training in both the formal and non-formal sectors:

- the need to focus on artistic, personal and professional development;
- an emphasis on creating, making and performing music in different educational and community contexts;
- a commitment to developing generic, artistic and tacit leadership skills;
- a belief in self-assessment and critical reflection as tools for raising the quality of artistic and educational practice;

- an understanding of the centrality of collaborative practice – e.g., cross-arts, cross-cultural, cross-sector, formal and non-formal contexts;
- the need to establish informed dialogue through mentoring circles involving music leaders, teachers, co-workers, students and apprentices;
- an increasing commitment to working towards a laboratory approach to collaborative arts practice and professional development.

### **III Lifelong Learning in the Music College**

What does this mean for Music Colleges?

If the concept of Lifelong Learning is to permeate the Music College successfully, it means change, organically connected and interwoven, at all levels of the college: the (educational) organization, curriculum, teachers, students and alumni.

#### *1) 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 constantly fine tune and adjust to the needs of the workplace, and vice versa. Competence-based learning has to be positioned and analyzed within the context of a constantly changing workplace.

A challenging learning environment presupposes the establishment of cross-overs within musical disciplines and encompasses informal learning in non-formal learning contexts.

A change of mind-set should facilitate the transition of the Music College into an artistic laboratory which supports a learning culture.

#### *2) Curriculum*

A curriculum that is based on the conceptual framework of Lifelong Learning is competence based, requires team-teaching and receives feed back from external partners. It balances between tradition and change. It is reflective of the outside world. It re-evaluates existing knowledge. It can be very individual with different learning paths, and should for a substantial part take place in non-formal settings, and include portfolio, context related assessment and peer learning.

### 3) *Teachers*

A successful implementation of a Lifelong Learning Conceptual Framework in the Music College is highly dependent on teachers' competences. Teachers are important 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 transformative processes.

Balancing between tradition and change need not mean that music colleges have to get rid of master-apprentice schemes, but here the "master" should invite, encourage curiosity, discovery, and the ability to question. Reflective practice and personal development for teachers is essential.

### 4) *Students*

A Personal Development Plan should be central for students, leading to a relevant development of their portfolio, guided by teachers whose role is to be a mentor. Self management should be encouraged by asking basic questions such as 'who am I', 'where do my strengths lie', 'what do I want to contribute as a musician to the community', in short, *questions of identity* should be facilitated.

### 5) *Alumni*

The EU investigation to which I referred earlier showed that former students are eager to stay in touch, and appreciate being kept informed by their former school.

A solid alumni program is important for 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 An Example of Practice: Lifelong Learning in the Music College; connecting the artistic potential with reflective practice**

I would like to finish with a case study of a Lifelong Learning project in a Music College. It concerns an artistic /reflective project for freshmen at the North Netherlands Conservatory, that was held in December 2004 in cooperation with

the Department of Professional Development of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London.

The aim was to help freshmen 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.

A group of teachers and students, as well as Sean Gregory, head of the Department of Professional Development of the Guildhall School, were involved in designing the contents of the project.

The freshmen were divided into four groups which were mixed by instruments and by principal study area (Jazz, Classical, Conducting, Classroom Teachers Training and Composition students). Each group was lead by two workshop leaders, all graduates of the Professional Development Program of the Guildhall School. Through their prior training, the leaders had learned to create and lead creative workshops by improvisation in a variety of contexts. Aside from the two tutors, each group also had a mentor (teachers of the NNC). 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.

During the first days of the project there was also room for inquiry: a teacher of the primary school visited the group to inform them about the audience of 9 – 12 year old children, and an 'activities coach' from the nursing home informed the students about the inhabitants who would form the audience.

This was important information, as another aim for the students was to engage in a short conversation with the audience following the performance of their compositions. These conversations, to focus on what music means to people, were to take place in small groups, be informal and, both in the primary school and the nursing home, be supported by staff.

After two days of preparation the performances took place. In the morning in the primary school, where all four groups attended, two groups performed their composition and the other two groups observed, joining the audience.

After the two performances Sean Gregory developed a group improvisation with the two student groups and the children. This was followed by the conversations of the students with the children. The organization group and tutors then briefly evaluated the performances with the teacher of the school.

In the afternoon the same thing happened in the nursing home; the two groups who performed in the morning now observed. The other two groups performed their composition, followed by a group improvisation (students and audience) lead again by Sean Gregory and a conversation of the students over tea with the inhabitants of the home. The organization group and tutors successively evaluated the afternoon with two activities coaches.

The next morning was used for evaluating the project with the students, tutors and mentors. Everyone had kept a personal diary during the project for evaluation and self assessment.

The majority of the students was positive about the idea of continuing to learn more about this creative work. They also realized the great value of improvisation and composing for their further development as performing musicians. One of the student participants summed up his experience saying “the way I regard music and listen has changed totally”.

According to Sean Gregory, “[...] 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).

The work in this project 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*, Wenger (1998) points out that learning transforms who we are and what we do, and 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*.

The connection with the concept of Lifelong Learning in this project is clear:

- *Learning by Doing* 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”.
- Both *Artistic and Reflective Practice* were elucidated in different contexts. Creating and performing a composition required sensitivity and an ability to adapt to the different audiences through varied forms of communication.
- *Shared leadership* took place at different levels: mentors and tutors worked together in guiding the groups while students shared leadership in building and shaping their composition.
- *Shared mentoring*: the leadership, reflection and evaluation of the project was very much the result of a shared partnership involving staff from the primary school and the nursing home.

What are the possible implications of this case study for the future?

The project suggests several important outcomes relative to transforming education in the Music Colleges. For example:

#### 1) *Collaboration with Shared Responsibility*

Working on an artistic product, where everyone is equally engaged in creating a composition means that there is no hierarchy involved. The learning environment is non-judgmental although there is a commitment to achieving quality.

#### 2) *Cross over within Music Disciplines*

A mix of students from different courses and countries is both artistically and socially valuable. Students let go of their prejudices: “now I might want to play with a classical musician”! (or vice versa).

#### 3) *Exploring and Risk Taking in a Safe Environment*

The growing trust in the groups was striking. (“I never thought that I would ever dare to improvise”).

#### 4) *Adaptive Attitudes and Communication Skills*

Having to adapt to the audiences in the primary school and nursing home helped foster new communication skills among participants.

#### 5) *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.

#### 6) *Entrepreneurship is essential to Musicians*

In the words of a colleague, entrepreneurship means transforming an idea into an enterprise that creates value. Many opportunities exist in this area, and it the task of the Music College to make students aware of this.

To conclude:

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

The implementation of a conceptual framework of Lifelong Learning in the Music College leads to the emergence of informed musicians who can interact in a variety of 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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