

## Reflective practice and research at the heart of the concept of Lifelong Learning

The main challenge of today's musicians trained in our conservatoires and academies is *navigating* in a rapidly changing cultural landscape. In a nutshell, the major changes they encounter can be phrased as follows:

- Changes in the social-cultural landscape are helping to shape a very different workplace for musicians.
- Flexible *portfolio careers* require finely tuned transferable skills and a more entrepreneurial attitude towards work.
- Increasingly musicians work collaboratively with professionals in other fields – in cross-arts, cross-cultural and cross-sector contexts.
- Musicians now have to perform different roles as they are expected to respond creatively to cultural and educational contexts that go beyond the concert hall (Renshaw 2010 drawing on Smilde 2009).

Within these changing careers in addition to highly developed artistic skills, also transferable 'life skills' are increasingly important for musicians and it is clear that they need to take up various interrelated roles in order to be able to do their work in a successful and relevant way. They need to be entrepreneurs, innovators, connectors, partners and reflective practitioners.

This means that Lifelong Learning is required for musicians, which we can define as *a dynamic concept of learning that enables us to respond to the needs generated by continuous change*. It is a concept spanning an entire lifetime in a process of "...transforming experience into knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and the senses" (Jarvis 2002). It is not 'just' continuing education, it is much more. We can say that it is an important

conceptual framework for the improvement of musicians' *employability* and *adaptability*.

Characteristics of the concept of Lifelong Learning include different approaches to learning, including non-formal learning in settings outside the school. Maintaining a strong relationship with the professional field and a strong network of relevant partners is crucial. The interconnection between professional and personal development is important, including, and a critical role of *reflective practice*.

Within our daily business in schools, reflective practice is crucial for the community of learners which our institutions constitutes, senior and middle management, teachers and students.

What do we mean by reflective practice?

Within critical reflection you analyze, reconsider and question experiences you have, and relate this upon reflecting to impacts within a broad context of issues, e.g. what do these experiences mean for the way your approach your musicianship or your teaching. Critical reflection can enable people to make a new sense of situations (Schön). This reflective practice is to my mind, actually *research*.

Why is critical reflection, reflective practice, actually research?

Research or - as we might say in this context - *reflective inquiry* is of the utmost importance for musicians when they want to create innovation and develop their professional skills. It is required when for instance they are engaging with new audiences or new types of professions, navigating in today's complicated cultural landscape. Or if they want to improve their practice in the music school or academy. As said, our students, and tomorrow's

professional musicians, have many roles to perform. They have to be able to look at themselves to their assumptions and presuppositions and be engaged in evaluative processes. They have to be *reflective practitioners*. My point is therefore that, no matter that different types of specialized research can take place in our schools, leading perhaps to highly interesting PhD's, as a community of learners within the conservatoire we *all* are and need to be musicians as well as researchers. Why? Because we need to be inquisitive, to *reflect* and *ask questions*.

Upon critical reflection we can gain deeper understanding of what is happening around us and we can improve our practice, developing it further, getting to know more and more about it. Research is of course always about gaining knowledge, but research is in the first place about *learning*.

This brings me to the concept of 'Action Learning', which means at its simplest 'learning by doing'. Groups of teachers and students can be engaged into action learning. Thinking and reflecting collaboratively on how to improve their work, their knowledge and their cooperation requires critical reflection and evaluation. Research then comes through reflection, evaluation, decision, action and reflection etc. etc., as an ongoing circle. We, teachers, students and management, are all action learners, reflective practitioners and thus researchers. Reflecting collaboratively on our practices, and researching our practice together with partners from the professional field is the a fruitful way of creating an environment which nourishes the continuing professional development of our teachers.

That can lead to educational practice which is relevant to the current and changing cultural landscape, explores different contexts, is intervention oriented, leads to relevant learning experiences, and illuminates attitudes and values.

Key for any musician engaged in any connection to the various contexts of today's professional world is his or her *transformative learning* which is expressed in changing your frame of reference (a way of knowing) when you connects to different contexts. Transformative learning is based on gaining new understanding emerging from critical reflection on your own assumptions and presuppositions. Kegan describes it as 'knowing differently' (2009: 49). And this is critical for any musician to perform her many roles at the same time, while adapting to change in a flexible way.

In addition, in order to function as a musician one needs to be able to exercise *leadership*, also on an individual level. Leadership is dependent on authority and the ability to exercise authority. Within musicianship we can speak of *shared authority* through collaborative artistic practice, which is underpinned by qualities like informed decision making (sometimes in an implicit way), adaptability, flexibility and committed values and attitudes (this happens e.g. when we play chamber music). You might call this artistic leadership. But also the ability to lead by example and attitude, while developing and using transferable (life) skills and social skills is highly relevant for today's musicians. I call this *generic leadership*. It is as important as artistic leadership. Being a good leader requires a lot of reflective practice. You have to know what you are doing, how you are doing it and why you are doing it.

Reflective practice and leadership are required if musicians want to become 'lifelong learners' in order to be able to adapt to continuous change and to various contexts which they encounter.

And I think it important for us, in conservatoires, to embrace this notion and make this collaborative reflection and learning really possible, by being a community of learners and thus researchers.

