

# **Journeys of Lifelong Learning in Music**

Perspectives on Musicians' Identity  
and Professional Performance  
a reflective handbook

Rineke Smilde



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Research group Lifelong Learning in Music  
Prince Claus Conservatoire / Research Centre Art and Society  
Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen  
Meeuwerderweg 1  
9724 EM Groningen, The Netherlands  
[www.lifelonglearninginmusic.org](http://www.lifelonglearninginmusic.org)

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*Music, such music, is a sufficient gift. Why ask for happiness;  
why hope not to grieve? It is enough, it is to be blessed enough,  
to live from day to day and to hear such music - not too much,  
or the soul could not sustain it - from time to time.*

Vikram Seth: An Equal Music, p. 484

*To Felix*

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## Foreword by Peter Renshaw

In this remarkably honest and challenging book Rineke Smilde draws on a lifetime of experience in which she has pursued the vital question – ‘Who am I as a musician and how can I contribute to society?’ A question that is more urgent than ever in the world of post-Covid-19, Black Lives Matter and climate change. With her deep commitment to the arts and social engagement, Rineke provides a myriad of examples, some very poignant, of how music can enhance people’s lives and transform their ways of looking at the world. Her research explores fundamental issues connected to questions of identity, sense of belonging, healthcare, mental health and wellbeing.

Equally important, Rineke’s central thesis is also premised on the importance of musicians discovering who they are in terms of their personal, artistic and professional identity. She proposes an all-embracing definition of a musician’s professional performance, which she sees is rooted in the connection between one’s personal, artistic and professional development, comprising diverse roles, skills, values and attitudes, based upon a profound awareness of one’s artistic and professional identity. These interconnected forms of development lie at the heart of a musician’s learning throughout their life, at the centre of which is their biographical learning.

For Rineke, professional performance is both artistic and situational: the music has to connect to context. She states clearly that “a well-informed professional performance is imperative for *every* musician, in *any* professional situation, including chamber musicians, orchestral musicians, music teachers and musicians with a portfolio career. Performing music is not either ‘social work’ or ‘l’art pour l’art’... (It) is about honest communication through music in the broadest sense of the word, for all audiences.” This view of professional performance presents a fundamental challenge to conservatoire education, opening up new avenues for research and creating both a reflective and reflexive culture that fosters a climate for lifelong learning.

What stands out for me in this book is Rineke’s integrity, deep commitment and passion for musicians to make a difference in the world. It not only exemplifies her contribution to the research community, but at times it is deeply moving because Rineke becomes the living embodiment of what she writes. This is especially the case in the areas of Music and Dementia, and Meaningful Music in Health Care, where the research really captures the things that matter.

When I first knew Rineke in the late-1990s, she was Director of the North Netherlands Conservatoire and an active member of the Council of the Association of European Conservatoires. For the last 17 years she has been Professor of Lifelong Learning in Music at Hanze University, Prince Claus Conservatoire, in Groningen, Netherlands. In that time, she has developed an international research group of 50 members and 20 associate members, and in many ways this book describes the legacy of this group, which has been examining the relationship between musicians and society, and what engaging with new audiences means for the diverse roles, learning processes and the leadership of musicians.

Perhaps one of the most crucial aspects of Rineke's own legacy is her strong belief in the importance of collaboration – how much our practice is enhanced through our engagement with others. This principle is central to her earlier research projects – the Artistic Reflective Project at Prince Claus Conservatoire (from 2004), Opera in the Bus at the Yo! Opera Festival in Utrecht (2005), the Cross-Arts Laboratory with musicians and visual artists at Schiermonnikoog (2010), and the development of the Joint Master's degree in New Audiences and Innovative Practice (2006-2009). But the principle of collaboration is best exemplified in her most recent research initiatives in Music and Dementia (2009-14) and in her ongoing work in healthcare, where she has established a strong partnership with the University Medical Centre at Groningen.

In many ways this book encapsulates the central aspects of Rineke's active professional life so far, but I sense these only provide the foundation of what's to come. The future is more complex and challenging, but the main thrust of her collaborative research has the potential to engage with and further our understanding of where the arts can make a significant difference to our lives. This challenges us all to reimagine, reinvent, reappraise and to re-engage. The research perspective illustrated by Rineke can help us all to reshape the way forwards.

  
  


# **Lifelong Learning in Music**

# Introduction

Lifelong Learning entails one's ability to respond reflexively to change, and to do this with confidence and self-knowledge. It is all the learning that people do during their entire lifespan, in all kinds of shapes and forms, implicitly and explicitly, in and outside school, through others and with others, and through experiences in their lives. It is thus a holistic concept of learning. 'Change' is a keyword, as learning takes place in the midst of society, and ongoing change is at the core of society, of the institutions in society and of our individual lives, and this is something of all times. At times though, change can be rapid, become challenging, rendering us apprehensive, as we experienced for instance from early 2020 onwards, when Covid-19 started spreading over the world. We might perhaps consider this at some point in history as one of the biggest professional challenges for musicians ever.

For musicians it is of great importance to be able to respond to change, moreover, to understand and embrace change and come to know the opportunities and new possibilities that may lie ahead. These are not only professional job opportunities, which can in themselves be ongoingly rapidly subject to change. Also opportunities for personal and professional growth can emerge from the awareness that while being gifted as a musician, one can have a *choice* to contribute as an artist to society. 'Who am I as an artist, as a musician, and how can I contribute to society?' is the key question underpinning today's musicians' personal and professional development.<sup>1</sup> Change which can lead to an *informed* choice, to a response rather than a reaction, underpinned by critical reflection, that is basically at the core of the lifelong learning musician.

This reflective handbook gives an insight into the harvest of seventeen years of research into lifelong learning in music, conducted in the research group Lifelong Learning in Music (LLM) in Groningen, The Netherlands.<sup>2</sup> I aim to show through a number of reflective chapters, using examples of research projects carried out between 2004 and today, how lifelong learning in music can be central to the personal and professional development of musicians, to their confidence and wellbeing and that of others. This can range from individual learning of musicians to joint learning processes with others. During these years we conducted research into musicians' practices; explored new questions and developments in society which are relevant for the professional development of musicians and creating their new practices, bringing in the outside world through joint sustained projects. This helped to develop a framework for a lifelong learning environment in the conservatoire, developing teachers and students, and having an eye for one's alumni.

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<sup>1</sup> Zygmunt Bauman (2005) points out that learning should be lifelong in order to help us "salvage the conditions that make choice available and within our power" (p. 128).

<sup>2</sup> The research group Lifelong Learning in Music was established in 2004 as a joint research group of Hanze University of Applied Sciences in Groningen (Prince Claus Conservatoire) and the University of the Arts in the Hague (Royal Conservatoire). From 2012 onwards the research group LLM was solely based in Groningen, as part of the Research Centre Arts & Society of Hanze University of Applied Sciences.

Our point of departure was and is that we strive for research that can lead to deeper knowledge about and understanding of the world of professional musicians and their relation to the society they live in. This enables us to develop insights and ideas for improvement and renewal of musicians' practice. The criteria which we formulated for the research projects were that they should be relevant to the current and changing cultural landscape, reflect the changing profession, explore different social contexts, be intervention-oriented, lead to relevant learning experiences, illuminate attitudes and values and, first and foremost, be always artistically driven.

Developments in society have their influence on institutions<sup>3</sup>, which impacts on individuals within that institution.<sup>4</sup> In the end, the individual musician can respond to society through their art, creating a difference, and the institution, here the conservatoire, is pivotal in facilitating this process. This is where the conservatoire and the outside world come together, and that is what will be explored in this book. This is also where the well-known discourse of the role of the conservatoire in society comes in, where the conservatoire cannot be a stand-alone institution in a bubble with their eyes closed on what goes on around them. It is, on the other hand, not 'simply' a matter of giving up something precious, acquired through a rich tradition. It is more about 'changing gears and adding on' - preserving one's wonderful traditions and enriching them with a new view and fresh engagement. This is not a matter of jumping as an artist through a societal hoop, but it is about deep commitment and intrinsic motivation. That can be difficult and frightening, and challenge feelings of security and beliefs that have been taken for granted for decades, if not centuries. It is about real change, instead of committing to the safe margins.

For the individual musician this means sheer freedom: one contributes to society what relates to one's identity, be it playing as an informed musician in the orchestra or engaging artistically with prisoners or people with great mental challenges who 'missed the boat', or, most often, combining those various activities in a portfolio career (Smilde 2009a). Therefore, this book is about both tradition and innovation, about valuing every musician, wherever they find themselves. Lifelong learning is not about judgement and 'truth', but about learning journeys, about learning through biographical experiences. That point of departure permeates this book.

In the various chapters I intend to build up strands of the discourse briefly addressed above, where in the end the various threads come together in implications for the 'reflexive institution'. This reflective handbook therefore consists of four parts:

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<sup>3</sup> The conservatoire, an orchestra, a hospital, a concert hall e.g.

<sup>4</sup> See more on this in chapter 1.

I	Lifelong Learning in Music (Introduction and chapter 1)
II	New Audiences and Innovative Practices (chapters 2 and 3)
III	Musicians' Professional Performance (chapters 4 and 5)
IV	The Reflexive Institution (chapters 6 and 7)

The first part, on 'Lifelong Learning in Music', serves as an introduction to the concept of lifelong learning. Chapter 1 explains the core of the concept of lifelong learning in music and the different learning styles used by musicians. It identifies the role of biography in learning processes, and its impact on the identity development of musicians. Lastly, the chapter addresses the relationship between conservatoires and building identity.

The second part, on 'New Audiences and Innovative Practices', discusses a number of innovative practices and projects which have been developed and researched in the course of the years, the discoveries that were made, and what we have learned from them. In chapter 2, 'Musicians Engaging with New Audiences', I made a choice for four contrasting projects, which all involved students and had a strong impact on conservatoire education. They are *The artistic-reflective project*, developed from 2004 onwards, a project in which first-year students, upon entering the conservatoire, are confronted with the reflective question of their identity as a musician in society, in a *hands-on* way, learning experientially. This is followed by *Opera in the bus* (2005), a community project in the city centre of Utrecht, where vocal students from the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague acted as animateurs. *The cross-arts laboratory* (2010) is the next example, describing the discovery of collaborative learning processes between musicians and visual artists. Finally comes a section on the development of the European Joint Master *New Audiences and Innovative Practice* (NAIP), from 2006 to 2009, emerging from theoretical research and practice development in the LLM research group and conducted together with a number of international partner schools.

In the same part, chapter 3, 'A Shared Heart: Music in Healthcare Contexts' is dedicated to new audiences and innovative practices in healthcare, a field where the research group LLM has since the last decade been very active. Two extended research projects are unpacked here, *Music and dementia* (2009-2014), and *Meaningful music in healthcare* (from 2015 onwards). An in-depth explanation of qualitative research can be found at the beginning of this chapter, in particular geared towards the ethnographical approach of both research projects.

'Musicians' Professional Performance' constitutes the third part of this handbook, entailing the chapters 4, 'Seven Overarching Concepts' and 5, on 'Performance and Identity'. Part III steps back and observes concepts which emerged from the examples presented and found in other projects of the LLM research group. What could be observed, and how do they relate to musicians' biographical learning processes? How, in the end do they inform musicians' professional performance?

Chapter 4 'takes stock'; in the chapter seven key concepts which are fundamental for lifelong learning in music are further explored and connected to each other. These concepts could also be identified in the projects that were being discussed in the first three chapters and play a role in the subsequent chapters.

The chapter on 'Seven Overarching Concepts' begins with identifying and describing the 'Artistic laboratory', followed by 'The quality of the artistic response'. In this section attention is also given to the notion of person-centred improvisation, which can be central to participatory music-making processes with vulnerable people. We can read outstanding examples in the practices described in chapter 3, where person-centred improvisation is utilised in healthcare contexts. Subsequently, the multi-faceted notion of 'Excellence and quality' is defined, where the focus is particularly on the notions of excellence going *beyond* artistic quality and excellence. This is followed by two sections, on 'Empathy and compassion' and 'Reflective practice, artistry and tacit knowing'. 'Musicians' professional performance' is subsequently discussed, including the notion of musicians' professional identity. Finally, I will say more about the 'Community of practice'. All the seven overarching concepts are elucidated with examples from my biographical research<sup>5</sup>, and research projects which we carried out with our LLM research group.

Chapter 5 considers musicians' sense of artistic and professional identity, coming together in musicians' professional performance. It addresses the importance of improvisation, the scope of which ranges from personal expression to the expression of 'the other'. Improvisation can also relate to performance anxiety, which is approached in-depth from a biographical perspective. Lastly, the chapter discusses musicians' self-confidence, self-compassion and trust in others.

Part IV contains the aims of 'The Reflexive Institution' and 'The Reflexive Conservatoire' in chapter 6, while chapter 7, 'Final Considerations' draws all the different elements together. Chapter 6 describes the reflexive institution, where innovation and tradition go hand in hand. It identifies new ideas about learning environments for lifelong learning in music, as we found in our various research projects. Research into practice is discussed, especially in relation to the question of how social practices could be researched from an artistic perspective. The conservatoire as a community of students, teachers and mentors is then further examined, followed by an exploration of 'sustainability', in the form of collaborative learning processes between the conservatoire and professional partners. The role that alumni can play is also addressed.

Chapter 7, 'Final Considerations', entails some final reflections. It aims at drawing together the different threads of this reflective handbook in order to generate ideas for how we could move forward, with musicians acting as agents of change, at all times creating impact.

An index is added at the end of the book, aiming to help find definitions of recurring topics.

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<sup>5</sup> Smilde 2009a/b; see also chapter 1.

# 1. Musicians and Lifelong Learning

*For Christine Stöger*

*Learning is a lifelong process that is not limited to educational settings but is limited to the scope of our identities. Etienne Wenger*<sup>6</sup>

## 1. Lifelong learning

In principle the quote above could serve as an all-encompassing definition of lifelong learning. Despite its brevity, it includes all its components. There are the words 'lifelong', 'process', 'educational settings' and 'not limited', where the only limit is 'the scope of our identities'. 'Identity' is especially key when we consider lifelong learning, and where Wenger (1998) talks about 'identity', we might add the word 'biography'. Regarding the latter, in addition to the word lifelong, we might add the word 'lifewide'. Learning is both a (horizontal) lifelong and (vertical) lifewide process, as we will see time and again throughout this book.

In this chapter we will unpack this further, by establishing what actually lifelong learning is, and in particular how it relates to musicians' processes of learning. As said in the introduction, in a nutshell lifelong learning can be understood as a dynamic holistic concept of learning that enables us to respond with confidence to change. This confidence can emerge as soon as we become aware who we are as musicians, while giving shape to our professional identities.

Lifelong learning encompasses different learning styles and modes of learning, as we can conclude from Wenger's (ibid.) definition above. It entails knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, which extend far *beyond* the formal education system a musician may go through and it is not limited to an educational setting. When talking about an educational setting, Wenger (ibid.) no doubt refers to a (more or less) restricted *formal* educational setting, which we will define later in more detail. For now, it is important to note that *learning is always, and by nature, education*. Lifelong Learning is an ongoing process, starting from the moment we are born and ending when we die. In this lifelong process we have many encounters during our personal and professional lives from which we learn in a 'lifewide' way:

In a world of rapid change people learn all the time from changing circumstances, thus creating new potential learning experiences from which [they] continue to learn throughout their lives (Smilde 2009a, p. 49).

Peter Jarvis, who can be considered one of the leading experts on learning, offered in 2006 the following holistic definition of lifelong learning:

...the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills,

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<sup>6</sup> In *Communities of Practice, Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, p. 273. Cambridge, 1998.

attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and the senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person (p. 134).

Despite this definition on first sight may seem somewhat abstract, it encompasses a number of notions which we will come across in the following chapters: for example, 'body and mind', 'social situations', 'transformation', 'continually changing' and again, 'biography'. Throughout this book we will encounter all these components and various concepts of learning, not by spelling them out one by one without context, but first and foremost by creating awareness and understanding through musicians' experiences that will be recounted and analysed.

Lifelong learning is sometimes confused with the notion of 'continuing education', a term used for further education upon graduation or perhaps later in life, where for instance courses are taken. The latter can certainly be part of the umbrella concept of lifelong learning, but lifelong learning encompasses much more. Lifelong learning can be considered an important overall conceptual framework for people's personal and professional development. In order to learn more about that, I will first say more in general about lifelong and lifewide learning. Following that I will focus on the notion of biographical learning. Then I will address musicians' learning processes, aspects of professional development and the building of self-identity in the period at the conservatoire.

What can we consider the main components of lifelong learning? Lifelong learning has long been on the European agenda. A communication of the European Commission described lifelong learning in 2001 as all learning that encompasses the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal learning (p. 3). Its objectives would include active citizenship, personal fulfilment, social inclusion and employment-related areas. The principles underpinning lifelong learning would include the centrality of the learner, equal opportunities and the quality and relevance of learning opportunities (ibid.). The European definition of lifelong learning is clearly aimed at people's ability to adapt to change and to securing and increasing their employability in a rapidly changing society.

Key characteristics of lifelong learning include, as in the description above, the distinction between formal, non-formal and informal learning; the emphasis on *learning* as opposed to training; the simultaneous existence of different learning styles and approaches to learning; the interconnection between personal and professional development, and lastly the role of critical reflection and reflexivity.

The concept of 'learning' permeates this whole book, and different types and approaches of learning which are characteristic for lifelong learning will emerge throughout the chapters and be explored and clarified where they are relevant. Also, the interconnection between personal and professional development is, especially for musicians and other artists, fundamental, and we will meet this interconnection many times. The same applies to the role of critical reflection and reflexivity.

First I will examine formal, non-formal and informal learning in music. Formal learning can be considered as learning based on a structured curriculum, with specific learning objectives, duration, content, method and assessment, aiming to develop skills and competences that are particularly relevant for the professional musician (Smilde 2012a, p. 290). It leads to a qualification, a diploma or degree in a conservatoire or music academy. Non-formal learning can be defined as any organised educational activity that contains learning elements outside the established formal system (ibid.), for example in collaboration with a professional partner, like an internship of a music student in an orchestra. Informal learning refers to learning that takes place in an implicit way without the intervention of a teacher, exemplified for instance by pop musicians who learn by listening to and imitating each other in garage bands (ibid., see also Green 2002).<sup>7</sup> In informal learning all aspects of learning - what to learn, how to learn and for how long - are controlled by the individual learner (Smilde 2009a, p. 75). Formal, non-formal and informal learning are fundamental at all levels of lifelong learning, and often these three modes of learning can blend and happen all at the same time, especially during the period in the conservatoire. I will say more about that later on.<sup>8</sup>

Lifelong learning and its implications range from the *macro* level of society at large, in the first place when we consider it as a means of broadening possibilities for employability, but also for instance where it considers slowly changing values, to the *meso* level of the institution. This can be the learning environment, be it in a conservatoire, an orchestra, a hospital or for instance a care home. Lifelong learning also exists on the individual *micro* level, relating to individuals in society. All three levels can directly and indirectly influence each other, and all three levels can also be directly and indirectly influenced through artistic practice, as we will for instance see in chapter 3, when we read about music in healthcare contexts.

## 2. Learning seen through the lens of biography

*The real theoretical provocation within the “biographical approach” is its insistence on a different way of learning.* Peter Alheit<sup>9</sup>

Below I will identify the ‘micro level’ more in-depth. Lifelong learning on an *individual* level can be seen, next to the ‘European’ perspective as described above, as a second perspective, which relates to the *biographical learning* of an individual. Biographical learning includes people’s experiences, knowledge and self-reflection in the context of their life histories and the world they live in; in short everything people have learned throughout their lives and have given a place in their biographies (Smilde 2012a, p. 290; Alheit and Dausien 2002). The transitions in people’s lives are of special interest, as they can lead to change and decisions that underpin their biographies. A biographical approach to learning therefore has the capacity to change both the individual and *the context* in which the learning

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<sup>7</sup> Lucy Green (2002) defines informal learning in music as “a variety of approaches to acquiring musical skills and knowledge outside formal educational settings” (p. 16).

<sup>8</sup> For more on formal, non-formal and informal learning in music see also Mak 2007.

<sup>9</sup> “The “Biographical Question” as a challenge to adult education (1994). *International Review of Education* 40 (3-5), p. 283-298.

takes place. The latter idea can be considered a paradigm shift in learning (Alheit and Dausien 2002). From biographical knowledge and learning, a new understanding of people's learning processes can emerge, both in terms of emotion and cognition. We therefore speak not only of *lifelong* (i.e. 'horizontal' throughout the life span) but also of *lifewide* learning ('vertical', for example through intensive biographical experiences during a period of transition in life). Together lifelong and lifewide learning define one's biography.

As people have to function in a constantly and rapidly changing world, their life stories are 'reflexive'; "[people are] actively engaged in social life and, at the same time, able to reflect on it" (Giddens and Sutton 2014, p. 37).<sup>10</sup> This means that one's response to *change* includes "constantly putting what one learns in relation to oneself, to one's understanding of oneself and what meaning the influences one faces have for oneself" (Illeris 2004, p. 91; Smilde 2009a, p. 12).<sup>11</sup> Giddens (1991) observes on the 'reflexive biography' that,

Each of us not only 'has', but *lives* a biography reflexively organized in terms of flows of social and psychological information about *possible ways of life* (p. 14).

Reflexivity in our individual lives in society can be understood as something that is underpinned by *choice*: "the individual constantly has to choose his or her way, externally as well as internally, in terms of life course, lifestyle and identity" (Illeris 2004, p. 95), and "with this, reflexivity also comes to have significance for (...) qualities such as independence, self-confidence, sociability, sensibility and flexibility (ibid.). Furthermore, Illeris argues that,

... what is special about reflexivity is that it involves the organisation of the self. Therefore no clear boundary can be drawn between personal development and reflexivity (ibid.).

The relationship between reflexivity and personal development as described in the quote above is at the basis of a special notion within biographical knowledge, which is that of *biographicity*. Biographicity was first identified by Peter Alheit (1995) and defined as follows:

Biographicity means that we can redesign again and again, from scratch, the contours of our life within the specific contexts in which we (have to) spend it, and that we experience these contexts as 'shapeable' and designable. In our biographies we do not possess all conceivable opportunities, but within the framework of our limits we are structurally set, we still have considerable scope open to us. The main issue is to decipher the 'surplus meanings' of our biographical knowledge, and that in turn means to perceive the potentiality of our unlived lives (p. 65).

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<sup>10</sup> Giddens and Sutton (2014) define reflexivity as "A characterization of the relationship between knowledge and society and/or researcher and subject, focusing on the continuous reflection of social actors on themselves and their social context" (p. 36).

<sup>11</sup> Giddens and Sutton (2014) also argue that "the thing called 'society' is a continuous social construction rather than a fixed, objective entity that is set apart from individuals" (p. 37).

Biographicity is 'self-referential', which means that through critical reflection it has the capacity to understand new experiences in life and, when linking it to older ones, bringing about a learning chain. Intuitive knowledge about our "unlived lives" is part of our "practical consciousness" (Giddens 1988; *ibid.*).<sup>12</sup> Illeris (2004) describes biographicity as "something that concerns how we perceive and interpret our lives in relation to the opportunities we have and the choices we make, [where] biographicity can be understood as an overall framework for learning through reflexivity, which (...) holds the individual's self-comprehension and identity together" (p. 96/7). We will encounter examples of biographicity later in this chapter, and also in particular in the chapters 3 and 5.

### *A biographical approach to learning*

A biographical approach to learning offers, in addition to new understanding, a *different* approach to learning, and as said, especially learning processes within *transitions* provide new perspectives as they take place in new contexts (Alheit 1994). Knowledge can only be transitional if it is biographical knowledge. Reflexive learning processes take place within the individual, but they also depend on interaction with others within a social context (*ibid.*), in other words, on the meso level. Alheit and Dausien (2007) observed that,

Biographical learning is embedded in lifeworlds that can be analysed under certain conditions as 'learning environments' (...) Learning within and through one's own life history is therefore interactive and socially structured on the one hand, but it follows its own 'individual logic' that is generated by the specific, biographically layered structure of experience (p. 67).

The individual can definitely influence their social environment through biographical learning processes. As Alheit (1994) argued, there is a 'transitional potential of biographical learning' interwoven into social structures and cultural understanding when self-awareness of people's directions and choices within their life course can also provide the possibilities for changing them.

### *Meso level: education as a biographical process*

That brings us to the meso level, the level of the learning environment, in whatever institutional context. The sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (2005) reflected on the relationship between learning and reflexivity by addressing the 'liquid setting' in which learning and education needs to take place, and which should indeed be lifelong, as:

No other kind of education and/or learning is conceivable; the 'formation' of selves or personalities is unthinkable in any fashion other than that of an ongoing and perpetually unfinished re-formation (p. 118).

Especially on the meso level of the institution and learning environment there are possibilities for this 'formation of selves' within the context of 'ongoing re-

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<sup>12</sup> See also chapter 4, section 5 on 'Reflective practice, artistry and tacit knowing'.

formation', as Bauman terms it, through biographical learning and knowledge. As we have read, this can bring about transitional learning processes and thus social change, no matter how small. We will see examples of that in the chapters 3 and 5. Alheit and Dausien (2002) even speak about "the life span as an institution", when they refer to the 'societal curriculum' for the individual life, which is ever again changing and negotiated. This 'societal curriculum', they argue, is regulated through both formal learning and biographical learning. The formal side of learning and biographical learning are seemingly in tension with each other, but at the same time they are interrelated and depend on each other. Moreover, the distinctions between formal, non-formal and informal learning are not necessarily sharp (ibid., p. 8; Smilde 2009a, p. 17). We also observed the latter in section 1 of this chapter.

A fundamental question is how education and training can be conceived as a biographical process (Alheit and Dausien 2002, p. 11). Education (learning)<sup>13</sup> does not only take place in an organised and institutionalised form, but it also encompasses the everyday and life-history experiences, transitions and crises (ibid.), in other words, the lifewide learning. As I observed in the beginning of this chapter, learning is always education; "Thus, lifewide learning is also tied at all times to the context of a specific biography [as] without biography there can be no learning, without learning, no biography" (ibid.). Therefore, on the institutional meso level, Alheit and Dausien argue,

...a biographical understanding of 'self-determination' would have to be developed with reference to the 'formation' concept ('Bildung'), rather than the notion of learning as 'training'. If the biographical organisation of learning processes is to be given practical educational (and institutional) support, then spaces for reflection and communication, as well as interaction with 'spaces of opportunity' are at least as important as developing 'instruments for individual self-management' (ibid., p. 13).

It goes without saying that this is worth exploring much more in detail, as this would mean that we would create space for biographical learning processes in the learning environment of the conservatoire or music academy in order to give space to 'the formation of selves' or put simply: to enable musicians to develop their identities to the full. I will get back to this in-depth in chapter 6, where in the depiction of the conservatoire as a reflexive institution I will be drawing on conclusions from the previous chapters and reflect on their meaning for the education and training of today's musicians, and of the role of biographical learning and research in this context.

### **3. Musicians' learning processes**

In the previous section we read about 'the formation of selves', 'the organisation of the self', and simply 'identity'. We also explored the strong interconnection between personal and professional development, in which biographical learning

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<sup>13</sup> The German word used is 'Bildung'.

processes play a key role. At the core is the question: who are we (as musicians) and what do we stand for? It is in fact the key question underpinning this reflective handbook: 'Who am I as a musician and how can I contribute to society?'

Taking into account the notion of biographical knowledge as described earlier, this identity question might be addressed through research into musicians' biographical learning processes. It could be argued that the interrelated development of musicians' life, educational and career span (their lifelong and lifewide learning) can give us important knowledge, understanding and insight into the question how musicians learn, how their professional development and personal development intertwine and how the establishment of their (professional) identity comes about. As we also read, the transitions in musicians' lives are of special interest, leading to change and decisions that underpin their biographies.

I therefore executed a study on 'musicians as lifelong learners' where I used biographical research to examine the processes of learning and development in the professional lives of musicians.<sup>14</sup> A hypothetical assumption was that informal learning<sup>15</sup> and related modes of learning would play a more prominent role throughout different stages of learning in music education, including the period in the conservatoire. The outcomes of the research, emerging from the analysis of these *learning biographies*, should result in a deeper insight into the concept of lifelong learning in music, enabling future musicians to acquire a reflective and reflexive attitude in responding to change in society. This could enable musicians to address their identity question and develop into 'lifelong learners'.

By means of narrative biographical interviews<sup>16</sup> which I held with professional musicians with varied professional practices and in different phases of their lives, I tried to gain understanding of these musicians' personal and professional development. What kind of (lifelong) learners were they? The study covered professional musicians from different countries, working in the creating, performing, teaching and/or entrepreneurial domains in all genres of music, and tried to elucidate divergent careers. As there is much overlap between career types (Rogers 2002; Bennett 2012), I decided to use three flexible categories, consisting of 'soloists', performing musicians whose professional lives consist mainly of giving concerts; second, 'music pedagogues and educators', and third, musicians with a portfolio career.<sup>17</sup> The latter was by far the largest group, which reflects the societal reality. In addition, I took four age categories into account, ranging from the first years after graduation to mature adulthood.<sup>18</sup> The main outcomes of the research will be briefly described below. Throughout the book I will, where relevant, refer to examples of these musicians' biographical learning.

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<sup>14</sup> Smilde 2009a; 2009b. Biographical research focuses on the individual's unique life course as it occurs in dialogue with societal conditions and the individual's own interpretation (Alheit and Dausien 2002).

<sup>15</sup> See section 1 of this chapter.

<sup>16</sup> A narrative interview aims at trying to get the interviewee in a 'story telling mode'; the interviewer asks open questions, holds back as much as possible and enables the interviewee to tell her or his story, in their own order. See more on the narrative interview at the beginning of chapter 3, under 'Qualitative research practices'.

<sup>17</sup> In a portfolio career, musicians combine different roles within various areas of engagement. More on the portfolio career in chapter 2.

<sup>18</sup> See Smilde 2009a, p. 101/2; 2009b.