

Becoming Reflective Practitioners in the Music Business

Tone Vold, Hanne Haave, Ole Jørgen Ranglund and Carl-Henrik Wahl

Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Rena, Norway

Tone.vold@inn.no

Hanne.haave@inn.no

Ole.ranglund@inn.no

carl-henrik.wahl@inn.no

Abstract: This case study is from the music business production where we have investigated how supervisors at music camps develop as reflective practitioners. We have investigated the process of how the supervisors gradually become aware of their tacit knowledge and are able to make it explicit, following the SECI-model through reflecting. It is also interesting to identify how they maintain a production focus throughout each process of conducting the music camps, but at the same time opens up for reflection and learning. As the lecturers also work at a music production company, and we have sought to unveil how becoming reflective practitioners have made a difference when it comes to executing their profession. Hence, through qualitative investigations we have interviewed the supervisors and their co-workers in their organization to unveil how this has had an impact in their organization and contributed to enhanced organizational knowledge.

Keywords: Reflection, Reflective Practice, Tacit and Explicit Knowledge, Reflective Practitioners

1. Introduction

At the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Business School, Norway, we offer a bachelor's degree in music business and production. One of the courses is about developing and producing songs. In this course, the lecturers being from a professional music production company (The Woods) offer the students music camps lasting from 10 am in the morning till 10 pm in the evening. After a short introduction to the theme for the music camps, the students are divided into groups. These groups are carefully put together by the lecturers. Their experiences from music camps at their company and previous experience at the university have provided them with insights that allow them to organize the groups in such a way that they are able to develop a song during the camp.

Although experienced the organizing nearly 100 music camps, they are still developing within their trade, also due to their work at the university. The experiences they gain from working with the students provide them with input as the students vary in their experience with developing songs. Not only do they provide their students with work like settings such as music camps (Vold et al., 2023), they also learn more themselves for each camp held.

In this case study we have followed the informants over a period of 3 years. During this period, we have watched the lectures develop into what we would associate with "reflective practitioners". Johns (2009) states that "A reflective practitioner is someone who lives reflection as a way of being" (p. 3).

In this paper we will present data collected from the different types of informants; the lectures/practitioners and their colleagues at The Woods. Through these investigations we will establish if they have indeed become reflective practitioners and if they are able to utilize the knowledge and being reflective practitioners back in their work at The Woods.

We have drawn on theory on reflection and reflective practice (Schön, 1987, Schön, 1991, Johns, 2009, Moon, 2004), as well as looked at how they are able to articulate their tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967, Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001, Cook and Brown, 1999) on their way of becoming reflective practitioners. We have also observed how they share knowledge and experiences with their colleagues at The Woods, much similar to theory on Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Through utilizing qualitative research methods, we will present and discuss our data before we conclude.

2. Theoretical Foundations

As a basis for becoming a "reflective practitioner" lies reflection. Reflection offers a deeper learning opportunity and may provide us with different perspectives. Being able to reflect – and not just think (Dewey, 1910) – both prior to an action, during an action, after an action, and even a while after action allows us to learn from different viewpoints and each will contribute with something somewhat different.

Donald Schön is a major contributor within the area of understanding the importance reflection (Schön, 1987, Schön, 1991). Schön presented different approaches to reflecting such as reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, the first being to reflect during the course of the action – with the opportunity of changing the action, the latter being reflection posterior to an action – then to see if it would be other solutions.

A definition of reflection is provided by Boyd and Fales (1983) as : “the process of creating and clarifying the meaning of experiences [present and past] in terms of self [self in relation to self and self in relation to the world]. The outcome of the process is changed conceptual perspective. The experience that is explored and examined to create meaning focuses around or embodies a concern of central importance to the self.” (p. 101). They further points to stages of reflection, such as identification or clarification of concern, openness to new information from external and/or internal sources, and deciding upon acting on the outcome of the reflective process (Boyd and Fales, 1983). Hence, this perspective also takes in a constructivist approach.

Another theorist, Johns (2009), claim: “Learning through reflection also takes place on a more deliberative level. Indeed, through reflection, practitioners become more mindful and increasingly sensitive to their intuitive responses.” (p. 6). Hence, Johns are arguing for an intuitiveness which may resemble or build on tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is knowledge that is hard to explain and to make explicit (Polanyi, 1967). Often it is embedded in actions and reactions. It is also a part of the total knowledge base of a person.

Johns also brings in mindfulness as a perspective regarding reflection. According to Holmes (2017) “reflection require mindfulness” (p. 22). One must understand the “Self” in order to understand how learning will affect oneself and how to utilize the learning from experiences. Hence, learning is ultimately about creating connections between synapses in the brain (Bransford et al., 1999) and research shows that the neuroplasticity of the brain is affected by self-reflection and mindfulness (Holmes, 2017).

Hence, both to understand the physical explanation of learning as well as understanding how this is connected to identification, increasing a knowledge base through experiencing and reflecting shows how complex the process of becoming a reflective practitioner may be.

Regarding developing reflective practitioners Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) allows for enabling practitioners to see their development through three key stages; 1) returning to experience, 2) attending to feelings, and 3) re-evaluating experience. In the latter it is about re-examining experiencing, associating new knowledge to previous knowledge, integrating new knowledge with previous knowledge, and change behaviour according to the new knowledge.

However, it is also about being open to and curious about new knowledge and practices. Gadamer (1975) claims : *“the opening up and keeping open of possibilities is only possible because we find ourselves deeply interested in that which makes the question possible in the first place. To truly question something is to interrogate something from the threat of our existence, from the centre of being”*. We interpret this to be about being willing to learn and to change.

Understanding is also important although there are resisting factors that will work against change (Johns, 2009). One of these factors is tradition. To change beliefs and perceptions are difficult. Creswell (1998) claims that knowledge is embedded in the interpretations people create; it is acquired through discussions about these interpretations. It is influenced by personal biases and values, expressed in a personal and intimate manner, and it evolves and emerges, deeply connected to the context in which it is examined. Hence, change is depending on the ability of doing the “double loop” learning (Argyris and Schön, 1996). Argyris and Schön (1996) developed the model of single and double loop learning. They then also coined the terms “espoused theory” and “theory in use”. “Espoused theory” is about values and views that *guide* the behaviour and “theory in use” is about how one actually behaves (Argyris and Schön, 1996).

According to Daniels (2002) a tool for reflecting on practice is peer coaching or cognitive coaching. Cognitive coaching comprises three key components: (a) establishing a trusting relationship, (b) fostering a desire for learning and growth, and c) collaborating autonomously while maintaining interdependence with others.

Lastly, we would like to include a typology of reflection based on Johns (2009) which describes different types of reflecting:

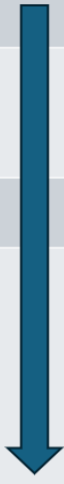
Reflection on experience	Reflection on a situation or experience after the event with the intention of gaining insights that may inform the future practice in positive ways	
Reflection in action	Pausing within a particular situation or experience in order to make sense of and reframe the situation in order to proceed towards desired outcomes	
The internal supervisor	Dialoguing with self whilst in conversation with another in order to make sense	
Reflection within the moment	Being aware of the way one is thinking, feeling, and responding within the unfolding moment whilst holding the intent to realise my vision. It involves dialoguing with self to ensure interpreting and responding congruently to whatever is unfolding and having mental acuity to change ideas rather than being fixed to certain ideas	
Mindfulness	Seeing things for what they really are without distortion, whilst holding the intention of realising desirable practice	
		Reflection as a way of being

Figure 1: A typology of reflective practices, based on Johns (1991, p. 10)

This theoretical foundation has been important for our understanding of how to do research on developing reflective practitioners. To see if we are able to understand their “Self” in the educational setting and to support their reflections about their previous practices, their present practice and to record if/how this has affected their way of reflecting about how they perform their jobs.

3. Method of Inquiry

In this study, we are four researchers who have followed an education program, bachelor’s degree in music business and production over the period from 2021 to 2023. In particular we have studied the part of the study program that organizes music camps. The camps are carried out in five sessions over an academic year. We have followed two cohorts of students and their teachers. In total, 4 teachers and 20-25 students have participated per year. The group of teachers are the same four, while the students group change each year. Our methodological approach has been qualitative with a longitudinal design (Patton, 2002). We have followed the teaching program as observers and carried out participatory observation (Patton, 2002). In addition, we have conducted several formal recorded semi-structured interviews along with informal individual conversations and group conversations with both students and teachers during the sessions (Patton, 2002, Dalen, 2011). Our respondents are three of the teachers and three student groups, as well as a number of individual students. We also have interviewed the teachers in between the music camps. The data consists of transcripts from the recorded interviews, field notes written during and us after participating in the lessons. The data material has been analyzed by reading through field notes, and transcripts, as well as listening to the recordings. This has resulted in findings that show how the teacher- student relation is conducted and developed. We have also findings that give us insight in the development of the teachers as reflective practitioners. Along in the process we have discussed our findings in the research group. Our findings are also presented and discussed with the two teachers to have their opinion on the subject of a deeper understanding of the process of becoming better reflective practitioners.

4. Results and Discussion

Here we will present the results from our longitudinal investigations. The findings show two different relations; the relationship between students and lecturers/supervisors, and the relationship between the researchers and lecturers/supervisors.

4.1 The Practical Supervision – Student – Teacher Relationship

We joined the teachers in the studios and observed the tutoring situation. The students and the teacher discussed ideas for arrangements for the song they were to create. We experienced that they had a good communication and dialogue where the students received feedback from the teacher on their ideas and they developed them together. Afterwards, we asked the students how they perceived the teachers' feedback. They expressed that they perceived him more as an experienced colleague who gave some good advice than as a teacher who gave instructions.

This may indicate that the teachers have been able to create an understanding of collegial equality. The teacher is a music producer like the students are, only more experienced. This is similar to the phenomenon that Solberg (1996) describes, where she is able to incorporate the role of researcher into a type of producer role that she takes part in together with her informants. The production setting means that they meet as equal participants, in our case it is about the students accepting the feedback, (for the most part) and agreeing. This resembles also the peer coaching and cognitive coaching (Daniels, 2002). They have established a trusting relationship; they have fostered a desire for learning and growth and the supervisor is able to appear as collaborating with the students.

The lecturers/supervisors also appear to aid the process of reflection with their students. They encourage the students to evaluate and rethink if they are heading the "wrong" way. Much like Boud et al. (1985) they allow for "enabling practitioners to see their development as reflective practitioners through three key stages; 1) returning to experience, 2) attending to feelings, and 3) re-evaluating experience". Sometimes this requires the students also to do a double loop (Argyris and Schön, 1996) in the learning process as they may rethink and maybe change some of the basic knowledge they brought with them to the university. It may be that their basic assumptions are wrong and that they require that they are open and curious. They thus sometimes need to do as Gadamer (1975) suggest; to open up and keep open for possibilities, as they are generally truly interested in developing as songwriters even if they need to reset from time to time. Some students find this very hard as they may have thought they were good songwriters when they applied for university, only to discover that they still have a lot to learn.

4.2 Developing the Reflective Practitioner – The Researcher – Lecturer Relationship

When we started out doing research on our colleagues and the particular feature of song camps in this study program, the lecturers were very positive and welcoming. However, it took some conversations before they were able to reflect on their own practice. When they did start their reflections, they started to emerge as reflective practitioners (Schön, 1987, Schön, 1991). Statements like: "These are things I didn't know I could do until you and I sat down and talked about it" show how they are then able to open up for peer coaching. They have of course been students themselves at one time, having to come to terms with the fact that they were not necessarily the best songwriters when they entered their own education. Although having evolved and had quite a few hits on the billboards, they are still humble to the fact that they keep learning. A statement such as: "It was only after we spoke that I could visualize what was going to happen... the stages in how to make a song." Here it is referred to an interview where we as researchers pushed one of our informants (lecturer/supervisor) out of his comfort zone and asked him to explain to us why he behaved differently in the different groups. He then had to explain that he knew how far they needed to have developed the lyrics, the melody, the recordings and the production in order to manage to make a song within the time frame. This turned out to have been *tacit knowledge* (Polanyi, 1967) as he "just knew this by experience". This is knowledge obtained by hosting, supervising and producing hundreds of groups professionally in his organization (The Woods) and at the university. By being enabled to explain and externalize this knowledge, we as researchers were able to take part in this knowledge.

Our informant also claimed: "I wouldn't have been able to make this model if we hadn't had that conversation" and "The model has helped me a lot in my work" which indicate that the SECI-model (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) has been in use. By socializing, externalizing, allowing his colleagues take part in this knowledge and combine it with their own knowledge, they can by reflection and utilizing it, be able to internalize this knowledge and make it their *tacit knowledge*. It has also been of use to them in their work at the university as they are now able also to explain this to their students in order to make *them* understand and comply to this model.

Hence, we see a development with our colleagues that follow the typology of Johns (2009). They are able to reflect on experience as well as in action and pause to make sense and reframe if necessary. They are dialoguing with us as well as with themselves. They have become very aware of how they are thinking and feeling and

responding and have been clear about discussing different interpretations with us after themselves having reflected. They even seem to have obtained a certain mindfulness as they are trying to make sense and understand different behavior both within the university setting and within the frames of their organization (The Woods). They have largely absorbed *reflection as a way of being* and thus become *reflective practitioners*.

5. Conclusion

We find that the arrangement around the song camps has developed from being more of a purely production perspective, to also incorporating and placing great emphasis on the learning perspective where reflection leads to tacit knowledge being externalized. The teachers are well on their way of becoming stronger aware about their "Self" as reflective practitioners and they seem to have a better understanding of their own developmental process and learning process. The schemes have always had clear structures, these have now become more conscious and thus subject to developing and improvement.

The different aspects of reflections have been implemented by the lecturers/supervisors and they are now imposing this way of learning to the students at the university by making also the students become more aware of their capabilities, who they are as songwriters and how they can learn to become better practitioners as well as reflective practitioners.

The lecturers ability to embrace reflection as a tool for change in themselves as well as in their practice has allowed them to become reflective practitioners that has adopted reflection as a way of being.

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