Encouraging reflective practice in conservatoire students: A pathway to autonomous learning?

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Abstract

This paper reports on first-year conservatoire students' reflections on their one-to-one performance learning through a reflective journal. One-to-one lessons have been a central part of the education of performing musicians, although their place in the 21st century conservatoire is not beyond challenge. Recent research has indicated that this model has potential for students to rely heavily on their teachers for feedback and that more reflective and autonomous learning might benefit their progress. Students' journal responses revealed three main themes: the development of student autonomy; a sense of shared responsibility and collaboration; and increased clarity and confidence in the direction of their learning. The findings suggest that the journaling process can prompt an increased level of reflection and lead to more collaborative and autonomous learning in the one-to-one studio context.

Keywords: Conservatoire learning and teaching; Music learning and teaching; One-to-one studio lessons; Reflective practice; Student autonomy.

Introduction

This paper seeks to reveal processes through which reflective practice can stimulate autonomy, collaboration and confidence in the one-to-one learning environment of the conservatoire. Recent research has drawn attention to the ways in which traditional approaches and expectations of learning in the conservatoire environment are shaped by particular 'learning cultures', which remain largely unexplored and unchallenged (Burt-Perkins 2009 Froehlich 2002; Mateiro and Westvall 2013; Nerland 2007; Perkins 2013; Triantifyllaki 2010). These learning cultures have the potential to limit teachers' and students' capacity to systematically reflect on and enhance their learning and teaching practices. Other concerns relating to the approaches of learning in this environment include the generalizability of the learning that often takes place (e.g. Mills 2004;

Author & Non-Author 2015), and issues of power that can arise between teacher and learner (Burwell 2013; Author 2008; Long et al 2014). This research has highlighted the need to challenge and improve practices that impede students' autonomy and their capacity for life-long learning.

Historically, one-to-one lessons have formed an integral part of learning in the conservatoire (AEC 2010), and are deeply embedded within its learning culture. Teachers and students engaged in one-to-one learning and teaching widely agree that the benefits are significant (Author and Non-Author 2015; Gaunt 2008; 2010; 2011; Author 2004), and there is now a growing body of evidence that draws attention to the ways in which effective learning and teaching is facilitated in the one-to-one environment (Burwell 2005; Author et al 2013a; 2013b; Zhukov 2007), as well as the ways it may be supported by other types of learning experiences such as lessons with groups of students and student-student peer learning (Daniel 2006; Latukefu and Verenikina 2013; Long et al 2014; Thorgensen 2013).

A previous study led by the first-named author found that teachers and students recognise the need for students to develop independence and autonomy (Author and Non-Author 2015). In particular, it identified the need for students in the one-to-one context to assume greater responsibility for their learning, by being more reflective and more proactive in their questioning and their own learning goals in the one-to-one context (Author & Non-Author 2014). Research in education more broadly suggests reflective practice and journaling may be a means of encouraging the development of students' ability to self-monitor their progress (Ryan and Ryan 2013; Moon 2006; 2013). Moreover, this can be valuable in fostering autonomous learning (Taylor 2007; Barer-Stein & Kompf 2001; Wilink & Jacobs 2011).

This paper therefore reports on the use of a reflective journal as one approach to aid autonomous learning in students in the one-to-one setting. In this paper, the ways in which reflective learning and reflective practice have been applied in higher education are outlined; particularly the ways in which journals have been used to prompt deeper levels of reflection from students. The features of the Conservatoire context and student participants are described, as well as the methods of data generation and analysis that were used. The findings drawn from the analysis of the students' journal responses are then elucidated and explored using three broad themes: the development of student autonomy; a sense of shared responsibility and collaboration; and increased clarity and confidence in the direction of their learning. A list of recommendations are then provided, focusing on the ways the findings of the study may enhance conservatoire students' learning in the one-to-one context and more broadly.

Reflective learning

Recent research on higher education courses has highlighted the potential for reflective practice to contribute to lasting learning outcomes (Ryan and Ryan 2013) and to promote higher order thinking skills (Coulson and Harvey 2013). However, there is surprisingly little evidence in the extant literature about encouraging reflective practice in learning or teaching in the one-to-one context, or in conservatoire learning more broadly. One of the pragmatic aims of this project is to develop a learning culture in which students' and teachers' practices are reflective and collaborative, with the expectation that this will lead to increased feelings of autonomy and confidence. According to Glazer, Abbott and Harris (2004), reflection can lead to new perspectives on their practice, which in turn can contribute to professional growth. Findings from Author and Non-Author (2016) and Beatty (2000) suggest that reflection stimulates a greater sense of student autonomy and self-direction, encouraging learners to take

responsibility for their own learning.

Schön's (1983; 1987) seminal work describes reflection-in-action as the instinctive and embodied knowledge inherent in the actions of practitioners – the reflection is non-verbal, 'in the moment', and 'in the doing' itself. This reflection-in-action, in conjunction with reflection-*on*-action (reflection that happens before or after the action itself), facilitate what Argyris and Schön (1978) call "double loop learning" (see Figure 1), where the assumptions and theories underpinning the practice are called into question, and where new routines which are based on fundamentally different conceptions of practice are created (Argyris 2003). It is this approach that scholars of one-to-one learning and teaching have called for (Author et al 2013a; McPhail 2013; Perkins 2013; Nerland 2007; Persson 1996; Triantafyllaki 2005). In short, considering *why* lessons happen as they do (Triantafyllaki 2005), as opposed to approaches that are largely informed by intuition, "commonsense" and historical tradition (Persson 1996).

[Insert figure 1 around here]

One way of facilitating reflection for students is through the use of learning journals. Moon (2006) suggests a learning journal can be a means of providing motivation and incentive to reflect, which some students may need. She suggests that it creates a space for accumulating material over time that is based on the writer's reflections with the intention of enhancing learning (2006, 2). Use of a learning journal allows students to see connections that may have otherwise been missed. Importantly, Hübner, Nückles and Renkl (2010) argue that a journal-writing task can encourage students to make connections between new ideas and their existing knowledge, to continuously monitor their learning, and to address gaps in their understanding at an earlier stage, which may lead to enhanced learning outcomes.

However, journal writing in itself does not necessarily lead to improved learning outcomes (see Bangert-Drowns, Hurley and Wilkinson 2004). Coulson and Harvey (2013) suggest that, in order to reflect, students require support to reach a level of self-analysis and an openness to new ways of thinking. Regular opportunities to practise reflection, along with prompts that ask the students to make connections between their current learning and their past experiences (what Berthold, Nückles and Renkl (2007) call cognitive prompts), have been shown to assist students develop their reflective capacities.

Methodology

The aim of this paper is to consider the ways in which a reflective journal may stimulate the development of autonomy, collaboration and confidence for first-year conservatoire students. This section describes the context in which the research was undertaken, the methods used for data collection and analysis, information about the participants, and the ethical considerations of the research.

Context

The data on which this paper draws is part of a larger project that was designed to illuminate the characteristics and processes of one-to-one teaching practices within tertiary music education. A research team comprising of researchers and teachers from five institutions sought to actively develop learning practices that are positive, collaborative, supportive, open, exploratory and reflective. Project activities have included multiple opportunities for reflection by both students and teachers working in the one-to-one context: workshops for one-to-one teachers, reflective journaling tasks for students, exercises prompted by videoed lessons for both teachers and students, and collaborative activities between teachers and students.

Method

As part of their one-to-one studies, students at one of the above institutions are required to complete a Performance Studies Portfolio (PSP) or journal. The content of this journal forms the basis of the data for this paper. The journal is designed to capture reflection on a range of student activities and experiences, documenting and reflecting on the individual students' learning activities associated with their performance studies, including but not limited to their one-to-one lessons. Other activities reported on in the PSPs include concerts, workshops and masterclasses.

To assist in developing an understanding of the requirements of the journal, in the first week of the academic year, students were invited to participate in a workshop. This workshop included a series of activities that focused on approaching learning with a growth mindset, where students embrace challenges, and approach feedback on performances as an opportunity to learn rather than personal criticism (Dweck 2006). The importance of reflection as a means of evaluating students' progress towards their goals was also explored. These concepts, which were designed to prompt both reflective practice and to fuel dialogue with their one-to-one teacher relating to their learning, were incorporated into the journal stimulus questions and assessment criteria.

As prompts for their journal-writing, students were provided with questions specific to their individual lessons in Weeks 1, 3 and 7 of a thirteen-week semester. Students were invited to write one paragraph for each entry, in response to the following questions:

Week 1, Entry 1: Reflect on your discussion with your teacher about your learning goals. What are your thoughts about your learning going forward?

Week 3, Entry 1: Thinking back to the learning goals that you developed at the start of

semester, do you still see them as important/relevant? Explain why or why not, and how you have developed new ones (if applicable).

Week 3, Entry 2: How are you progressing towards your goals? What do you still need to achieve? What will you do to achieve this?

Week 7, Entry 1: Write a paragraph about the achievement or progress towards your learning goals so far this semester. Are there any additional learning goals that you have thought of?

Week 7, Entry 2: After discussion, what feedback have you had from your teacher about your goals and your progress?

Unsurprisingly, the length and depth of the responses varied widely, with some students diligently responding to each part of each question, others responding more generally, and in a few cases, somewhat sporadically. However, the responses yielded an extensive amount of data that highlighted the ways in which the students reflected (or not) on their learning, and the ways in which the process of journaling had prompted and encouraged them to exercise autonomy and to develop their confidence.

Participants

With a student population of almost 1000, the conservatoire in question offers degrees in classical instrumental and vocal studies, jazz, composition, musical theatre, popular music and music technology. With the exception of those studying popular music and music technology, all students in addition to enrolling in a diverse range of courses, undertake one-to-one tuition in performance.

Journals were submitted by a first-year cohort of 148 students, of whom 94 consented to their folio being used for the purposes of this research. The students who

consented were from a wide range of areas and specialisms within the Bachelor of Music degree program (see Figure 2), with the proportions of participants across areas broadly reflective of the student enrolment patterns.

[Insert Figure 2 around here]

Data analysis

The analysis was conducted using a primarily inductive process, although it was also informed by the issues raised in the extant literature (described above). In the initial coding, each of the authors reviewed the data independently and then discussed to reach a consensus on the themes. In the second reading of the data, the journal entries were re-coded according to the themes and subthemes, with particular attention paid to examples where the students' reflection-on-action (as per Schon's theory) appeared to stimulate a change in practice or routines, indicating a move towards a double loop (Argyris and Schön 1978, Argyris 2003).

Ethical considerations

Students were recruited at a workshop during their orientation week, and after a being provided with verbal description of the project and a written information sheet, were asked to return a paper-based consent form. Students were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and confidential, and that any extract used in publication would be de-identified.

The journal entries of students who consented to participate were de-identified prior to analysis, and each student was allocated an ID number at random. Any references to names of teachers or other students were anonymised (e.g. "my teacher" instead of the teacher's name). References to instrument-specific repertoire were

generalized (e.g. etude rather than Kreutzer #8) to reduce the potential for those with inside knowledge of the institution to be able to identify the participants from their comments.

Findings

The students' journal responses revealed three main themes: the development of student autonomy; providing direction to learning; and the sense of shared responsibility for learning through student-teacher collaboration. In this section, each of these themes will be discussed in turn.

Student Autonomy

As described earlier in this paper, one of the primary aims of this project is to implement initiatives that encourage a greater sense of student autonomy through developing their capacity to reflect.

Reflecting on goals

The journal questions encouraged students to return to these questions in subsequent entries, which, for some students, provided an opportunity to reflect on and affirm their original goals:

I believe that the learning goals I wrote about in week one are still relevant as they are goals that will make me become a better player. I think that the goals I wrote about are all very technical based and as I have lacked doing this [sic], they will help be become a better player. (Student #35, Week 3)

I still see the learning goals that I developed at the beginning of the semester as important and relevant. I believe that these goals are relevant as it will help me to continue improving at a set pace, with certain goals set. My goals have not changed, however I now have a order or priority to which pieces I am starting or

working on, so I feel motivated to keep working and practicing. (Student #52, Week 3)

I absolutely see the before-mentioned [sic] learning goals as important and relevant. I believe that these developed goals are the key to improving my capability to perform as well as increasing my enjoyment of the performance experience ... I feel at this stage, rather than new goals being established, the importance of current goals has been amplified. (Student #53, Week 3)

For others, the prompt to reflect provided an opportunity to reevaluate their direction:

I believe that my learning goals are still applicable, however there is some extra that I would add to my original list. Technically speaking, I am happy to continue concentrating on my left hand 4th finger for this semester, and perhaps the rest of the year. I am still happy with my repertoire goals, but now need to consider my etude choice for my next exam, as well as also focusing on memory work. However, I wish to focus more upon my nerves and my approach to practice and lessons. I find that I get extremely nervous prior to lessons, and that no matter how much practice I have done in the week leading up to it, I always feel that I have not done enough. I wish to combat this by breaking down each of my goals into smaller ones, and by looking at each practice session as a self contained unit, which I will discuss further in the next entry. (Student #39, Week 3)

The learning goals that I set for myself at the beginning of the semester are still very important to me and I consider them to be relevant to my continued learning. However, I have decided to change them slightly. During the last few weeks of trying to actually implement these goals I have realised that they are still very broad. At the end of the semester I feel that I am not going to be able to tell if I have achieved them or not. Consequently I am going to make a few of them even more specific so that I am able to clearly see how I am or am not accomplishing them:

- Develop and implement at least five new strategies for improved practice
- Develop and implement at least five new strategies for improved scale practice (Student #80, Week 3)

The goals I had set remain relatively unchanged presently. In hindsight (only two weeks ago) I realise I was still thinking more short term. That would be 'learn

scales' and 'this etude'. Now however I am focusing on developing long-term habits that will benefit me for years. Among these includes the desire to develop a stable and consistent practice routine and effective time management. I want to lock myself into a routine that will help me to become successful. Regarding the progression to achieving my set goals, I would say I am progressing on schedule. However, I am still finding it hard to sink into a decent and consistent practice routine. To achieve this, I propose creating a logbook that will keep record of my practice so I will know when I'm not working as hard as I should. (Student #84, Week 3)

These reflective journal entries help to demonstrate students' capacity to monitor their learning, and also align with other literature in relation to benefits of student journals (Hübner, Nückles and Renkl, 2010). While it is not possible to ascertain whether or not students might have engaged in such monitoring without the journal, it would appear that the journal provided a tool and a source of motivation through which to engage in this process.

Goals influencing practice

In some cases, there is evidence to suggest that the goal-setting exercise encouraged students to develop new routines to help them reach their goals:

I believe I am progressing well towards my goals. It has only been two weeks and I am noticing a small improvement in my high register. So far I have managed to break my practices into several short sessions and this allows me to focus on specific things each time I practice. I need to divide my practice up better so I am working on technique, studies and pieces every day and not just focusing on one each day ... I am going to log a practice diary for the next week so I can see exactly what I practice each day and for the week as a whole. This should help me check if I am practicing efficiently. I will also try writing a daily checklist to ensure I am getting all the necessary things done every day. (Student #71, Week 3)

In this entry, the student describes a proposed variation of practice with the intention of

generating greater awareness of how time use and, in turn, greater productivity is achieved. The new knowledge that is generated through this change in behaviour has the potential to prompt a shift towards double-loop learning. Likewise, for some students, the journal activity drew their attention to the need to develop more independence, demonstrating a reconsideration of the *governing variables* and potentially prompting a phase of double-loop learning:

We didn't discuss my long-term goals in any depth during my lesson this week. In my opinion, the main reason for this was time. There is always so much to cover in a lesson and there is never enough time to do everything you want to do. I would have liked to talk more about my specific goals and in retrospect that was my mistake because I should have been the one to start the discussion ... I have listed four specific goals I would like to achieve during this semester and I will share these with my teacher during my next lesson ... (Student #80, Week 1)

However, there were also students whose entries appear to suggest that they were not yet ready to exercise their autonomy, preferring to let their teacher guide the course of their learning. In some cases, responding to the journal questions such as “What are your thoughts about your learning going forward?” prompted students to consider ways in which they might exercise more autonomy in the future:

From this initial lesson, I have taken that my current learning goals include securing the breathing mechanism, increasing the strength of the upper range of my voice, and focusing on correct vowel placement and production. I was happy with the way these goals were explained to me, and felt comfortable asking questions and seeking advice. I feel confident that these goals are achievable and I will aim to apply the advice given to me in lessons throughout my own practice. I believe that through regular practice and taking on the advice from my teacher, my learning will progress. In future lessons, I hope to ask more questions with regards to my teacher's expectations (i.e. time frame for learning pieces) so that I may set deadlines for my own learning. (Student #20, Week 1)

The first part of this entry appears to demonstrate a relatively passive student position,

whereby the goals are inferred by the teacher rather than devised by the student. While the student does not explicitly state that he/she objects to this, there is an acknowledgement that more responsibility could be taken for his/her own learning.

Giving learning direction

Students were asked at several points throughout the semester to respond to what they thought about their learning going forward in conjunction with their progress towards these goals. The overwhelming majority of students expressed feeling positive, confident and clearer about their learning.

I am finding it very helpful to have specific goals in my learning and feel that I am progressing toward most of them in a satisfactory way. (Student #80, Week 3)

The discussion I had with my teacher this week was incredibly helpful and has motivated me to better myself as a musician this year. I definitely feel more clear about my learning goals. (Student #28, Week 1)

So far this semester, I feel as though I am improving and striving towards my goals that I set at the start of the year. I am feeling more confident and organised with setting mini goals each practice session so I have clear understanding of what I want to achieve. (Student #46, Week 7)

After the discussion with my teacher I felt a great deal clearer on what it is that I am aiming to achieve in my first semester at The Conservatorium. I believe the specified learning goals will assist me on my path to becoming a professional musician. (Student #93, Week 1)

As is to be expected from a first-year cohort, a number of students also expressed that developing and discussing their goals had helped them to gain a better understanding of the university requirements:

Discussing my learning goals with my teacher, I have a clearer understanding of what I need to do in order to reach my goals. It has been a bit overwhelming starting uni and getting comfortable with the lectures and assignments but I feel I have a better grip at it all now... I feel more comfortable about the year ahead after having that discussion, as I know now, what I need to be prepared for and ways of tackling the assessment efficiently and effectively. Right now I'm excited about starting it all. (Student #4, Week 1)

While discussions relating to learning goals may well have taken place between some teachers and students without the prompt questions in the journal, generally the journals indicate that these conversations were helpful. This may suggest that the journal provides a valuable framework for encouraging teachers and students to discuss progress and direction.

Shared responsibility through student-teacher collaboration

There were marked differences between the ways students wrote about their interactions with their teacher as they developed their goals and reflected on the process. In some examples, there was evidence of a collaborative exchange that had positive effects for the student:

When I talked to my teacher about my learning goals, she listened to my goals, and helped me to make them stronger and more achievable. She asked me what sort of artist I wanted to be, and what techniques I wanted to work on so that I might find the areas needing refinement. (Student #17, Week 1)

After discussing my learning goals with my teacher, I have a better understanding of what I want to achieve in my music career and how to get there. (Student #46, Week 1)

In contrast, there are a number of examples where the students describe goals that their teacher selected *for* them:

After having a discussion with my teacher, my learning goals are very clear. I need to practise very slowly, to ensure that the movements in the arms and wrists are very precise ... I feel that my learning goals have been made very clear ... (Student #142, Week 1)

Some students also identified that the task had provided the impetus to share their goals, something they may not have otherwise done:

The discussion with my teacher proved rather interesting. I found that I was slightly stumbling through speaking about my long-term and short-term goals, realising that I had never really articulated them to anyone. As a result of this, I definitely feel more clear about my learning goals now that I have spoken to someone about them. With regard to my learning going forward, I am very excited. (Student #95, Week 1)

I was really excited to discuss my learning goals with my teacher. I think that it is the ideal way to start the semester as it enables both student and teacher to move forward with the same clearly defined goals in mind. My teacher didn't choose my goals for me, but rather asked me to identify areas needing improvement in my own playing. I found it difficult in a way to articulate exactly what I wanted to improve, but my teacher was able to help me in this way ... (Student #78, Week 1)

These comments appear to suggest that the students valued the sense of collaboration and shared decision-making that emerged from these conversations.

In another example, the student identifies learning goals that don't appear to have discussed with the teacher during the semester, with the act of journaling appearing to stimulate the development of the goals:

I didn't get the chance to discuss my learning goals with my teacher but my goals are as below:

- Improving my technique such as lowering my right shoulder when playing.
- Become more confident when playing, overcoming performance anxiety.
- Becoming more focused during practice. (Student #2, Week 1)

While the student does not explain why they were not discussed, there is some evidence of an increasing level of self-reflection from the student, and a willingness to implement strategies independently, suggesting that the exercise prompted a shift towards double loop learning:

Thinking back to the learning goals that I developed at the start of the semester I do still see them as important/relevant. My first learning goal that I thought of is improving my technique. This learning goal is still relevant to me because technique is something that can always be improved. The second goal I created was to overcome my performance anxiety. This goal is still important because as a musician I perform a lot and will need to become more comfortable performing. My last goal is to become more concentrated during practice. This is still a relevant goal because to improve my technique and overall playing I need to be more concentrated. For my first goal I have been improving my technique by improving my other goal (becoming more concentrated in practice). To further improve my third goal (overcoming performance anxiety) I need to perform more in front of my family and friends. (Student #2, Week 3)

The first achievement I have made towards my learning goals is that I have made days where I practice my technique with a friend. This is improving my technique skills and especially helping me prepare for my technique exam in June. (Student #2, Week 7)

When compared with the entries by other students, the absence of any reference to the teacher in this series of entries is striking. In this instance, the student takes a high level of responsibility for his/her own learning, and utilises other sources of support (a peer) to assist in reaching his/her goals. The extent to which this is significant cannot however be determined from these data.

In other cases, the teacher features prominently in journal entries. As is evident in the following example, some students demonstrate a high level of reliance on their teacher for direction.

One of my goals is to improve my technical standard so that when I perform I can focus on the emotion of the piece instead of producing the right sound based on what is written in front of me. My teacher has shown me many exercises that will be useful for this particular goal. However, my one concern with this is that I might not learn quickly enough and fall back in other practical assessments. I am not sure how I will overcome this but I am sure my teacher will be able to guide in the correct direction. (Student #59, Week 1)

Other students attribute their progress to their teacher rather than taking ownership of their work:

I feel as though I am improving week by week thanks to my teacher. I can directly see this improvement in the practice room and more so in ensemble, where I am taking new approaches towards my playing. (Student #73, Week 3)

The journal entries above illustrate the existence of a wide range of student-teacher relationships, and demonstrate varying levels of collaboration and shared responsibility. While there is no “ideal” type of student-teacher relationship evident, these variations highlight the ways in which some students rely heavily on their teacher for guidance, while others engage with their teacher in a more collaborative way..

Recommendations, need for further research and conclusions

The results from this analysis suggests that reflective practice, stimulated through critical questioning and dialogue, has the potential to enhance learning outcomes for students of performance studies courses. Reflective practice has the potential to enhance students’ ability to take responsibility for their own learning, and the students’ reflections suggest that the questions in the journal prompted thinking about the goals of their learning, providing the impetus for student-teacher discussions that may not have taken place otherwise. There is also evidence to suggest that the journal provides an opportunity to formalize the process of establishing student-teacher relationships, where

students are encouraged to articulate their goals for their musical learning and their career aspirations. This is likely to lead to a more collaborative approach to lessons, with responsibility shared between teacher and student.

The findings from this investigation would appear to support what has been found more broadly in higher education: that reflective learning has a positive effect on students' learning. While this investigation was within a single institution and of a single cohort, there is potential for the principles to be applied at an institutional level, more broadly across the higher music education sector, and in other one-to-one teaching, tutoring, coaching and mentoring contexts. Further, there are opportunities to investigate more extensively teachers and students perceptions of the journaling process, as well as to monitor the influence of the process on student autonomy, learning outcomes and graduate attributes.

Within the scope of this research, there are limitations on the conclusions that can be drawn from data of this nature. It is important to note that, even though members of teaching staff were randomly selected to grade the journals, it is imperative to allow for the possibility that some students might write to please their teacher. Fernsten and Fernsten (2005) suggest that it is crucial that reflective writing is conducted within a "safe space" and is free from negative repercussions as a result of honest reflections on less than optimal behaviours (i.e. leaving work until the last minute, not demonstrating an appropriate attitude towards their learning). Within the dataset, there was evidence of students reflecting openly on such issues, which suggests that in general that students felt that they could write freely, however, it is not a variable for which the researchers were able to control.

Further, it might be desirable to map correlations between the quality of students' reflections and teachers' perceptions of student improvement. Additionally, an

exploration of the students' perceptions of the workshop (which were collected anonymously in this instance) in comparison with the quality of the reflections in the journal might provide insights into the relationship between these learning experiences. The latter may have the potential to inform and evaluate the workshop design in terms of how effectively it scaffolds the reflective writing process for students. While these investigations are beyond the scope of this paper, they may be considered in future project designs.

This paper sought to examine the manner in which reflective practice can assist in developing stimulate autonomy, collaboration and confidence in conservatoire training. Reflective journals have been found to be a useful tool in establishing goals, beginning conversations, and providing clarity in the learning situation. It is but one way through which students can assume ownership of their learning. This approach appears to address, at least in part, some of the concerns raised in the literature about issues of power in the student-teacher dyad (Burwell 2013; Author 2008; Long et al 2014). Through collaborative learning and shared clarity of purpose, there is potential for power imbalances to be mediated. The three themes give some specificity to learning, helping to overcome the generalised nature of research thus far, as identified by Mills (2004) and Author & Non-Author (2015).

As Mateiro and Westvall (2013), Perkins (2013) and Triantifyllaki (2010) and others have lamented, there is a lack of thorough investigation into conservatoire learning. The project has assisted by revealing that student learning can be enhanced through the use of reflective practice. As this paper reported on student perspectives, further research is required into the development of teacher attributes and skills to enable students to participate in the collaborative approach more fully. Furthermore, a longitudinal study with different data generation methods may help to reveal further

insights into how reflective journals impact on learning outcomes. It might also assist in gaining a richer understanding of how reflective journals might shape the development of autonomy and/or student teacher relationships and instill more confidence in student learning in the conservatoire and other institutional and non-institutional learning environments.

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Figure 1 Argyris and Schön's (1978) model of double loop learning

Figure 2 Study area of student participants