

# Participatory learning walks: reflective practice for the conductor-music educator

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## Abstract

Learning walks can be defined as ongoing, structured classroom visits by senior teachers and other colleagues intended to gather data about teaching and learning through observation and interaction with students. Used in areas such as classroom teaching, learning walks are designed to support professional learning for educators and encourage collegial conversations. A participatory learning walk has the potential to facilitate powerful teacher reflection, inform educational practice and support improved student learning outcomes. This paper presents a modified learning walk that encourages teacher reflection and enhances student learning in ensemble music education. In this article qualitative action research methodology, existing research into reflective practice, the nature of learning walks, and the specific context of music ensemble are each explored. Finally this paper presents the case study of 'Ben' the conductor-music educator and his experience of participating in a learning walk program. Above all, this paper seeks to generate professional discussion amongst music educators with regard to their reflective practices.

**Key words:** reflective practice, learning walk, music ensemble.

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## Introduction

This paper examines 'learning walks' as a mechanism for reflective practice in music education, specifically exploring the application of an adapted (participatory) learning walk model to an ensemble music education context. Learning walks, also referred to as data walks (Bloom, 2007), walkthroughs (Skretta, 2007), or learning visits (Bloom, 2007) can be defined as ongoing, structured classroom visits by senior teachers and other colleagues (Skretta, 2007), intended to gather data about teaching and learning through observation and interaction with students (Bloom, 2007). Learning walks have been widely used in classroom settings, and are aimed at supporting professional learning for educators (Bloom, 2007). Furthermore learning walks seek to encourage

collegial conversations (Pijanowski, 2008) about teaching and learning within classroom contexts. An important aspect of the learning walk process is their focus on encouraging critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995) as a part of collegial dialogue. Learning walks are not intended for use as summative, performance measurement, although they are sometimes (mis)used as such.

The Conductor-Music Educator combines the functions of both conductor and ensemble teacher (King, 2011). The conductor-music educator does more than prepare music for public performance. The conductor-music educator helps performers with their technique and assists with learning music fundamentals (Kohut & Grant, 1990).

The qualitative research presented in this paper was generated as part of a 2012 Master of Education program research project. The participatory action research approach (McIntyre, 2008) employed several data gathering procedures including surveys, focus groups and journals. Data were collected from ensemble members, learning walkers and the conductor-music educator regarding three sequential learning walks in a student music ensemble (wind orchestra). Data were analysed through an approach that uses ‘inductive category construction’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hatch, 2002; Moses & Knutsen, 2007; Sarantakos, 2005).

This paper explores data collected from student members, learning walkers and the conductor-music educator about the three learning walks and the impact of these walks particularly on the conductor-music educator. In this paper literature regarding reflective practice and learning walks are presented and discussed, the adapted ‘participatory’ learning walk is introduced, the participatory action research approach and the site for the research is outlined, and finally the impact of the learning walk program on the conductor-music educator is presented as a single case study.

## Literature

### ***Reflective practice***

Reflective practice is an important disposition for educators and professional learning communities that focus on student learning. Dewey (1933) defined reflection as the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 9). The persistent and methodical nature of reflective practice is explained by Schon (1983) as a way to “surface and criticise tacit understandings and make new sense of the situations of uncertainty” (p. 61). Quinn (2004), explains that through careful reflection, we develop

the capacity to “integrate the realm of action with the realm of personal identity. We reflect deeply on our patterns of action and we clarify who we really are and what we are really doing” (p. 110). Searby (2007) describes this process as the “mental activity of stepping back and reconnecting with core values”(p. 50). These definitions of reflection highlight the individual nature of reflection and the purposeful connection to a specific context.

Reflective practice can provide professional learning communities with a vehicle for refocusing their educational vision. Such “communities of practice” (Stamps, 2000, p.8), focus primarily on “learning as social participation” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). Professional learning communities (Riegelman & Ruben, 2012) are interested in a very specific aspect of learning – that of students. These communities regard learning as a “collaborative activity between student and teacher” (Gamble, 2008, p. 17). They “focus on a shared purpose, mutual regard and caring, and an insistence on integrity and truthfulness” (Hord, 2009, p. 40).

The processes of engaging in reflective practice are as varied as the pedagogies and models themselves and educators have a broad range of data gathering tools available to assist in the process of reflection. These include: supervision and evaluation (Rutherford, 2006); standardised and benchmark testing (Pijanowski, 2008); student interviews (Brown Easton, 2008); journal writing (Quinn, 2004); and, learning walks (Bloom, 2007). Moon (2004) also includes portfolios, action learning sets, human inquiry groups, peer and self-assessment and problem based learning (PBL) among the more usual processes for reflection. According to Love, Stiles, Mundry and Di Ranna (2008) each of these tools generates data, which can take on real meaning when used as part of the reflective process.

### ***Learning walks***

The value of learning walks in general classroom education has been well documented in recent

years (Bloom 2007; Brown Easton, 2008; Cudeiro & Nelson, 2009; Dallas, 2011; Jorissen, 2006; Kachur, Skretta, 2007; Steiny, 2009; Kachur, Stout & Edwards, 2010). These studies have shown that when used well learning walks have the potential to generate thoughtful and constructive discussions between stakeholders about teaching practice. A useful application of the learning walk might involve the school principal and another member of the administrative staff negotiating a time to visit the classroom where grade five students were involved in a health lesson. They would clearly articulate their objectives to the teacher prior to entering the classroom. The learning walk would involve observing the teaching and learning transactions, discussing with students what they were learning, and, following the visit, a discussion with the teacher about the visit. Recent studies (Bickford, 2010; Cudeiro & Nelson, 2009; Dallas, 2010) have shown that while learning walks have much potential, the learning walk does not always operate as intended. A learning walk where the objectives are not transparent, where feedback to the teacher is non-existent or limited to a written checklist, or when the purpose is summative, is likely to be unhelpful and even counterproductive in enhancing teaching and learning outcomes. These studies have shown that to be successful, these instructional models must have clearly defined parameters. Failure to articulate the purpose and process of the learning walk can result in the application of the model degenerating into summative teacher evaluation. This places the model at odds with authentic, reflective processes.

### **The 'Participatory' Learning Walk**

This research resulted in the development of an adapted Participatory Learning Walk model for use in ensemble music education, which involves the learning walkers (observers) in the process of constructing a shared understanding through active participation in learning. The research also argued that a participatory approach to learning walks is most appropriate for ensemble music

education. The role of participant (learning walker) involvement in a music ensemble, an area that the reviewed literature on learning walks does not address, becomes critical to the design of an adapted learning walk model.

Learning walker participants in this study had the opportunity to join three ensemble rehearsals and through being involved in this music making to experience the learning process directly. This participatory adaptation allowed the observing learning walkers to become active participants, engaging fully in the teaching and learning process by playing their instruments in the rehearsal. In this participatory model the conductor-music educator, ensemble members and learning walkers (observers) had the opportunity to shape each other's understandings of what that teaching and learning process meant to them.

The development of an adapted participatory learning walk model was also driven by the particular nature of the teaching and learning context. Ensemble based teaching, whilst employing written and oral language, encourages learning through the vehicles of musical sound and gestures (Battisiti, 2007; Lisk, 2010). This language is a characteristic unique to the ensemble setting. The teacher (in this case a conductor-music educator) communicates musical intentions and interpretations through physical gestures. The students (in this case the ensemble members) respond primarily through the production of music and sound with their voice or instrument (Glumm, 2010). It makes sense therefore to experience the instructional process through this primary language rather than through traditional observation, note taking and discussion with students, as occurs in more 'generic' learning walks. The participatory learning walker responds to the conductor's gesture through the creation of sound on his or her instrument. The participatory learning walker learns through participation, which in an ensemble requires interpreting conducting

gesture and necessitates the creation of sound as a means of expression and communication within that learning context. The learning walk is bookended by traditional forms of communication experienced through written and verbal instructions, focus group discussions and journal reflections.

## Method

### ***Participatory action research***

The research was conducted within an action research framework and specifically employed a participatory action research model. Action research is a distinctive approach to inquiry that in an education context provides a means for teachers to “enhance their teaching and improve student learning” (Stringer, 2008, p. 1). According to Milton-Brkich, Shumbera and Beran (2010), action research is defined as “professional research done by teachers to inform and improve their own practices” (p. 47) while at the same time focusing on “student learning” (p. 4). Action research was considered the most appropriate methodological approach because both teacher reflection and student learning are critical components of a learning walk approach and likewise in the proposed participatory learning walk model.

The underlying principles of participatory action research include: (a) a collective commitment to investigate an issue or problem; (b) a desire to engage in self and collective reflection to gain clarity about the issue under investigation; (c) a joint decision to engage in individual and/or collective action that leads to a solution that benefits those involved; and (d) the building of alliances between researchers and participants in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of the research process (McIntyre, 2008, p. 1).

### ***Presentation: Case study***

Case study is the study of a bounded entity (Burns, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Stake (2000) writes

that a “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. By whatever methods, we choose to study the case” (p. 435) [see also Denzin & Lincoln, 2000]. One of the conundrums of the case study is the distinction between generalisability and specificity. Stake (2000) maintains that “the search for particularity competes with the search for generalizability” (p. 439), but that the use of an “instrumental case study” can enable an examination of the complexities of the case, but in a manner that illuminates an “understanding of something else” (p. 437). Burns (1998) writes that the generalisability of the case study has value “by showing that things are so, or that such an interpretation is plausible in a particular case and therefore might be so in other cases” (p. 365). This research generated four case studies, three cases based on the individual learning walkers and one based on the conductor-music educator. This paper presents the case of the conductor-music educator, Ben; but is significantly informed by the perceptions of the three learning walkers.

### ***Site and sample***

The University of Tasmania Community Music Program (UTCMP) was selected as the context for this research because it was readily accessible to the researcher, and because of the potentially rich data that such a program could generate. The UTCMP is comprised of six graded ensembles, five conductor-music educators, more than one hundred and twenty members and has a twenty-five year history. From the six ensembles in the program the ensemble selected for this study was the second highest - the Symphonic Band. The aim of Symphonic Band is to provide an ensemble experience that brings members closer to the repertoire of the contemporary symphonic wind band. As part of the UTCMP, Symphonic Band aims to develop a player’s musical skill and confidence in an engaging and social learning environment.

All participants in this study volunteered their involvement and were selected based on a range

of criteria related to their role within the program, their level of experience and their availability for the duration of the study. Three learning walkers (observers) were selected in order to represent the range of instruments played within the ensemble, and only one conductor-music educator was found to meet these criteria.

Pseudonyms have been used throughout this paper. The three learning walkers were: Andrew (flute), Peter (trumpet), and Vaughan (percussion).

In addition to the three learning walkers and the conductor-music educator, three student ensemble members (current members of the selected ensemble) also participated in this study through their completion of pre and post surveys. These participants were selected according to their level of musical ability and experience, the currency of their membership with the ensemble, and their availability for the duration of the study.

The student ensemble members provided an important contextual perspective regarding the learning walk process because they were regular members of the ensemble, with personal perspectives drawn from between six months and eleven years of experience with it. Their perspectives served to confirm responses given by the ensemble conductor-music educator and the participatory learning walkers. The pre-learning walk survey questions were as follows:

1. As a learner, how do you experience the following aspects of Symphonic Band rehearsal?
  - a) Warm-ups and tuning
  - b) Pacing of the rehearsal
  - c) Verbal explanations and instructions by the director
  - d) Conductor modeling and non-verbal communication (gestures)
  - e) Focus on sections and individuals
  - f) Working on difficult passages
  - g) Encouragement to listen to self and others
  - h) Encouragement to practice
  - i) The repertoire and music you play
2. Reflecting on your learning experiences in Symphonic Band, what priority do you believe

is given to each of the following dimensions of music making?

- a) Playing with correct rhythms and pitches
  - b) Using good intonation & tone quality
  - c) Employing correct articulation
  - d) Playing with precision
  - e) Use of phrasing and expression
  - f) Playing with dynamic contrast
  - g) Using balance and blend
  - h) Conveying the emotional & expressive qualities of the music
  - i) Playing with a beautiful sound
3. How do your experiences in Symphonic Band contribute to your sense of musicianship - the ability to think for yourself and make musical decisions?
  4. What could be done to enhance your learning experiences in Symphonic Band?

Post learning walk surveys were almost identical.

### **Data collection instruments**

This project used multiple methods of data collection (surveys, journals and focus groups). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state that the "use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (p. 2). This approach to data collection contributed to the strength of the research design and to the validity of data.

Embedded within the research design, and reflecting the principles of participatory action research, was a four stage recursive process:

1. Questioning a particular issue;
2. Reflecting upon and investigating the issue;
3. Developing an action plan; and
4. Implementing and refining that plan. (McIntyre, 2008, p. 6)

This recursive process framed all transactions within each focus group interview, thus again providing substantial integrity to the process.

## **Procedures**

Data were collected from participants over a three month period; with data from student ensemble members being collected at the beginning and the end of the study through pre and post surveys. Data were collected from the three learning walkers through three focus group discussions and three individual journal entries following their participation in each rehearsal. The focus group data were audio recorded and returned to subjects for member-checking. Focus groups included one of the researchers, the three learning walkers and the conductor-music educator. These focus groups took place after three spaced rehearsals (at approximately one month intervals) and were framed by the four stage, recursive participatory process outlined by McIntyre (2008). This process started with an open-ended reflection by the participatory learning walkers on their learning experiences during the first ensemble rehearsal. The conductor-music educator then outlined to the three learning walkers areas of his practice that he wanted them to pay attention to during their subsequent walks. These overarching directives were already integral to his learning plan for the ensemble and included:

### Rhythmic accuracy

- Internal subdivision
- Start and finish sound as an ensemble
- Full value sound

### Tone Development

- Starting with great air support
- Flowing air through all passages
- Tuning accuracy

These foci for rehearsal were provided in dot points on small laminated cue sheets for learning walkers to use as prompts during the second and third rehearsals. These dot points provided a stimulus for the participatory learning walkers to consider as they actively participated in the rehearsal. Importantly, these foci became a central part of the subsequent focus group interviews and helped

to frame discussions about teaching and learning transactions. As part of the participatory nature of the research these foci continued to evolve and develop as a result of the focus group transactions. As a result of this process the Conductor-music educator identified a further specific foci for the learning walkers: "Listening outside your part."

## **Data analysis**

Data were analysed through an approach that uses "inductive category construction" (Hatch, 2002; Moses & Knutsen, 2007; Sarantakos, 2005). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) "an inductive approach to analysis means that the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves" (p. 12). Hatch (2002) writes that "inductive data analysis is a search for patterns of meaning in data so that general statements about phenomena under investigation can be made" (p. 161). These "patterns of meaning" emerge from data, and evolve as data are coded, enabling the researcher to move in and out of data as the phenomenon is better understood.

In this research data were entered into charts or "matrices" (Miles & Huberman, 1984), coded numerically and by colour, providing a framework for the analysis of emerging themes and the relationships between them. Through analysing the data provided by the student ensemble members, the conductor-music educator and the three learning walkers it was possible to discover and interrogate commonalities and patterns in their experiences.

## **Ben: the case of the conductor-music educator**

Ben studied at the University of Tasmania where he gained his BPA (Mus.), B Teach, and Grad Cert (Orchestral Performance). As a performer Ben has played with a wide range of local and interstate performers. In his professional life Ben is a music educator for the Department of Education where he works as music coordinator at a local high school.

Ben has been involved with the UTCMP since 2001. In 2003 he joined the conducting team, initially working with the Beginning Band and then working with Development Band for seven years. After a short break he returned in 2010 to take on the role of musical director for the Symphonic Band. Ben is well-versed in the 'learning process versus final product' ethos of the program and as a result was willing to be involved in a study that explored ways of enhancing student learning for his ensemble.

Steiny (2009) writes that "to be genuinely meaningful learning walks must also be bookended by professional development" (p. 32). For Andrew the focus group sessions were what "made a real difference [to his ability] to reflect" (Andrew, Journal Entry 3). The focus group discussions involving the three learning walkers and Ben also reveal the value of collegial discussions to all learning walk participants but particularly as a means of engaging Ben in critical reflection. Discussions between Ben and the learning walkers offered new and quite specific insights for his selection of repertoire:

*Ben: With the saxophones, did you think [the difficulty of the repertoire] was beyond them or was it at that edge, where they have to sharpen?*

*Andrew (PLW - Flute): It was at that edge; I don't think it was beyond them. I could hear some honkey stuff going on occasionally. A lot of it is down to intonation rather than the ability to physically play the notes. The difference between this ensemble and the one below it is that you're getting that blend and that's what you're aiming at, some are just not reaching that. They can physically play the notes.*

(Focus Group Interview 1)

This extract reveals Ben's use of Andrew as a "sounding board" (Senge, 2006, p. 126) to ascertain the appropriateness of the repertoire he had selected for the ensemble. Andrew's response was only made possible because of his proximity to the saxophones that sit directly behind the flutes in the ensemble. Critically Ben's question showed a respect for Andrew's knowledge and musicianship.

There was also a clear level of comfort between Ben and the three learning walkers that allowed him to ask meaningful questions about his practice at this early stage of the process.

By the second focus group interview, all participants were comfortable enough to engage in a more in-depth discussion relating to both the repertoire and the areas of focus identified by Ben. In this dialogue Peter begins by affirming the conductor-music educator's work, to which Ben responds with contextual information. This extract is indicative of the meaningful and reflective dialogue that took place during this session:

*Peter (PLW – Trumpet): I thought the ensemble had certainly grown [between the first and second learning walks] in regards to the repertoire, it was pretty obvious. We had a full trumpet section tonight. Obviously things we were trying to identify, you focused on. There was a massive focus on the rhythmic concepts, alignment, transparency and those sorts of things. It felt like a different section I was sitting in tonight. I don't think that was entirely because we had full complement, but probably because rehearsal had been developing; just a different sound, ensemble based as well I think.*

*Ben: There have been some attitude adjustments over the last few weeks, which I think helped. Just on the focus, we had a shocker about two rehearsals ago and I am talking a real dog's breakfast type of shocker. In some ways we are very time poor in comparison to some ensembles who play that sort of repertoire, [the rehearsal] needed to be very organised so it keeps motoring through, so there is not a lot of downtime for the ensemble as a whole.*

(Focus Group Interview 2)

That Ben finds the focus group interviews useful is further evident in his observation that these discussions were able to rise above a discussion of the musical components and centre instead on musicality and musicianship:

*It is quite encouraging that we got onto the discussion of musicality and musicianship.*

(Focus Group Interview 2)

Ben's belief that 'the pinnacle of musicianship [is] where all the technical is blown away so you are working that beautiful art' (Focus Group Interview 3) is evident in his appreciation of discussions that centered on this. Ben and Andrew's discussion during the second focus group was substantial and affirmed that Ben's intention to engender a sense of musicianship was successful:

*Andrew (PLW – Flute): Making [the ensemble] think about [the movement of air for articulation] in a constructive way made a very big difference to the sound. You tend to notice flutes tend to do it differently than the clarinets or saxes for that matter and it was very noticeable to me and it was good to see you picked up on that as soon as it was needed and fixed it. In terms of the way you ran that session it was funny and if we had not been given that cue sheet (containing key foci for the rehearsal and provided by the researcher to guide reflection in action), I think we would have figured it out anyway, within about five minutes. This is good because you have that really discernible structure and I think everyone relaxed into it.*

*Ben: It's one thing I have looked at and educated in schools, explicitly outlining what the heck we are here for. It's one thing I have really been thinking about. Often as a director, we go in with our idea of what we want to achieve and often we don't achieve that. I think sometimes just explicitly saying 'well hang on here's what we are trying to do', and I felt like I probably overstated rhythmic alignment in the first 5 minutes.*

*Andrew (PLW – Flute): I don't think you did.*

*Ben: I think the proof was in the pudding that there was far better clarity tonight because I think they were listening in a lot more. I think that's because I did a focused activity to help them in with that or maybe because there was more transparency through the ensemble because of rhythmic accuracy... it was quite obvious it was a lot easier for them to do that tonight.*

*Andrew (PLW – Flute): One of the things I did notice, that I thought was really interesting was not just actual sections listening outside their box but particularly in the lower section of the band,*

*that base. They were working more together as a huge section, which makes it easier for everyone else to sit on top of. I think that actually made a big difference.*

*Ben: Part of the reasons I jumped on it early was because they were blowing too firm and the intonation was pushing sharp and it became really obvious that it was going to be really hard for the band to sit on top of.*

*Andrew (PLW – Flute): It did on the other hand make it really obvious to me that the flutes intonation was up above a certain level but out of tune at the lower end. That's one of the things flutes have to get used to, it's not just tuning for them but tuning to people who are three or four octaves below them, which is hard, you have got to get your head around that.*

(Focus Group Interview 2)

The depth of collegial conversation that surfaced in similar exchanges throughout the focus group sessions highlights the value of a participatory approach to learning walks. While the above transaction was clearly affirming for Ben, other focus group sessions highlighted areas to him that he also needed to work on. The balance between the use of verbal and nonverbal instruction is one such example. Rudolf (1995) maintains that "the ability to express oneself plainly and concisely is an important part of a conductor's craft"; furthermore, "a well trained orchestra need not be verbally instructed [on many details] because skilled musicians are able and willing to follow beat and be guided by telling gestures" (p. 333).

The importance of this balance between these different means of communication in Ben's practice was evident in the pre-study student ensemble member survey. When asked to comment on her experiences with the verbal explanations and instructions by provided by the director Rachel notes that with regard to Ben these were:

*Usually clear and sufficiently detailed. However the tendency to re-iterate and give unnecessary information can be frustrating.*

(Pre-study student ensemble member survey)



Vaughan also picks up on this aspect of Ben's conducting in the second focus group interview, simultaneously highlighting the benefit of a 'participatory' learning walk in which the learning walker experiences the learning first hand. He does so through positive affirmation:

*Vaughan (PLW-Percussion): There was far less verbal direction to all members of the band. If you did this... (Vaughan gestures)... with your hands they would understand and would know exactly how far to go. You did one hand gesture to the sax to back off just a little bit just with your hand and it fit in beautifully. You didn't need to do anything more; that was it and you could just move on. I thought that was brilliant. That means they are really responding to you.*

(Focus Group Interview 2)

The benefit of the 'participatory' learning walk approach was again evident when Ben subsequently noted this, remarking:

*One thing I was mindful of tonight was not to talk too much. There were times I was trying to show gesture and sometimes it would be picked up.*

(Focus Group Interview 3)

Furthermore, the student ensemble members have also noticed this change in Ben's practice, because in the post-study student ensemble member survey Rachel concludes that:

*... there has been an improvement in talking overkill ...*

(Post-study student ensemble member survey)

These transactions demonstrate the value of the participatory learning walk process to all stakeholders in the ensemble. The participatory learning walk, bookended by critically reflective professional learning in the form of focus group interviews, demonstrates a context sensitive process that can add value to an otherwise 'generic' learning walk.

Also of significance to the process was the fact that Ben was cognisant of the benefits of reflective practice:

*I am big on reflective practice. I think the process for me is to go home tonight; I won't get to bed*

*for a while and I will sit and chew the rehearsal over.*

(Focus Group Interview 3)

This existing commitment to reflective practice probably made Ben receptive and willing to work with the feedback he received during this study. However his comments show that while he values reflective practice tools, the insights they provide can still be confronting:

*Ben: Head is mush!!! Big day and big rehearsal. Surprisingly I wasn't put off having Vaughan, Peter and Andrew in the rehearsal. It was interesting to see how responsive the band would be after a [two week holiday] break.*

*"Llwyn Onn" [a selection of repertoire] what the fruit loops went on here tonight!!!!!! Ensemble couldn't make it through 8 bar phrases together. After great alignment in the warm up / tuning period this went to hell in a hand basket. It is very frustrating knowing how they could be playing. I'm not sure if the unsettled / unusual start has put people off, or perhaps having the two week break has slowed things down. They need to employ the same listening skills as they needed in the chorale. That was painful to listen to. Frustrating, they are just 1/2, 1/4 and 1/8 notes in a slow tempo.*

(Journal Entry 1)

Ben also acknowledged that reflective practice is not a stand-alone activity; but rather a mode of operating, a "continual search for meaning" (Smyth, 1985, p. 39). As such this study became more than an isolated and unrelated learning event in his professional career. It appears to be both relevant and meaningful to Ben's specific teaching context and appears to have helped him to shape and nuance his teaching in just a few months. His final remarks acknowledge the advantage of the participatory learning walk in providing holistic, specific and meaningful feedback to him:

*Ben: [The focus group sessions] add a lot to my reflection. Here were obviously three people who I respected and I was eager to get in... Having people who are well versed in that can give you that feedback and it certainly shapes what you do.*

(Journal Entry 3)

Thus, along with the learning walkers, Ben highlights expert knowledge as a key characteristic for participatory learning walks. Ben's data continually highlighted the importance of collegiality and the critical role played by focus groups in enabling all participants to engage in meaningful discussions.

## Conclusion

This paper highlighted the particular contribution of the conductor-music educator's data to the development of an adapted learning walk approach, for use in an ensemble music education environment. It also reported the perceptions of the learning walkers, student ensemble members and the conductor-music educator regarding the adapted participatory learning walk approach. Ben's case is particularly illustrative of the value to all participants of focus group discussions within a recursive and reflective environment. Central to Ben's case is the participatory nature of the adapted learning walk approach.

This research study highlighted the advantages of the adapted participatory learning walk approach to the ensemble music education environment. Three important conclusions provide points of departure for this approach from more generic approaches to learning walks in professional contexts.

Participation in each stage of the process is a vital and defining characteristic of an adapted learning walks model within a music ensemble context. Participation by learning walkers allows learning within these contexts to be experienced though the dominant music ensemble language of sound and gesture.

Participatory learning walks should be based on the collaborative construction of understanding by all those involved in the reflective process. This collaborative reflection is deliberate, deep and persistent in nature. It allows for the clarification of both individual and collective educational goals.

Finally, participatory learning walks are designed to generate feedback, which enhances

not only a teacher's (conductor-music educator's) reflective capacity but benefits all stakeholders through improved teaching and learning outcomes in music ensemble contexts. There is much scope for this approach to professional learning to be further investigated. Future research into this participatory approach to learning walks may focus on longer term action research studies and perhaps on their use in choral ensemble contexts.

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