'Putting on a Show' Non-Placement WIL in the Performing Arts: Documenting Professional Rehearsal And Performance Using Eportfolio Reflections

Narelle Yeo
The University of Sydney, Australia, narelle.yeo@sydney.edu.au

Jennifer Rowley
The University of Sydney, Australia, jennifer.rowley@sydney.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp

'Putting on a Show' Non-Placement WIL in the Performing Arts: Documenting Professional Rehearsal And Performance Using Eportfolio Reflections

Abstract

his study explores the utility of employing a student-created experiential narrative ePortfolio as a multi-modal tool for reflective practice in WIL. It does so by examining a case study situated within the performing arts, where WIL discourses are rarely adopted, and few examples are present in the literature. This paper introduces a circular mentoring framework that extends Kolb's experiential learning model, whereby learning is facilitated through the interchange of roles through rehearsal and reflection. In this study, participants prepared and performed an opera in a professional venue over a five-day period of intense creative studio work. The 2017 and 2018 *Inclusion Project* is an innovative teaching and learning opportunity that offered authentic industry-based experience to undergraduate music students in a closely monitored, non-placement WIL setting. Participants (n=18) undertaking a semester long elective, reported their experience through online journaling in an ePortfolio allowing them to create narrative responses. A qualitative analysis using narrative inquiry on the ePortfolio reflections indicated a direct benefit for student's career readiness as creative artists.

Keywords

Introduction

Work-integrated learning (WIL) provides students with real-time and outcomes-rich exposure to their discipline in practice (Billett 2010). Recent educational developments have championed the concept of non-placement WIL, adapting simulated, authentic or industry-based activities that show innovative educational potential (Dean, Eady & Yanamandram, 2020). The role of WIL, including non-placement WIL, is of importance to the higher education sector, and acknowledged as a broadly positive influence on graduate employability (Rowe & Zegwaard 2017). However, non-placement WIL in the creative studio is rarely reported in the literature, with few examples in the tertiary creative arts curriculum.

The performing arts have been largely subsumed into the higher education sector, and thus function both as traditional skills-based practice (master-mentor) and classroom pedagogy in a standard university setting as well as through student-led productions. Placements embedded in the profession do not typically place students in performance contexts with professionals but instead focus on internal production elements in professional companies. Masterclass scenarios are also common teaching tools in the performing arts, yet they foster perceptions of the novice/ professional divide using embodied, charismatic authority (Atkinson et al. 2013). The project outlined in this paper aimed to address this assumption in order to prepare students for emerging into the music profession with increased self-efficacy within an experiential learning context. The research described in this paper focuses on undergraduate students taking an elective subject (Professional Practice Internship) in 2017 and 2018. The *Inclusion Project* is directed by academic staff who developed an authentic WIL experience for creative artists to be fully immersed in a professional production. As a non-placement WIL experience, it was transformative for Bachelor of Music students because they had an opportunity to work in equal partnership with professional singers/performers in a professional performance context.

In this project, trainee music teachers and performance majors were mentored by tertiary faculty, while professional performers were embedded in the project with pre-professional university students and young performers from a Conservatorium based in the regional area. In each case, a one-act opera was prepared for a public performance in a professional venue, the Speigeltent, Wollongong, NSW, Australia. The Speigeltent is a travelling theatre-in-the-round tradition that began in Belgium in 1920 and is famous for immersive theatre. Preparation for the performance required an intensive week of rehearsals on-site. Students were required to evaluate their own performances according to perceptions of industry expectations and observations of others. Over this rehearsal week, the project aimed to develop students' self-reflection, positive ensemble behaviours and collaborative creativity in group music learning, which are vital skills for the young musician.

Using an online learning space (referred to in this paper as an ePortfolio) and through narrative writing and enquiry, students reflected on their performance which was designed to build career-readiness and self-efficacy (Rowley 2019). Employing ePortfolios for narrative enquiry is an effective means of consolidating learned skills through self-reflection on experiential learning. Findings of a study with music students by Burnard and Dragovic (2015) supports the use of reflective diary entries for increasing student wellbeing by empowering them through supportive statements and decision making. Schön (1985) argued for the influence of socio-emotional elements on effective learning and the use of reflection as a valuable tool in progressing student learning. The idea that learning is more than a cognitive activity means it also has affective dimensions involving both ideas and feelings, thus contributing to the growth of the whole learner – in this case,

development of the complete artist. Professional competency and resilience training in artistic practice, as is taught in universities and conservatoria alike, co-opt methods of self-reflection from other disciplines, including the use of the ePortfolio as a personal learning space.

This study considers the utility of student-created experiential narrative ePortfolio as a multi-modal tool for reflective practice within an authentic, industry-based performance that is the non-placement WIL *Inclusion Project*. Reflective practices that analyse individual behaviour, development of self, and reflections on the processes and actions of others, are vital tools in the development of a performing musician. Students' responses were recorded in an ePortfolio reflection and qualitative analysis was performed using narrative inquiry techniques; "… noting the contributions that actions and events make to a particular outcome and then configures these parts into a whole episode" (Polkinghorne 1995, p. 6).

This research considers the following question: What is the value of ePortfolios as a self-reflective learning tool for use in the development of performing artists through a non-placement WIL activity? During the project, there was substantial involvement from academics and students, who created authentic experiences, alongside industry professionals, in order to practise their craft. This research investigates how the project assisted students to reflect on their future careers, including teaching music and leadership development (Bennett 2009). Firmly placed in students' new understanding is the development of professional and musical identity that requires reflection on their sense of future 'self' as a work-ready graduate (Reid, Rowley & Bennett 2019). With this in mind, students taking part in the Inclusion Project self-selected their musical roles in this authentic, creative WIL experience.

Literature

Ferns and Moore (2012) argue that workplace-learning experiences need to be connected with institutional learning. This connection can be facilitated through the use of ePortfolios, as research by Yeo and Rowley (2018) discovered. In their work, student experiences during two semester-long WIL programs developed leadership and, through self-reflection, enabled students to explore their future professional 'self' and musical identity. It also taught tangible work-related skills outcomes and bridged the gap between theory and practice. These outcomes were presented in an electronic (online) ePortfolio built by students (Yeo & Rowley 2018). Reflection tools, such as ePortfolios, when used during rehearsal are critical to the development of reflective practitioners who engage in experiential learning models of WIL (Thorley 2014).

ePortfolio as a personal learning space for developing professional 'self'

The ePortfolio allows autonomy and evaluation of learning (Munday, Rowley & Polly 2017). When students engage in reflective practice, they are exposed to the development of skills that are often valued in graduates: critical thinking, ethical behaviours and problem solving (Rowley & Dunbar-Hall 2015). In addition, the ePortfolio is a training ground for digital literacy and a range of other skills (Rowley 2019). In some circumstances in higher education, the ePortfolio is embedded as a reflective tool in WIL to enable teachers to observe changing perspectives and monitor practices. Use of ePortfolios is well documented in various forms of professional training, notably those used in nursing and teaching (Brooks 2017; Green, Wyllie & Jackson 2014). When ePortfolios were first introduced to the creative and performing arts, students resisted their value due to the intensity of work, yet the continued and progressive use of ePortfolios over the course of a music degree program has gained acceptance from students. Studies have shown that students are becoming 'drivers' of

the development of the ePortfolio creation (Rowley & Dunbar-Hall 2015). Their use in the training of musicians continues as the potential of ePortfolio thinking to implement change in musician preparation, enhance future career building and professional employment capacity is becoming well documented (Bennet et al. 2017; Reid et al. 2019). An ePortfolio provides scaffolding to help users create records of learning, achievement, and aspiration, and has a reflective structure underpinning all of its core elements. An initial aim of the *Inclusion Project* was to evaluate how the ePortfolio was able to meet the professional needs of musicians in training for real work within a non-placement WIL. Taylor and Rowley (2018) showed the relationship between student created ePortfolio reflections and the development of professional practice, where "students' narratives reveal a viable development of problem solving, critical thinking, decision-making, self-realisation and identity as a future professional musician" (p. 202).

The ePortfolio task may be the first time that students reflect critically on their tertiary studies. The assessment tasks of the elective WIL subject were designed to guide students' thinking and exploration in relation to career planning and expectations. Towards the end of semester, students gave a ten-minute oral presentation on their key learnings informed by their ePortfolio. Students submitted their ePortfolio reflections in response to a scaffolded template at the end of their WIL. For this reason, assessments were at the conclusion of the provided scaffolded series of workshops to ensure students were suitably prepared for the reflective practice required to engage in the non-placement WIL and to create their ePortfolio response.

Professional challenges assist in building self-efficacy and professional competency: Schön's reflective practitioner

Self-efficacy is, according to psychologist Albert Bandura, a personal judgment of how efficiently one synthesises a situation and responds with a particular course of action based on existing knowledge and grounded self-belief (Bandura 1997). Within the context of building self-efficacy through the boundaries of an ePortfolio, it is determined that writing reflectively as a result of a well-executed scaffolded process produces a benefit of student ownership of their learning. We adapted the ePortfolio template to suit their non-placement WIL activities and to evidence their experience through the use of photographs, videos and testimonials. Some of the students chose to create an online resource similar to a blog, whilst other students submitted more traditional written reflections.

Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy is demonstrated in the ability of a person to believe their ability to influence both events and their own experience of these events. Yeo and Rowley (2018) reported that self-efficacy/self-reliance is high impact for the student participants in the *Inclusion Project* from among a range of important developed attributes and outcomes that influence career preparation. Mentoring projects are valuable and enduring, whether musicians are preparing a public concert series, a school musical, producing student works or facilitating any number of musical performance projects. However, this is not widely studied in the context of non-placement WIL.

The grandfather of reflective thinking, Donald Schön, noted that to act authentically one must look to one's experiences, connect with one's feelings, and attend to whichever theories were influencing one during the reflective cycle (1983). Building an online journal (or ePortfolio) bears similarities to the act of engaging with social media sites, as much of the content represents a narrative supported by documents, images or sound files. Conceiving of oneself as a professional encompasses the process embedded into building an ePortfolio where one collects one's work, reflects upon strengths and weaknesses, and strives to improve. With this in mind, the "reflective practice that situates and

guides the effective use of learning portfolios (using) experiential learning, metacognition, reflective and critical thinking" (Rowley & Dunbar-Hall, 2015, p. 218) guided the approach to this analysis.

Kolb's reflective learning cycle as process model

The experiential learning cycle is a widely referenced approach in learning theory and practice. Kolb's (2014) reflective learning cycle is a succinct way of organising reflections on experiential learning and is the basis for the modelling in this research. It is useful for the creation of education programs that actively engage learners in a kinaesthetic learning process. Kolb's model asks learners to reflect on their existing knowledge as part of the reflection, therefore creating a synergy between theory and practice. The performing arts is an endlessly recurring cycle of learning through rehearsal and performance experiences and Kolb's model allows for reflection on the cyclical nature of learning, and for facilitators to value different experiences, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making and engagement.

Kolb's learning cycle involves four stages, namely: concrete learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (Kolb 2014). Effective learning can be observed when the learner progresses through the cycle with the learner entering the cycle at any stage within a logical sequence. Kolb's experiential learning theory works on two levels: a four-stage cycle of learning and four separate learning styles. Much of Kolb's theory is concerned with the learner's internal cognitive processes.

In the *Inclusion Project*, Kolb's model was adjusted for purpose with the emergence of a circular mentoring framework which guided the reflection process. The circular nature of the cycle is supported by the notion that we don't learn linearly, but in circles of influence outlined below in Figure 1. In the project we applied Kolb's experiential cycle and identified the learning styles fit for purpose to match his four stages of learning:

1. The importance of doing (concrete experience)
2. Undoing (reflective observation)
3. Reframing (abstract conceptualisation)
4. *Mise-en-scène* (active experimentation and performance in-situ)

Our model extended the concept to propose that music mentoring is the doing, undoing, reframing and placement in the scene (*mise-en-scène*) of both expert and student, with equal responsibility for all in the success of the performance outcome. Mentoring relied on the causal relationship of shared outcome (performance) to drive relationships (Campbell & Brummett 2007). In this project, the process was underpinned by an emerging circular mentoring model, or the concept that each participant has a teaching and learning role, and these roles were constantly flipped during both rehearsal and reflection. In a series of safe-to-fail experiments, participants were challenged on their assumptions and encouraged to move within the circular framework, depending on need. What follows is an explanation of the student involvement in each of the four-stage cycle (adapted from Kolb 2014).

Concrete experience – the importance of doing

Singers are placed in a real-world professional performance scenario, under time pressure. Mentors are chosen for their empathic approach to teaching and learning, involving both professional performers and performer-educators (Benson 2008) and also with reference to the importance of causal relationship in assisting learning (Campbell & Brummett 2007). Mentors were also placed in

the role of mentee at different times during the rehearsal process. Practical experiential learning is at the core of this project and is fundamental to mastering the kinaesthetic skills required, as well as the confidence needed to be an effective musician (Yeo & Rowley, 2018).

Reflective observation – undoing

The act of reflective practice assumes that the participant is actively involved during and after the actual experience. Participants are encouraged to unpack their experience in a particular scene or rehearsal for context and content. A reflection-in-knowledge and reflection-on-knowledge paradigm encouraged the students to undo what they had previously done and to create new knowledge about a particular skill or way of interpreting the musical direction.

Reframing – abstract conceptualisation

Pursuing a continued path of development, these reflections-on-action proposed a new piece of knowledge and way of approaching a problem. As such, the critical thinking and problem solving (also known as technical or soft skills) were put into practice and each student engaged in a re-framing of themselves as performers. The non-placement WIL in this case promoted a sense of growth as a future professional.

### Mise-en-scène – active experimentation and performance in-situ

For the purposes of this research, mise-en-scène describes the physical curation of the performance and rehearsal space into a coherent structure following a series of safe-to-fail rehearsal experiments (Pavis 2013; Yeo 2017). With a renewed approach to their craft, students not only sought the guidance of their mentor but also developed a sense of trust in the safe environment and to experiment with new knowledge and approaches to their performance equally as mentee. Active experimentation within a solid scaffold provided new material with which to work that was often workshopped as a group, together with the professional performers, to ensure there were elements of creativity and authenticity in the production and a sense of group creation and ownership.

A framework emerged

After evaluation of the pilot study it was concluded that the relationships are more complex than two-way mentoring and the circular mentoring model emerged that captured all aspects of learning, mentoring/being mentored, competency and self-efficacy development during the *Inclusion Project*. The model adapts components of Kolb's learning cycle (2014), as applied to this unique performance and rehearsal process.

Figure 1 shows the process used to encourage all participants to undertake safe-to-fail experiments in rehearsals, with mentoring roles given to all participants, using a series of games and improvisations in sequence, resulting in the eventual placement of the scene and reflective process.

Figure 1. *Circular Mentoring Model*
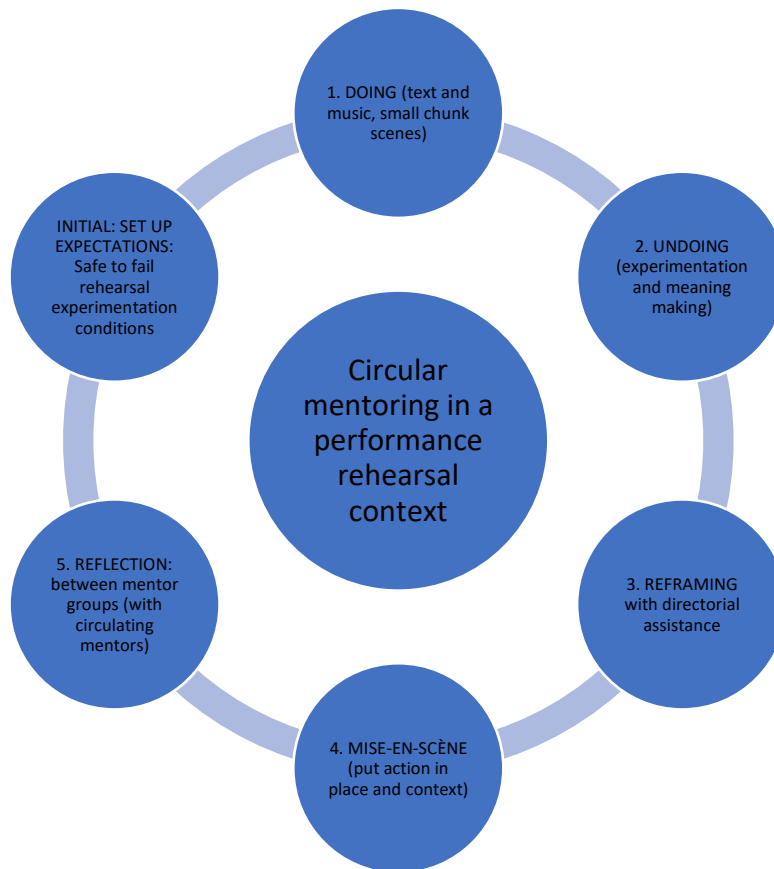
Methodology

This paper describes a case study that harnessed a qualitative methodology and a narrative inquiry approach (Stake 2005). Qualitative research is a methodology for conducting research that involves collecting, analysing and integrating qualitative data, in this case using narrative inquiry. Case study research uses a single research paradigm, either quantitative or qualitative (Stake 2005). This research analysed narrative responses from participants in order to ascertain the learning from the single 'case' of the production. The case study research design has been used in social science as a useful tool for investigating trends and specific situations. This method of study tests theoretical models in real world situations as an in-depth account of a particular situation, rather than a sweeping statistical survey. This case study is used to draw inferences from the data through students' reflective narrative writing, emphasising the sophisticated interplay between cases and theoretical frameworks, thus demonstrating the validity of this methodology for investigating music teaching and learning (Barrett 2014).

Through narrative inquiry, we analysed content in ePortfolio reflections, using instrumental bounded cases selected to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomena than that provided by

a single case (Polkinghorne 1995; Clandinin & Connelly 2000). Closer to lived experiences than other forms of research, reflective practice gives agency to the participant in constructing meaning as they recall the experience. Narrative inquiry was used to tease out the important themes in the case study because it enables the human dimension of an experience over time, with respect to the particular context of the lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). Stories are lived experiences and unfold as self-knowledge, using of themselves a reflective practice and shared construction.

Treating these reflections as case studies points to "narrative knowing", or shared lived experiences on which participants impart meaning through story recollection (as opposed to paradigmatic enquiry). Analysing the set of narratives presented in the ePortfolios enabled the researchers to use analytic procedures to build a discourse and a shared meaning from the submitted narratives (Polkinghorne 1995).

The study was designed to elicit each participant's perception about the value of the *Inclusion Project* in relation to their perception of a future career in the creative and performing arts. Self-reporting by students from their online portfolio was analysed using thematic analysis and open coding. Findings from the case study were categorised for units of meaning using Polkinghorne's (1995) frame, into four broad headings:

1. The Dual Mentoring Relationship,
2. Professional Challenges and Performance Anxiety,
3. Skills Acquisition and Competency, and;
4. Creation of a sense of 'Professional Self'.

The data provided a rich source of information revealing students' perceptions of the extent to which the *Inclusion Project* had a deeply significant influence on their own personal preparation through the rehearsal and performance stages of the WIL experience.

Participants were undergraduate tertiary music students (*n*=18), nine in 2017 (P1-9) and nine in 2018 (M1-9), who agreed to participate in the research as members of the *Inclusion Project*. Participants were given a code with a number to represent each of the two *Inclusion Projects* to maintain anonymity. Students signed up for participation in the program and completed a pre-engagement audition. All participants who applied were accepted into the program. There were five male and thirteen female participants in this study. The data were collected in two years and two stages across consecutive *Inclusion Projects* spanning one year each. A human ethics application was approved by The University of Sydney Human Ethics Committee (Project number: 2017/652) and those who were identified as potential participants were invited to take part in the research study, by way of a cover letter email and included a Participant Information Statement (PIS) and Participant Consent Form (PCF) signed as an additional attachment.

Participants came from a range of experience levels, competencies and demographics. Tertiary music students collaborated with the students of a regional conservatorium, as well as industry professionals, to rehearse and perform two productions of *I Pagliacci* (participants identified with P) and *Mahagonny Songspiel* (participants identified with M) in a collaborative process during 2017 and 2018. The venue (Strut and Fret Spiegeltent) was chosen as it was based in the Wollongong area for the duration of the project and the city-based tertiary music school was actively pursuing a partnership with performers in the Wollongong area as part of a regional outreach program.

The building of an ePortfolio by student participants was deliberately designed as the main assessment task of the *Inclusion Project* unit of study and, as a personal learning space. It provided each student with agency in the cause of reflecting and documenting their learning journey during the WIL experience (Kondo 2019). Students attended a workshop where the learning outcomes of the ePortfolio were discussed together with the traditional characteristics of a student-created reflective narrative. The workshop deliberately empowered a sense of 'self' and student agency so as to encourage self-efficacy (Munday & Rowley 2017). Assigned with the task of writing a narrative focused on their learning experience of the circular mentoring and the WIL activity, students created responses in their ePortfolio to the following prompts:

1. What do you want to learn from the Inclusion Project experience? Write down what you hope to learn and experiences you'd like to have.
2. Identify your strengths and what you can offer others in the Inclusion Project.
3. Identify your limitations and how you can develop more skills to strengthen these during the Inclusion Project.
4. What are your learning objectives and outcomes? How might you extend further the skills and knowledge you gained in the Inclusion Project?
5. Relating theory and practice: What connections have you made from your formal study that have become more applied after your participation in the Inclusion Project?
6. Self-reflection: your own perceptions and ideas on how you changed and or gained new insight into your profession.
7. Future learning areas: identify learning areas for future development. How do these link to your experience in the Inclusion Project and your learning outcomes?

Student responses were exported to a spreadsheet for comparison and were subsequently analysed using colour-coding to highlight keywords. These keywords were later grouped into emerging themes, which are presented in the next section, Findings and Discussion. The project utilised funding from two sources: The Richard Pulley Outreach *'buddy'* program, an endowment which supports initiatives of the city-based tertiary music school to build relationships and mentoring opportunities with regional conservatoria; and a donation from the Dean supporting regional touring activities.

The PebblePad™ platform was used to create the ePortfolio reflections and was chosen as it is easy to master with good scope for creative programming within the framework and was the university preferred ePortfolio platform. As a personal learning space, PebblePad™ has the capacity to encourage authentic, creative reflection and allows for uploads of sound and video files. Digitising personal creative journeys in a narrative is intensely personal, and PebblePad™ does provide 'walls' in the platform to ensure privacy. PebblePad™ is but one tool, and it should be noted that the assessment outcomes from the *Inclusion Project* could be achieved using alternate technology to build the online portfolio. Data from PebblePad™ were extracted using narrative inquiry and thematic analysis.

Each ePortfolio has a unique handprint and structure, reflecting not only the authentic experience of each participant but also their own intrinsic skillset and contribution to the adaptive system created. Students responded with a multi-modal mix of visual, aural and standard textual responses and formats reflected students' creative responses as well as intellectual responses to the stimulus questions in the template provided.

Findings and discussion

As a creative device, the ePortfolio demonstrated that the leadership experience was transformative for each of the participants in the study. The ePortfolio showed that authentic, real-life experiences were powerful in assisting students to 'bank' skills attained and build a toolkit for later use in their future professional practice. Student narratives as reflections showed an ability to personally and creatively reflect on the experience as well as detecting a growth in self-efficacy as they understood the practice of professional performance through application. As one participant noted:

> *We were part of a music experience that involves a cross-generation responsibility*
> *of the passing down of knowledge and values of music. (P1)*

The results provide an analysis of student learning within this dynamic non-placement WIL in a creative performance setting. Findings were consistent with Schön's (1985) theoretical model of reflective practice enabling individualised creative, visual and aural feedback. Students demonstrated increased confidence and self-efficacy as these skills were developed in a professional practice context, thus proving that a non-traditional WIL experience of public performance for musicians is transformative for students.

Students understood the high stakes outcome of delivering a professional performance. Students' narratives showed understanding of the aims and outcomes of the project, including high levels of transformative language in their reflections. Findings from the case study were analysed using Polkinghorne's (1995) frame on reflective practice (abstract contextualisation of lived experience), but circular mentoring was unique to the rehearsal practice for many. Overall, four key areas of self-reflection emerged:

1. Circular mentoring relationship,
2. Overcoming performance anxiety,
3. Skills acquisition and professional competency, and;
4. Creation of a sense of professional self.

The Circular Mentoring Relationship

Circular mentoring expands traditional creative practice from the classical model of master-student mentoring between two people. The *Inclusion Project* introduced a mentoring element where professional principals mentored tertiary music students, and these students mentored younger regional conservatorium students. This was refined into a circular mentoring framework. Participants were briefed on this process and valued the impact of circular mentoring on their experience:

> *Being able to talk to my mentors who have had similar experiences helped me*
> *realise that a career can span several different categories at different times of*
> *one's life. (M3)*
> *The performers will collaborate with a cross-section of professional, student, and*
> *amateur performers, giving insight into a professional performance environment.*
> *(M2)*

Over the five-day rehearsal period, participant confidence and familiarity with each other developed, particularly in terms of understanding their responsibilities in moving seamlessly between mentor/mentee roles:

> *Learning from each other was also a great student-student experience. (M9)*
> *The rehearsal process was a fantastic learning experience for people of all experience levels…but additionally we were able to observe skills and capabilities from each other. (M8)*

Many forms of mentoring rely on casual relationships to assist learning (Campbell & Brummett 2007). Adaptive roles were experienced as different from traditional hierarchical rehearsal situations, allowing for peer feedback as well as self-reflection. Informal observations by a number of mentors and mentees, seeing practical implementation of studied skills also had a strong impact:

> *I heard experience and stories from these professionals who further illustrated to me the importance of self-belief and staying strong within yourself as a performer. (M8)*
> *I found it extremely valuable to practically observe the technical aspect of their performance. Observing the way she used her voice technique in the upper range was something I valued watching. (M8)*

The circular mentoring aspect was enjoyed by participants as an innovative process for both learning and for the performance product:

> *The project was about more than just the performance. It was about making a difference in our industry. Learning collaboratively between institutions - in the project, this idea was seen when thinking about the mentoring aspect and meeting a whole range of different people. (P2)*

Participant responses showed that students understood the mentoring goals and found them to be useful to incorporate into their future practice:

> *We were part of a music experience that involves a cross-generation responsibility of the passing down of knowledge and values of music. (P6)*
>
> *The combination of amateur and professional performers…established an attitude of valuing performance opportunities as a fostering and sharing experience, not just for personal gain and individual promotion. (P5)*

Providing opportunities for students to re-evaluate their contribution to music while still perfecting their craft was noted by participants, using terms such as "ebb and flow of knowledge" (P9) and "fostering and sharing experience" (P7) and an avoidance of the hierarchical language of the one-on-one master-student relationship:

> *The most valuable part of this whole project for me was the mentoring arrangement…the older participants could learn from the endless energy and enthusiasm whilst the younger could learn from the older of a calm approach. (P9)*

Researchers noted that circular mentoring had a demonstrable impact on levels of anxiety for most participants. A new way of experiencing rehearsal and performance provided an opportunity for participants to re-evaluate performance anxiety.

Performance Anxiety

Musicians who experience performance anxiety will demonstrate characteristics of self-criticism before, during, and after performance, leading to disrupted concentration. Strategies to alleviate this include open discussions to reduce the impact of physical symptoms (Spahn & Echternach 2009). Research by Osborne (2012) investigated certain benefits of group singing on rates of anxiety, including relaxation, emotional balance, an ability to see problems of everyday life from a distance, positive emotional health, and a feeling of freedom and enhanced mood. Public performance induces performance anxiety and operatic performance is particularly prevalent due to the exacting demands of unamplified singing (Spahn & Echternach 2009):

> *...skills were put to the test over the process ... as we navigated a difficult score, a confusing premise, a highly unusual performance venue, an intense and short rehearsal time. (M2)*

Participants found that their anxiety peaked prior to opening, but that following the show they felt a sense of accomplishment and increased mastery over performance anxiety symptoms:

> *I also observed performance anxiety in the professional realm, within myself. Having struggled greatly with performance anxiety in the past, I was interested to see how I responded to the professional environment...I was able to observe my behaviour patterns...I have a glimpse into the professional realm and handling anxiety during a performance. (P1)*

Fourteen participants reported in their self-reflections that they had decreased levels of anxiety following the project. We consider that the circular mentoring process reduced levels of performance anxiety, normalising all levels of experience in a safe, accepted work environment. Not only was the perception of performance anxiety reduced, but new skills for combating anxiety were acquired.

Skills Acquisition and Professional Competency

As students reflect on who they are as performers and who they are becoming, a pattern of future goals and aspirations emerges (Blom & Hitchcock 2017, p. 169). As an example of reflection-in-action (Schön 1985) this circular process relied heavily on experiential learning to give an insight into the challenges of future work:

> *...this experience was very valuable as it allowed me to get a taste of professional practice, as well as observe the automatic reactions and challenges I face when I perform, and additionally, learning to not be too critical of myself when I have finished a performance. (M8)*

> *This was an intensely challenging project for me as almost every habit I have formed as a young performer had to be left behind. (M2)*

Some of the resulting achievements of the *Inclusion Project* were unable to be predicted, but from its inception the project was predicated on ensuring students were provided with a lens to their future

career. Participants' reflections referenced changing perceptions of their future learning and career goals:

> *…Broadened my horizons - I know my musical career is not limited to a chair in an orchestra, but it sometimes does feel like that's the only route. Gave me ideas of other routes I could pursue in my music degree. (M9)*

Participants recognised their growing sense of the interconnectedness of ensemble performance and their responses recognised the mentoring aspect of the project as transformative, exposing students to a meaningfully wide range of people, performers and ways of conducting performance practice:

> *It allowed me to understand the importance of unity and awareness within a group setting, as through the choreography as well as the chorus scenes, it was vital that we not only knew what we were doing, but additionally that we paid close attention to each other to make sure that we were all performing as a group that flowed naturally. (M8)*
> *The project was about more than just the performance. It was about making a difference in our industry. (M9)*

Traditional creative skills such as acting, dance, movement and singing were developed, alongside initiative-taking, marketing, decision making and innovative problem-solving:

> *At times, the dynamic shifted depending on who was in charge of the specific area and if I had to cooperate, or if I had initiative over an area and had to make decisions or be creative and innovative to solve problems in a different way. (M9)*

As noted above, initiative-taking, creativity and decision-making skills are transferable to any professional context. This was reflected in the mentioning of real-world problems and how collaborative mentoring provided a range of different solutions that participants discussed openly:

> *The Spiegeltent was a very dry acoustic…the other trumpeter had to adjust our dynamics, basically articulating everything a lot clearer and playing one dynamic louder for everything. The smoke machines that were in the Spiegeltent were slightly annoying as they made it a bit harder to breathe. (M7)*

The acquisition of extraneous skills such as the ability to apply stage make-up, or transferable skills such as the ability to be succinct in meetings, was described as extra capacity-building:

> *…learnt several skills that would be transferrable to any situation…being succinct in my written communication, coming to meetings prepared with the right information and being able to articulate myself clearly and succinctly. (M3)*
>
> *… an excellent lesson in adapting and making quick decisions…interesting environment to perform in because it was so transparent to the audience. (M6)*

The range of professional competency and interpersonal skills taught through this non-placement WIL activity have the benefit of transferability to a range of contexts. Students also built capacity

in a range of specific work-ready skills, for example, understanding the physical space for performance and making appropriate adjustments for specific conditions.

Circular mentoring, minimising performance anxiety and skills acquisition all combine to create a sense of the professional self through the *Inclusion Project.*

Creation of a Sense of Professional Self

It takes significant time for most classical singers to develop performing opportunities, networks, skills, confidence and self-mastery following conservatory studies. Student-created ePortfolio reflections have the capacity to see a professional self gradually emerge (Rowley & Munday 2014). Responses contained honest appraisals of self-preparedness for the music industry, based on an assessment of self and others in this performance context. Some approach this in a clinical manner by developing skills and attaining 'badges' to credential themselves:

> *Not only understanding that practice and self-discipline are crucial aspects of making a great performer, but additionally that self-belief and self-confidence onstage is vital. (M2)*

> *I truly believe that this experience has change the way that I approach classical music and change the way that I work with others in this industry. (P3)*

Participants' observations provided evidence for the impact of the experience on their future portfolio career as musicians, but particularly for the transformative effect of live performance. Direction centred on increasing intrinsic motivation for each student according to their own aspirations and skill set:

> *Knowing your strengths and displaying them. The project helped to discover group and personal strengths. (M9)*

> *Confidence and believing in yourself does make a significant and vital impact to your performance as a musician. (M1)*

> *There was no obvious difference between student and professional. Of course, this was due to their elite skill level and hard work, however, I also noticed and observed that confidence and believing in yourself does make a significant and vital impact to your performance as a musician. (M8)*

At the completion of the project, participants came to the realisation that the hard work, grit, individual skill and personality had much to do with how they managed the intensity of the activity. Many unexpected aspects of performing were featured in responses:

> *Learning a role in two days…it taught me not only do I have to be ready if an opportunity presents itself but willing to go the extra mile to take that opportunity which in a professional company would lead to more work and other great opportunities. (M4)*

Participants reported development of the professional self, enhanced self-efficacy and competency in rehearsal and performance technique, and demonstrated utility of the non-placement WIL experience for diverse, creative cohorts with professional performance outcomes. At the conclusion of the project, participants saw themselves as emerging professionals, instead of merely students:

> *...as a Principal artist I have seen a growth of self-confidence, musicality, leadership and social experience. (M5)*
>
> *This was an excellent opportunity to watch the professionals teach but to also provide feedback in a non-confrontational setting and watch people come out of their comfort zone. This experience really gave us an idea of every facet of performance: costume, lighting, acting, tech, production etc. (M6)*

Assisting students to move from expert student to novice professional requires an understanding of minimising pitfalls and roadblocks (Reid et al. 2019). Balance is needed in ensuring the student is pushed to their limits whilst also maintaining motivation for the task:

> *...the chance to see the importance of the mastery of the mind as a performer. Not only understanding that practice and self-discipline are crucial aspects of making a great performer, but additionally that self-belief and self-confidence onstage is vital. (P1)*

Discovering a sense of professional self through a scaffolded ePortfolio journal allowed participants to articulate the key components of experiential learning and see the benefits of circular mentoring so that they could acknowledge the development of skills for future professional contexts.

Conclusion

In the participant responses, we are provided with a reflective account confirming future interest in a specific area of live performance which is aligned with a future career path possibility. The intersection of WIL theory and practice demonstrated the utility of ePortfolio for building professionalism and professional identity by illustrating possibilities for incorporating elements of non-placement WIL experiences into these creative projects. From a theoretical perspective, Schön's (1983) theory of reflective practice and Kolb's (2014) experiential learning cycle underpin the broader goals and outcomes of the participants' experiences described in this paper: "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb 2014, p. 38). Kolb's (2014) model of experiential learning describes the movement of an individual through the learning process over four stages: experience, reflecting, conceptualising, and finally putting newly acquired ideas into practice. When thinking about the application of the reflective cycle, we see evidence of benefit and impact for developing work-ready competencies within the context of sharing experiences. We don't always have the opportunity to form such deep relationships in our learning environments, thus one advantage of participation in this non-placement WIL is the opportunity to belong to a community of practice (Brooks & Rowley 2017).

Participants expressed growth and development of competence as a result of the learning experientially which was evidenced through language such as responsibility, reasoning and reflection, rather than memorising aspects of their artistic craft. Professional identity is developed through several catalysts such as experiential learning, multi-levelled mentoring and reflection on (and in) knowledge and action (Schön 1995). An individual's identity evolves as they move through the experiential learning cycle.

Non-placement WIL activities in the performing arts are rare. This non-placement WIL experience placed students in the professional setting, along with a circular mentoring structure that challenged

the master-student dynamic. The process of narrative inquiry allowed the authors to explore student responses and expose four central themes investigating engagement in the performing arts. Having a real-time outcome with a real audience is unique, differing from standard student performance experience and masterclass (master-student) dynamics typical of conservatory environments and providing for authentic learning in the context of professional performance. Authentic creative non-placement WIL experiences in a public performance is a valuable and innovative learning and teaching experience for tertiary music students. Singers, instrumentalists, production team and audience are part of a complex adaptive system which organically builds towards an authentic industry-based experience.

The circular mentoring model presented in this research was found effective for competency and efficacy growth when used in authentic, life-changing non-placement WIL experiences. Polkinghorne's (1995) view of the value of narrative analysis appears in participant responses that contextualised their concrete experience and synthesised their learning goals through the project. The findings show that students are able to reflect multi-modally on their experience and give context to their changing professional identity. Student's self-reflections showed growing self-efficacy (Bandura 1997) and suggests the value of reflection through rehearsal exercises for increasing confidence and well-being, professional practice expertise and leadership experience.

This project illustrates the transformative potential of reflecting on high-stakes professional performance situations, particularly for building self-efficacy, minimising the effects of performance anxiety, building professional competencies with speed and having a sense of agency in the building of the professional self. Non-placement WIL for tertiary music students shifts perceptions in participants, particularly if conducted within a supportive circular mentoring framework.

Acknowledgements

References

Atkinson, P, Watermeyer, R & Delamont, S 2013, 'Expertise, authority and embodied pedagogy: operatic masterclasses', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 34, no. 4, pp. 487-503.

Bandura, A 1997, *Self-efficacy: the exercise of control*, W.H. Freeman, New York.

Barrett, JR 2014, 'Case study research in music education', in CM Conway (ed.), *Oxford handbook of qualitative research in American music education*, pp. 113-132, Oxford University Press, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199844272.013.007.

Bennett, D 2009, 'Academy and the Real World: Developing realistic notions of career in the performing arts', *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education,* vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 309-327, doi: 10.1177/1474022209339953.

Benson, MA 2008, 'Effective mentoring for new music teachers: an analysis of the mentoring programs for new music teachers as described in the literature'. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 42-49.

Billett, S 2010, *Learning through practice: models, traditions, orientations and approaches*, Springer, Netherlands.

Blom, D & Hitchcock, M 2017, 'Perceived usefulness and relevance of ePortfolios in the Creative Arts: investigating Student Views', in Rowley, J (ed.), *ePortfolios in Australian Universities,* pp. 155-172, Springer, New York.

Brooks, W 2017, "The Roles and Features of ePortfolios in Two Australian Initial Teacher Education Degree Programs', in Rowley, J (ed.), *ePortfolios in Australian Universities,* pp. 99-116, Springer, New York.

Brooks, W & Rowley, J 2017, 'City meets country: a program of provision of musical experiences for community members in regional NSW', *Uniting Voices | 21st National Conference Australian Society for Music Education*, Parkville, Victoria: Australian Society for Music Education.

Burnard, P & Dragovic, T 2015, 'Collaborative creativity in instrumental group learning as a site for enhancing pupil wellbeing', *Cambridge Journal of Education: Special Issue 'Creativity and Wellbeing'*, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 371-392, doi:10.1080/0305764X.2014.934204.

Campbell, MR & Brummett, VM 2007, 'Mentoring preservice teachers for development and growth of professional knowledge', *Music Educators Journal*, vol. 93, no. 3, pp. 50-55, doi:/10.1177/002743210709300320.

Clandinin, DJ & Connelly, FM 2000, *Narrative inquiry: experience and story in qualitative research*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Dean, BA, Eady, MJ & Yanamandram, V 2020, Advancing non-placement WIL across the degree. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* (in press).

Ferns, S & Moore, K 2012, 'Assessing student outcomes in fieldwork placements: an overview of current practice', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 207-224.

Green J, Wyllie A & Jackson D 2014, Electronic portfolios in nursing education: a review of the literature. *Nurse Education in Practice*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp.4-8.

Kolb, D 2014, *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development* (2nd ed.), Pearson Education, New York.

Kondo, S 2019, 'Musical communication in scaffolding young learners' expressive agency', *Research Studies in Music Education*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 55–74.

Munday, J, Rowley, J & Polly, P 2017, 'The use of visual images in building professional self-identities', *International Journal of ePortfolio*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 53-65.

Munday, J, & Rowley, J 2017, 'Showing a human and professional face to the world: an ePortfolio design strategy for a sense of self', in N. Northcote and G. Gooslein (eds.) *Handbook of Research on Humanizing the Distance Learning Experience*, pp. 142-159, IGI Global.

Osborne, M 2012, 'The psychology of music performance anxiety', *The Australian Journal of Music Thera*py, vol. 23, pp.76–76.

Pavis, P 2013, *Contemporary Mise En Scène – staging theatre today*. Routledge, New York.

Polkinghorne, D 1995, 'Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 5-23.

Reid, A, Rowley, J & Bennett, D 2019, 'From expert student to novice professional: higher education and sense of self in the creative and performing arts', *Music Education Research,* vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 399-413.

Rowe, A & Zegwaard, KE 2017, 'Developing graduate employability skills and attributes: curriculum enhancement through work-integrated learning', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 87-99.

Rowley, J 2019, 'The musician as teacher: early career experiences of music teaching and leadership explored through an ePortfolio learning space, in J Rowley, D Bennett & P

Schmidt (eds.), *Leadership of Pedagogy and Curriculum in Higher Music Education*, Chapter IX, Routledge, doi: 9780367077334.

Rowley, J & Dunbar-Hall, P 2015, 'The role of ePortfolios in preparing students for music careers', *Australian Journal of Music Education*, vol. 2, pp. 216-223.

Rowley, J & Munday, J 2014, 'A 'sense of self' through reflective thinking in ePortfolios', *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education* vol. 1, no. 7, pp. 78-85.Schön, D 1983, *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*, Basic Books, New York.

Spahn, C, & Echternach, M 2010, 'Music performance anxiety in opera singers', *Logopedics. Phoniatrics Vocology,* vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 175-182.

Stake, R 2005, 'Qualitative Case Studies', in Denzin, N & Lincoln, Y (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research,* pp. 443–466, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, California.

Taylor, J & Rowley, J 2017, 'Building professional capabilities: ePortfolios as developmental ecosystems', in J Rowley (ed.), *ePortfolios in Australian Universities*, pp. 191-203, Springer, Singapore.

Thorley, M 2014, Graduate meets employer- a model for embedding industry professional involvement in the development and assessment of student portfolios. Journal of Music, Technology & Education, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 325-339.

Yeo, N 2017, '*The Infallible Protagonist' – a study of complexity theory and rehearsal dynamics in monodrama*, Doctoral thesis, University of Sydney, http://hdl.handle.net/2123/16418.

Yeo, N & Rowley, J 2018, 'Reflections on a three-way mentoring program using ePortfolios: I Pagliacci (Leoncavallo) in the Speigeltent', *Music in Schools and Teacher Education Commission (MISTEC)*, New York University, Prague. 8-12 July 2018.