

Lifelong Learning: Perspectives, Opportunities and Challenges

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Whilst in the eons of history the term lifelong learning may be a relatively new addition to the language, the practices and experiences are most certainly not. Throughout human existence people have tried to improve their living conditions by accomplishing their tasks in more efficient and effective ways. This can often be linked to the notion of work but lifelong learning, whilst important in the workplace, affects all parts of our existence. It not only aids us to understand our tasks but also how we fit into a wider society. Without lifelong learning our society, and we as individuals, would stagnate. It is not something that we always do purposively but is a part of being human. We acquire skills and knowledge and then apply them sometimes in unrelated scenarios. Lifelong learning has benefits not just in terms of our work but can also help in terms of socialization. It also has potential health benefits, for example, in terms of enhancing neuroplasticity and aiding in the development of emotional intelligence and empathy for others. We become more confident in what we do as we achieve increased knowledge and understanding through lifelong learning, as can be evidenced in many of the contributions in this edited collection. We all benefit from lifelong learning and have a role to play in both in terms of educating ourselves and a duty to help to educate others in order to create a better society. The contributors and editors hope that this collection can play even a minuscule part in that development and we have certainly been through new experiences that have contributed to our own lifelong learning.

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Shifting identities

On sustainable talent development in performing arts

Michel Hogenes

17 July 2022

Introduction

Theatre is a word derived from the ancient Greek words θέατρον [théatron: a place for viewing], and θεάομαι [theáomai: to see, to watch, and to observe]. Theatres are diverse ‘spaces’ for people who love all kinds of drama and other performances. In theatres many roles can be identified, such as directors, playwrights, and theatre designers, as well as practical roles like lighting technicians and stage crew members. Finally, theatres need performing artists. Artists who are educated to use the basic elements: time, space, body, and presence of the artist, as well as the relation between the creator (e.g. the playwright or choreographer) and the public in order to generate a reaction, sometimes with the support of improvisation and a sense of aesthetics.

Performing artists work in a field that is variable and uncertain. Producers often seek all-round professionals who can dance, act, and sing in several style variations with rapidly changing circumstances and requirements. This requires a lot of flexibility. Performing Artists sometimes work on several productions at the same time and are expected to deliver constant performance at the highest level (SBB, 2021). ‘Drivers for change’, such as continuous innovation and renewal; entrepreneurship, the human dimension; and global challenges make it necessary to ask: What does an artist need to be able to keep participating and be valuable in the field of performing arts? Apart from these external drivers the physical and psychological demands of acting, singing and dancing are likely to be affected by decline of function which are often but not exclusively age-related.

A significant cultural change in the 20th century was the rise of identity as a fundamental value (Pöder & Kiilu, 2015). Identity is an important step towards becoming a productive adult because constructing an identity involves who one is, what one values, and the directions one chooses to pursue in life (Berk, 2017). However, working adults with a personal identity also

acquire a professional identity which can be defined as a professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences (Ibarra, 1999; Schein, 1978). This professional identity includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, and education that is relevant to – in this case – performing arts. Such education also encompasses the values, ethics and workstyle behaviours and preferences that allow for success in the theatre.

This chapter aims to understand how transformative professional learning can be created for sustainable talent development in performing arts. It examines the following aspects: identity formation; performing arts as a profession; positive growth of a professional identity; aging and other stressors; and sustainable talent development as features of lifelong learning in performing arts. The chapter is based on peer-reviewed literature and interviews with performing arts students, professionals working as a performing artist, and artists who have had a career of over 15 years in the performing arts to demonstrate the relevance of life-long learning in this area of work.

Identity formation

In these times of global awareness, arts can help us understand the world in which we live because the arts are a means of social and self-definition, and a bridge for young people from the self to others. Musical identity is an individual's perception of his or her musical self and is central to the formation of identity in emerging adulthood (Talbot, 2013). The same applies to dance, theatre, and all other arts disciplines. The social and cultural environments which surround an individual are main influencers of his or her artistic identity (Filippidou, 2022).

The concept of 'identity', introduced by Erikson (1950, 1968), encompasses both personal and social components. On a personal level, identity can be described as an answer to the question 'Who am I?' The answer to this question can be found when people develop their own personal lifestyle, which means that they accept themselves with all their possibilities and limitations. On a social level, identity should be acknowledged by the important people in a person's life, such as parents and peers. Hence, identity is a subjective feeling about what people want to achieve and assures them that the important people in their lives support them achieving this goal. However, identity also includes an objective element (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). People, especially young people, do have to make choices. They forge bonds

with certain roles that are linked to a profession, but also to moral and religious values, political ideologies and choices regarding relationship formation and social roles.

Identity is a major personality achievement and a crucial step toward becoming a content, productive adult (Berk, 2017). Even though identity formation begins early in life, it is, often, not until adolescence that young people become absorbed by this task. During adolescence, young people's vision of the self becomes more complex, well-organized, and consistent. They develop feelings, both positive and negative ones, about an increasing variety of aspects of the self. Over time, a balanced, integrated representation of their strengths and limitations are formed (Harter, 2006). These changes then set the stage for the development of a unified personal identity comprising of a solid inner core that provides a mature identity and a sense of self continuity as they move through their various roles in daily life. Identity will continue to be refined as the young person moves into adulthood.

However, there are also young people who fail to develop a unified personal identity. They show a sense of confusion and fail to take on the various roles expected of adults. In order to develop a unified personal identity, it is important for young people to explore possibilities in life. Erikson (1968) wrote about an 'identity crisis.' He stated that going through such a crisis is a necessary condition for the development of a well-developed identity. The feeling that one has to make important choices in all important areas of life inevitably leads to tensions which can accompany temporary manifestations of emotional imbalances. Nowadays, the word exploration is used instead of identity crisis (Rigter, 2020). This exploration implies that adolescents weigh different alternatives against each other in the construction of their identity. A vehement, emotional crisis only occurs in a limited number of young people.

Identity achievement is opposed to identity moratorium, exploration without reaching commitment; identity foreclosure, commitment in the absence of exploration; and identity diffusion, an apathetic state characterized by lack of both exploration and commitment (Berk, 2017; Marcia 2002). The concept of identity plays a crucial role in the psychology of adolescence. In the formation of identity, young people make decisions in all important areas of their lives.

For the field of music, MacDonald, Hargreaves and Miel (2016) distinguish identities in music and music in identities. *Identities in music* are aspects of musical identity that are defined by established social-cultural roles and categories, such as musician, composer, music teacher, et cetera. They form an important part of self-concepts for people involved in musical activities. *Music in identities* refers to how people use music within their overall self-identities, for example which music is important to people's self-definitions as masculine-feminine, old-young, et cetera. The same distinction can be made for other artistic disciplines, such as dance and theatre.

Professional identity formation

At the individual level, identity could be defined as a view of oneself in a social position shaped by social interactions (MacDonald et al., 2016). From this point of view, professional identity of performing artists is the way artists see themselves in the context of their position as artists shaped by the contexts of their work. Consequently, the notion of professional identity as described above is that formed within, and by the artists themselves. However, identity is not independent of outsider's views of the profession. Identity has been considered in various phenomenological, sociological and philosophical discussions which have shown that identity is linked to the recognition by others.

Bakhtin's (1981) emphasised dialogics, while Scaratti and Ivaldi (2021) focused on everyday life. Just as the individual is constantly synthesising his particularity, in other words his or her uniqueness or unique qualities, and generality or generic qualities within him or herself. One's professional identity is an ongoing process of integrating the personal and the professional sides of becoming and being a professional (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). However, precisely defining a performing artist's professional identity is rather problematic. What does a successful artist identity look like for a performing artist? Views about performing arts are already quite diverse. Which identities should be privileged, and which ones should be strengthened?

During their education artists learn to connect practice, theory and personal traits to form their professional identity as performing artists. They master concepts regarding professional identity formation and learn to use these concepts when reflecting on experiences in

professional practices. Artists thus form perceptions of their own professional identity. These in turn influence one's own professional formation, self-efficacy and the ability and willingness to be open to change and to implement innovations in their own practice (Beijaard, 2019).

In their model on professional identity formation of teachers, Akkerman & Meijer (2011) state that identity is understood as dynamic, flexible and context related. It is likely to assume that professional identity formation of performing artists is broadly similar to that of teachers. A dialogical approach explains how professional identity can be both plural, multi-voiced self with multiple 'I-positions' in different contexts, and cohesive to a unique self, showing both continuity and discontinuity over time and is both individual and social in nature. In this model, three types of aspects are important for the formation of a professional identity: personal aspects, such as uniqueness with regards to talents and values, professional aspects (e.g. artistic and entrepreneurial competences) and social aspects, such as gender, ethnicity and social economical class (Beijaard, 2019; Illeris, 2014). An artist's professional identity, or 'professional self-understanding' develops through reflection on experiences, in particular performance practice. In this reflection, relevant aspects of the student's personal and social identities and relevant theoretical knowledge are included.

Passion as driver for sustainable talent development

If there is one profession where passionate people can be found, it is the theatre (Dieho, 2018; Eleveld, Van Leeuwen & Rietstap, 2021). The question is how to turn this passion into a powerful driver for sustainable talent development as feature of lifelong learning in performing arts?

Identity learning is understood to mean the process in which the learner changes the self-image and develops new behaviour based on sustainable behaviour (Meijers, 2015). Although much research has been done on identity learning in school contexts (see e.g. Baker & Ryan, 2021; Barak & Shoshana, 2022), this is less the case for professional development in general and the development of performing artists in particular. However, the results of educational research seem to translate well into the professional practice of performing artists.

Creating a passionate environment in which artists can develop is almost identical to the learning environment that students need to give meaning to their own experiences (Meijers & Wardekker, 2002). Identity learning is at odds with reproductive learning in a number of ways. Reproductive learning focuses on the transfer of undisputed knowledge and/ or skills, whereby the role of the teacher, director or choreographer is first of all to structure the knowledge/ insights or skills in such a way that they can be learned. Then check whether the artist is capable of reproducing what is offered and, if that is not the case, diagnose where s/he is using incorrect strategies or does not understand the artist in order to solve these problems as quickly as possible through targeted feedback (Meijers, 2015).

Identity learning, on the other hand, is about the learner being able to make sense of their own experiences with both theory and practice. The teacher, director or choreographer can help the artist or artist in education with this through feedforward-oriented interventions that are mainly process-based. In order to make identity learning possible for artists, teachers, directors or choreographers must therefore change their own professional identity, that is to say: provide their own professional actions with new meaning and significance.

Within narrative career psychology, an identity is a story that a person tells him or herself and to others about the personal meaning and the social meaning of his or her existence. Identity learning is therefore a process in which an individual changes this story. Lengelle (2014) therefore speaks of the transition from a first to a second story. This process can be repeated multiple times.

Identity learning usually starts as a response to a so-called boundary experience: a situation in which a person encounters the boundaries of their current self-concept and is unable to handle the demands of the situation properly. The feeling of identity is tested, diminished, or even lost when a person runs into a proverbial wall, which makes it difficult for them to act confidently. The problem with the boundary experience can be cognitive (such as not understanding the situation or lacking the necessary information and abilities), but it is usually an emotional one because identifications from earlier in life prevent an appropriate response.

According to Lengelle (2014), in a particularly intricate interplay between the conscious and unconscious processing of boundary experiences, the development of a second tale takes place. Because humans lack cognitive abilities to make truly rational decisions and because the unconscious plays a significant role, direct introspective access to higher-order cognitive processes is constrained. People who only focus their decisions on rational factors frequently end up making mistakes that they regret later, compared to those who base their decisions mainly on intuition. Additionally, studies in neurobiology and neuropsychology demonstrate that emotions react more quickly than thoughts. Due to a low cognitive dissonance tolerance of the human brain, people in complex situations frequently go for the first solution that they perceive to be favourable. In summary, people often make decisions based on pre-programmed ways of thinking that they see as intuition when they are faced with a boundary experience. An intuitive handling of boundary experiences typically leads to adequate action in stable circumstances. However, an intuitive response typically does not lead to better living and working conditions in a society that is marked by decreasing social security (due to increasing individualization) and decreasing economic security (due to an increase in flexible employment relationships and the current post-Covid situation). Performing artists will need to develop the ability to cope with their intuitions more consciously if they are to survive in today's society.

Similar to the boundary experiences that lead to cognitive dissonance in the present, intuitive knowledge is a product of processing prior experiences. Before a person can become aware of them, they must first be verbally articulated, which allows for a greater degree of self-direction (Robertson, 2012). Feeling, sorting, focussing, and understanding are the four stages of the process by which the underlying experiences and silent knowledge progressively gain a voice (Law, 1996). The exploration and description of emotions evoked by boundary experiences take place during the feeling phase. Research shows that it is extremely important for the processing of boundary experiences that an individual becomes aware of feelings as they take place in the body (Van der Kolk, 2014). Following the feeling phase is sorting, where the person increasingly builds personal concepts through an internal and external discourse based on association via analogy (which is the core of cognition as can be read below). As a result, the individual is no longer overloaded with the chaotic mix of emotions and thoughts that characterizes the boundary experience. Points of view are developed during the third

phase, focusing. Although these viewpoints are still fragmented, they represent an effort to connect thoughts and emotions that surfaced during the stages of feeling and sorting. Ideally, the focusing phase moves into the understanding phase, where the acquired insights start to take the form of a new narrative/ story. This process of learning is known as episodic learning because the individual organizes the events and determines the who, what, where, when, how, and why of what happened. This process typically involves grouping the information, outlining the big picture, and coming to conclusions in the form of a second story. This second story doesn't need to be more accurate than the first—there could still be justification—but it must be more internally compelling for the person to take action. That is precisely what enables a boundary experience to be processed in a constructive manner.

The progression through the various phases is based on reducing cognitive dissonance through internal and external dialogue (see Law, 1996). An internal dialogue is a dialogue between what are called I-positions in the Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans & Hermans-Konopa, 2010). A collection of details about an emotionally significant event is represented by an I-position and is kept in long-term memory. An I-position can be thought of as a tightly packed mental chunk that creates a thematic whole of images, feelings, and thoughts in the form of a more or less coherent story (Campbell, Parr & Richardson, 2009). The story explains what someone finds significant by making apparent the way in which a previous boundary experience has been processed. A boundary experience automatically generates a variety of I-positions by association that represent a similar experience. It therefore happens unconsciously. These I-positions engage into a dialogue with one another and, in a direct or indirect manner, with the outside world (via I-positions that represent an emotionally important person, such as a father or mother). The dialogue that results does not adhere to Habermas' principles of the 'herrschaftsfreier Dialog mündiger Menschen' (Corchia, 2013), where the argument's persuasiveness is what counts in the end. Rather, there is a hazy dialogue where emotions predominate in the first instance. Only subsequently, frequently under the influence of an outsider who adds a metaphor or invites lesser voices to speak, do a so-called meta position and then a promoter position is developed (Meijers, 2015). A meta and promoter position reorganizes 'the self towards a higher level of development' (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, 228).

However, a person will typically attempt to address the cognitive dissonance through what Baker & Stauth (2003) refer to as VERB: victimization (a sense of victimization), entitlement (a sense of injustice), rescue (a need to be saved), and blame before beginning an internal and external dialogue (the need to blame others). As is generally known, man has a nearly limitless capacity to excuse his own shortcomings.

Speaking of which

The Netherlands has a vibrant theatre life with many talented artists (Dieho, 2018). To see how the theories and contemplations described above relate to processes of professional identity achievement that Dutch performing artists go through, eighteen people were interviewed for this book chapter: four first-year performance and education students, plus six fourth-year students of Lucia Marthas Institute for Performing Arts in Amsterdam, the Netherlands as well as four Dutch experienced artists with five till twelve years of performance experience and four senior artists with a career of over fifteen years. It was interesting to observe the similarities and differences between the different interviewees.

The interviewees had very different backgrounds before starting their education in performing arts. One student said: *"I was two years old when I wanted to follow dance lessons. Fortunately, I could go with my older sister. At the age of six, I started dancing at a serious level."* Another student's career started dancing in church: *"I was passionate about working with other youth in the church I am still active in. It is always nice to see people dancing and gives huge satisfaction to see people perform a chorography you made. It regularly gives me goosebumps moments."*

Many artists, both students as well as experienced and senior ones, have many interests. They don't limit themselves to singing, dancing, and acting. They are interested in kaleidoscope of topics like fashion, sociology, and teaching. Their educational backgrounds are diverse as well. Some went to senior secondary vocational education [MBO] before starting music, dance and/or theatre education at a college/ bachelor level. One interviewee received a Bachelor of Science before entering a performing arts school. Most artists had preparatory classes or full courses to prepare themselves for entrance exams/ auditions, often combined with secondary school.

The question: “*What made you want to make performing arts your profession?*” yielded interesting answers. Many interviewees said: “*It must be your passion. The drive to express yourself has to be in your blood.*” One interviewee said: “*When you know, you know. Although I have done many other things, I found out that nothing can make me feel like dance can. I want to cherish the gift I have. Think of it as a tree. Dance is the tribe. The rest makes it beautiful.*” “*If you can turn your passion into your profession, grab that opportunity!*”

Asking interviewees about their early careers, half of them mentioned that they have not always been successful in auditions. They certainly were not always the best. Men mentioned differences in opportunities between male and female dancers. “*As a man, it's easier to get more attention as there are “always” more female than male dancers.*” Three artists said: “*Having perseverance and a competitive attitude seems to be more important than being talented.*” Five interviewees mentioned getting supportive and specific feedback as a factor for success in their artistic career. One senior artist had very outspoken ideas on feedback: “*The nature of feedback one receives is very important to its impact on a performer. Artists need disconfirmation. This is much more powerful than confirmation. Feedback that disconfirms can lead to greater change. Artists should be allowed to make errors. Exposure to errors in a safe environment can lead to higher performance. The power of peers, interventions that aim to foster correct peer feedback are needed.*”

“*How do you see your future in about five years' time?*”, was a question that provided many different answers. Four students answered: “*I would like to become a teacher at the academy.*” Three students want to start their own dance studio. One with a special focus on children who don't have the financial support to become dancers, professionally or as amateurs. Six students indicated that they would like to play in professional productions. They have an enormous drive to realize their ambitions. Some of them would like to go abroad, for artistic as well as financial reasons. The kind of productions students like to be part of varies from modern dance to singing, dancing, and acting (triptych) in musicals, and being part of the ensemble of a celebrity musician. Four students indicated that they were interested in hybrid work, combining performance work and teaching.

A difference was noticed between the answers of students and experienced and senior artists. Students mentioned inspiring role models, such as teachers in the academy and leading performers in the field of music, dance and theatre and a combination of these three disciplines. They also mentioned possibilities that are available to work as an artist. More experienced artists, on the other hand, came up with boundary experienced as described by Langelle (2014) and Meijers (2015) and the need of professional development and life-long-learning. They talked about possibilities to create a better work-life balance. *“Being an artist is top sport. It is hard to combine my work on stage with having a boyfriend, let alone getting children in the future.”* All experienced and senior performers mentioned Covid-19 as a serious stress factor. One interviewee said: *“Due to Covid, my colleagues and I were unemployed for a long time. I suffered under the financial uncertainty. I worked at a Covid test bureau. I have even been a cashier in a supermarket. I am still afraid that we will have new lockdowns in the near future.”*

It was hard for first year students to imagine what their lives would look like in twenty years' time, other than being on stage, or teaching dance, drama and/ or singing. One student said: *“Whatever will happen, I will keep working in the theatre business. Maybe as part of a creative team, maybe as resident director, or dance captain. I might need some extra education in order to become successful in these roles. Finally, dancing less myself, but still working for what I am passionate about.”* Another student said: *“I would like to act in a TV series or a movie. I have no big heart for teaching, although I would like to give workshops and masterclasses.”* A third student likes to own her own company. *“I like to develop, produce and stage performances, alongside teaching in a dance studio.”* One student added: *“For me, it is important not to want too much. Have focus and set clear goals for myself.”*

The fourth years students would finish their education in a few months after the interview took place. It was therefore important for them to think about life after their education. It seemed to be easier for these students to think of their lives in twenty years' time. *“You can keep dancing. Learn to dream big now.”* *“In twenty years' time, I have built a nice reputation. You can still do a lot being in your forties. I can also choreograph for companies and great artists.”* One student sees herself living and working abroad: *“I would like to combine my work as an artist with teaching second language acquisition, a field of expertise I am already*

educating myself in." Another student thinks that she will still be teaching dance in twenty years' time. She said: "*We'll see. I live very much by the day.*" A third student was very enthusiastic about her education but decided to pick up her previous work in the fashion industry. "*I love my work as a dancer, but I would like to have a better work-life balance. That's very difficult in dance performance. Even in dance education.*" A better work-life balance was also what another student hoped for. "*Teaching performing arts will be easier to combine with the other things I like to do in life, although I will try to keep performing as well.*" Other students want to focus on performing: "*To be an artist is so much fun. I found out that I can do much more than I thought I could, and there is still so much to learn. I am more a creator than a performer. I want to do more with creatorship. I don't want to limit myself to dancing, although I am in the audition process for the musical Aida now. I also want to make concept videos and become a successful choreographer.*" Others had the ambition to become part of a touring production, follow short-term internships at for example the NDT (Netherlands Dance Theatre) or commercial companies. One student dared to dream big: "*I want to do my own thing. I want to make my own album, and tour around the world. I want to sell out the Wembley Stadium with my own show.*"

In addition, students were asked: "*To what extent has your subjective concept of the academy and the profession changed since you came to study performing arts?*" They answered: "*I now know much better now what I can and want. I dare to be open to about what comes my way.*" "*Lines between the subject music, dance and theatre have blurred. I discovered that triptych (music, dance, and theatre) is much more than the sum of its parts.*" *Dreams have stayed the same. I know much more what is possible and not. The theatre work field is sometimes very confrontational, e.g. being rejected at auditions.*"

Advanced and senior artists were also asked: "*How do you see your future in about twenty years' time?*" They looked back at their careers and were all highly satisfied with what they achieved. "*I performed in six musicals. I started in the ensemble, became understudy and swing. Now I am studying theatre studies at the university (MSc/ graduate level). I would like to become a theatre critique or dramaturge as I noticed that it becomes harder for me to excel on stage. Although I do everything I can to stay healthy and fit, I am getting older. There are so many talented young people and unfortunately less roles for older performers. Auditioning*

is not that thrilling anymore.” Two senior artists mentioned the inevitable fact of aging and the effects it can have on your body. “I became more and more aware that working as a performing artist is top sport. The older I get, the more time I need to physically recover. Two years ago, just before Covid-19, I injured my knee. I needed physiotherapy for half a year. Fortunately, all performances and concerts had stopped due to the pandemic. This event got me thinking. I am orienting myself on functions backstage now. Maybe, I can become an assistant director, but I am also looking into teaching, something I was never really interested in. I became aware that I need to have a backup plan. Now I am young enough for a career change in my own field. This might be much more difficult when I am in my fifties”

Conclusions and discussion

The rise of identity as a fundamental value was a significant cultural change in the 20th century (Pöder & Kiilu, 2015). Identity defined as an important step towards becoming a productive adult involving who one is, what one values, and the directions one has chooses to pursue in life (Berk, 2017). Working professionals also acquire a professional identity which can be defined as a professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences (Ibarra, 1999; Schein, 1978).

Becoming a performing artist is for many people a dream that (unfortunately) will never come true. It is a romantic dream some people have of being a performing artist as presented in TV-series like ‘Fame’ in the 1980’s. However, to become a performing artist takes talent, time, courage, enormous perseverance and maybe a bit of luck too. As a number of interviewees mentioned: *“Performing arts is akin to top sport. To stay at the top requires constant perseverance, hard work, and professional development.”* People age and grow in their professional role. To grow into this role itself can be seen as live-long-learning .

The interviews conducted for this book chapter highlighted a variety of differences between the interviewees. A path of life-long-learning seems therefore to be an individual path, but both theory and interviews showed a need for sustainable education, as it simply is impossible to dance, sing and/ or act the same way when you are sixty years old, compared to when one was twenty years old.

How can transformative professional learning be created for sustainable talent development in performing arts? As MacDonald et al. (2016) pointed out: professional identity of performing artists is the way artists see themselves in the context of their position as artists shaped by the contexts of their work. However, identity also depends on outsider's views of the profession. Professional identity formation is a process in which artists have boundary experiences (Langelle, 2014; Meijers, 2015). They encounter problems and people that shape their views on both their own profession as well as on their personal development. Performing artists who want to keep participating and be valuable in the field of performing arts have to anticipate to what is needed to keep participating, as well as to the question what aging means for their physical and mental abilities and possibilities on stage. Being valuable in this field can be on stage, but also off stage, or even not near a stage at all, for example as part of a management team or as a policy maker. To be and remain the owner of one's own development, performing artists should be(come) aware of their professional identity, as well as of the formation process that leads to one's professional development. This applies to bachelor and master students, as well as to experienced and senior artists.

Radical times, like during and right after Covid-19, offer opportunities to really do things differently. Artists (among others) unfortunately encountered many boundary experiences. The transition to a more sustainable world can gain momentum, and so can the human capital, where performing artists are part of, demand that goes with it. The Covid-19 measures have increased concerns about increasing inequality in education and people who were not already in a good position on the labor market. It became clear that not everyone could or was able to respond creatively and adequately to changes needed.

Like written above, The Netherlands has a vibrant theatre life with many talented artists (Dieho, 2018). However, the theatre is also a complex and demanding work field. It is uncertain what kind of types of change will be needed in the future. The past 20 years has shown that lots of innovation took place, such as the use of technology in theatres, and the possibility of live streaming. The eighteen interviewees showed great divergent strategies for learning and development. However, artists can always encounter problems that can't be solved easily by themselves. The Covid-19 pandemic left many artists in great despair. Formation of a professional identity should be part of the education of performing artists. One

of the students mentioned: “*It's very much about who you are here. Professional identity is very central in the education of performing artists from day one.*” However, professional identity should also be part of the coaching’s process of experienced and senior artists. This does not seem to be the case for everyone. In order to stay successful in the field of performing arts sustainable talent development as features of lifelong learning in performing arts is needed.

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