

# Preparing for Work-Life Through Work-Like Situated Learning: A Case Study

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**Abstract:** In this paper we investigate how it is to have supervision during a course when the students are to learn to write and compose music during a 12-hour music camps. It is a study that is close to practice as the part of the programme is about the students are to experience how it is to work on producing and developing music in a work life. The connection to work life require that the students establish an understanding of the purpose of the music camps and why they are organized the way they are. We will analyse this approach in the light of the communication principles of Habermas. The role of the supervisor does in a Norwegian setting require equality and symmetry in the relation between the supervisor and student, something that contributes to a psychological safety in the situation. This in turn contribute towards the students being able to forward their own points of views. The supervisors seek to make the students reach an awareness regarding what they will encounter in a work life. Hence, they encounter the concrete situations that occur and either steer or support the students based on their level of maturity and competency level. This can be regarded as an ongoing interaction regarding tacit and explicit knowledge. These are processes that not only support individual learning, but development of new knowledge which can be incorporated in the further development of the music camps. We have developed a conceptual model that has guided us in our analysis which is based on the qualitative investigations we have undertaken. Our conclusion is that the lecturers experience and skills, and work-like approach to the education strongly contribute towards facilitating a way of communicating that imply a sense of equality and symmetry in the communication between the student and lecturers, something they report contribute to a psychological safety that enables the learning not only of theory and skills, but also prepare them for a work-life.

**Keywords:** Knowledge development, Work-Like learning, Situated Learning, Supervision, Communication, Psychological safety

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## 1. Introduction

Educating people for the Music Business require an approach that meet not only these creative students' needs, but also the needs of the trade. Some students will be educated for the administrative and business within organizations working with developing and producing music, and others aim to be the singer/songwriters/producers for the music business. The music business is a part of the entertainment industry which embraces a lot of other sub-industries (such as the gaming industry, the gambling industry and the movie industry, to mention a few) (Hull, Hutchison and Strasser, 2011).

Technological developments have changed a lot in the music business. For example, the digitalization and the internet has enabled not only a swifter production, but also the possibilities of copying without permission, which has offered some challenges within the music business industry. It has also enabled quicker dissemination and promoted internationalization (Hull, Hutchison and Strasser, 2011).

At the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Rena, Norway, the students in the Bachelor program of Music Business and Production, are exposed to both the creative and the economic/administrative sides of the music business in order to gain insights and understanding of the different aspects of it. The idea is that this will strengthen their candidacy for a job in the music business. Also, whatever the students should choose, or be offered, they are prepared for a variety of work tasks within any organization in the music business.

In this paper we focus on features developed to enhance their skills and understanding for the music business industry. Already in the first year they are exposed to how to develop and produce songs in a way that they will be exposed to in the "real life" within the industry. The course consists of ordinary weekly lectures of three hours and six seminars of 10-12 hours, three in the autumn semester and three in the spring semester. During these seminars they are to write and produce a song over a theme decided by the teachers. We will have a particular focus on the supervision during the seminars as this need to not only promote developing their skills, but also be a part of what prepares them for a work-life in the music business.

Supervising students not only require skills within the particular trade (here writing lyrics, developing sound tracks and producing the songs), but also require an understanding of time management, how to motivate and how to communicate in order for the students to learn, develop, feel personal mastery and develop skills. This also implies to establish an environment that induces psychological safety which, in turn, facilitates the students' need to obtain the feeling of personal mastery and thus develop the necessary skills. The students, on the other hand, need to understand that the supervision will bring them forward regarding internalizing the curriculum and developing skills, and the supervisors need to understand how to communicate to motivate the students learn and develop. Thus, we have investigated this in the light of Habermas' theory on communicative rationality (Habermas, 1985a) as this is based on a linguistic communication supporting the idea of aiding the students to understand and internalize the knowledge and skills, based on a mutual understanding between the students and the supervisors.

Hence, our research question is:

*How to facilitate work-like supervision in a higher educational setting?*

In order to investigate this we have also formulated sub-questions:

*What do the supervisors base their feedback on?*

*How do the supervisors use their professional background when providing feedback?*

*What is the impact of the supervision on the students' psychological safety?*

*The case*

We have followed two sets of first year students over a total of three semesters (from spring 2022 till end of spring 2023). The students must register for mandatory seminars (music camps). The purpose of registering is for the supervisors/lecturers to be able to divide the students into groups. The groups consist of a producer, one or more lyric writers and one or more song writers. When the students register, they need to list what they believe they can contribute with to the group (for example if they believe they are good at writing lyrics or producing). On the day of the seminars, the groups are presented, and it is different groups for each seminar. The assignment, which is defined by lecturers, is presented at the start of the seminars. Generally, it is about pop music from around the world (J-pop (Japanese pop music), K-pop (Korean pop music), Nordic pop music) and they are introduced with the assignment accompanied by examples of what the students may use as inspiration for their work. They are provided with a rough schedule of the seminar describing approximately when they need to be finished with the different tasks. This schedule is approximate, but by experience the idea should be ready after an hour or two, then the start of the lyrics and the main theme should be in place by the next few hours, so that the producer will be able to make a start on the song in the computer tool. The total production needs to finish one hour before the listening session in order for the lecturers to organize for the session. In the session, the students are to present their idea to the audience, and receive feedback from their fellow students, but only a few comments from their supervisor/lecturer, as they will have had most of their supervision during the seminar.

There are rules for how the group members are to communicate how they like or dislike ideas and the basic rule is that if you do not have a better idea yourself you are not to discard, nor speak negatively about the idea from a fellow student.

In the following we will present the theory that has enlighten our study and how we have collected the data we later present and discuss before we conclude.

## **2. Theoretical Foundation**

In order to support the students in their learning process, as well as making it a work like environment, in addition to paying attention to the closeness the outcome has to the real world business, we need to look at how the students and supervisors/lecturers can draw on theory from not only learning through communicating but also on work-life situations that support development processes.

Habermas (1985a) theory of communicative rationality rely on mutual understanding and build on other theorists such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, John Searle and J.L. Austin. Wittgenstein's contribution to Habermas was about his way of looking at language (Wittgenstein, 2010). When language is stripped from contextual clues, there may be problems with understanding. Hence, a context and metaphysical environment is needed to avoid misunderstandings. He also presents an idea of language games where words may have different meaning

according to context and how it is used (Wittgenstein, 2010; Baker and Hacker, 2014). John Searle, heavily influenced by John L. Austin, present in his book *Speech Acts* (Searle, 1969) different sets of semantical rules where the same words will produce different meanings according to how it has been presented. He had his own interpretation of Austin's "illocutionary acts" (Searle, 1968, 1975; Austin, 1975) which is about saying something (locution) with the purpose of obtaining an answer, expecting something to be executed, asserting something, or ordering someone to do something.

Habermas was also inspired by George H. Mead who was concerned with pragmatism and social behaviourism. The pragmatism was based on the idea that the reality is socially constructed, that social and physical items encountered are defined by their usage of them, that people alter meaning about things that does not function the way they are used to anymore, and that actors must be understood by peoples' behaviour. To Mead, it was also important to promote that consciousness is an integral part of action and interaction between people. In his "Mind, Self and Society" (Mead, 1934), he presents the idea of the mind and self, the self, emerging from communication as a social process, and mind descending from communication as a social action, a socially mediated act.

Jean Piaget has not only inspired Habermas, but also for example Lev Vygotskij. Most notably has Habermas incorporated Piaget's thoughts in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1985a, 1985b). Somewhat unlike the behaviourists, Piaget claimed that knowledge needs to be constructed within each human being, but as a result of an interaction with the surroundings. The tough processes are organized in schemes that embraces experiences, thoughts and knowledge. If a new experience fits a scheme it will be expanded by assimilation and if a new scheme has to be construed it is an accommodation (Lyngsnes and Rismark, 2014).

In a Norwegian context the supervision in an educational institution need a high degree of equality and symmetry in the communication and relation between supervisor and student. This contributes towards preparing the grounds for psychological safety during the supervision, which in turn contributes towards allowing the students to promote their views. We are thus not only inspired by the social construction amongst the students and between supervisors and students, but also by Buber (1992) regarding establishing a relation that is characterized by equality and symmetry. Edmondson refer to a term called *psychological safety* (Edmondson, 2018, p. xiv) which in her research has proved to be a necessity for maximized organizational performance. In fact, psychological safety is underpinning other factors (like "setting clear goals and reinforcing mutual accountability" (Edmondson, 2018, p. xviii)) regarding successful teamwork. Psychological safety is thus important for driving innovation and development in organizations as it is important that people speak up if they have a good idea or discover something that should be corrected (Frazier *et al.*, 2017). Akan, Jack and Mehta (2020) claim that: "When team members feel psychologically safe, they engage more in exploratory and exploitative learning and are more creative and motivated, and in turn, more productive" (Akan, Jack and Mehta, 2020, p. 30). Too many do not dear speaking up because they want to avoid being thought less of something that again may lead to dissatisfaction and underperformance (Edmondson, 2018). To gain psychological safety one needs to establish trust and respect. Edmondson define psychological safety as "the belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (Edmondson, 2018, p. 8), and further states: "Psychological safety is present when colleagues trust and respect each other and feel able – even obligated - to be candid" (p.8). Edmondson also refer to Kahn (1990) who has also investigated psychological safety and how this support and develop engagement amongst employees. Kahn (1990) also refer to personal engagement which he defines as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively , and emotionally during role performances" and disengagement as "the uncoupling of selves from work roles; in disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694). Kahn also present his own research projects and refer to an instructor that shared his personal philosophy on a related topic as well as showing a "pure personal engagement" was able to empathize with his students and thus psychologically connecting with the students (Kahn, 1990, pp. 700, 701). According to Kahn, the four factors that influences psychological safety are: "interpersonal relationships, group and intergroup dynamics, management style and process, and organizational norms" (Kahn, 1990, p. 708). Akan, Jack and Mehta (2020) refer to a "conrescent conversation environment" which is defined as "disclosing, questioning, and steering verbal behaviour that constructs the team environment and contributes to task completion" (Akan, Jack and Mehta, 2020, p. 30) and builds on Searle's (1969) ideas and thoughts about language. Disclosing is about sharing information, including personal information in order to induce trust, questioning is about information-seeking and include five behaviours: posing relevant questions, being friendly (avoiding friction), being spontaneous, willingness to

answer questions, and appreciate the shared information, and steering which is defined as “describable verbal behaviour that guides or directs tasks efforts” (Akan, Jack and Mehta, 2020, p. 32).

Frazier et al. (2017) also tie psychological safety to two of the “Big Five personality constructs”; emotionally stability and openness to experience (Frazier *et al.*, 2017, pp. 118, 148). The emotionally stable are generally calm and relaxed and the openness is tied to risk taking which is again a sign of psychological safety.

Work-like learning can be called situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Situated learning is a theory that explains how an individual learns skills and how they are to take part in a community of practice by legitimate peripheral participation in a work environment. It is according to Lave and Wenger about changing behaviour as “learning implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 53), where the “systems of relations” refer to the learners relations to the communities and how they relate to a given problem that is to be solved based on their competencies. More experienced workers will have lesser peripheral distance than a newcomer. Hence, the learning is of a social kind that comes through participation and evolves and is renewed based on the relations with the community, the actions and ultimately; the world. According to Cooper, Orrell and Bowden (2010) this is about merging formal learning and work (theory and practice) and is in HEIs often executed like internships, fieldwork, service learning or similar.

Work-based learning are generally learning programmes initiated by a work-place but which takes place in for example a HEI. It is the often a cooperation between a HEI and the industry organizations (Cooper, Orrell and Bowden, 2010).

### 3. Methodological Approach

The data presented is from a qualitative case study following a number of songwriter camps throughout terms of spring and fall of 2022/2023. In this study we have mainly used observations, group interviews and single interviews. We have used a semi-structured interview form (Saunders, 2007; Johannessen, Tufte and Christoffersen, 2010; Dalen, 2011; Jacobsen, 2015). This has allowed us to discuss the different data and to observe the supervision in action and provided us with a thicker description (Geertz, 1973). The aim has been was to investigate how the songwriter camps were organized, the teaching methods, and make enquiries about the students’ experiences. A total of four researchers have been taking part in the data collection. During the camps we have conducted an open observation, as present observers. In addition to observation, we were doing both formal and informal interviews with teachers and students, e.g., sitting in at the introduction from the start, following the students doing studio practice during the day and listening in at the presentations of music products in the evening. During and after observations, we took fieldnotes. In addition, some students were interviewed individually, and we also have conducted group interviews using a semi-structured interview-guide, and the conversations were recorded and transcribed verbatim. A total of 18 students has given written reflections upon their experienced outcome learning of the songwriter- camps. The use of several different data collection methods has provided us with an insight into the processes of the songwriter camps, as well as the meanings, feelings and reflections of the various participants. This is what can be called thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973).

**Table 1: Overview of Data Collection, Timetable and Informants**

Songwriter camp	Observation by researchers in classroom and studio (fieldnotes)	Informal group conversations with students (fieldnotes)	Informal conversations with teachers (field-notes)	Individual interviews students (rec)	Group interview students (rec)	Group interview teachers (rec)
18 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2022	Researcher1	x	Teachers1 &2	Informants A and B		
4 <sup>th</sup> March 2022	Researcher2	x	Teachers1 & 3			
6 <sup>th</sup> April 2022	Researchers1 and 3	x	Teachers1 & 2	Informant C	Four informants	Teachers1& 2

Songwriter camp	Observation by researchers in classroom and studio (fieldnotes)	Informal group conversations with students (fieldnotes)	Informal conversations with teachers (field-notes)	Individual interviews students (rec)	Group interview students (rec)	Group interview teachers (rec)
18 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2022	Researchers 1, 2,	x	Teachers 1,2			
3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2023	Researchers 2,3,4	x	Teacher 2			
14 <sup>th</sup> April 2023	Researchers 1,3,4	x	Teacher			

The data analysis have been carried out by reading the transcripts to identify themes and issues relevant to the research questions. In this way the material was coded by marking sentences representing a central meaning to the research themes, thus developing descriptive codes close to the experience. Secondly, the categories were further interpreted into theoretical codes. Our interpretation of the data has also been qualitative and rather than trying to generalize (Yin, 2014), we have sought to find the nuances in the data from each semester in order to better interpret the subtleties of the supervising process to prepare the students for a work-life in the music business industry. The findings are presented and discussed against the theories presented above.

*The conceptual model*

What we are setting out to investigate is if and how the lecturers’ production focus and their facilitation of psychological safety for the students through their way of communicating can contribute towards the students’ perception of a work-like setting within the frames of their education. The lectures then utilize their communication skills acquired from their own work-life setting.

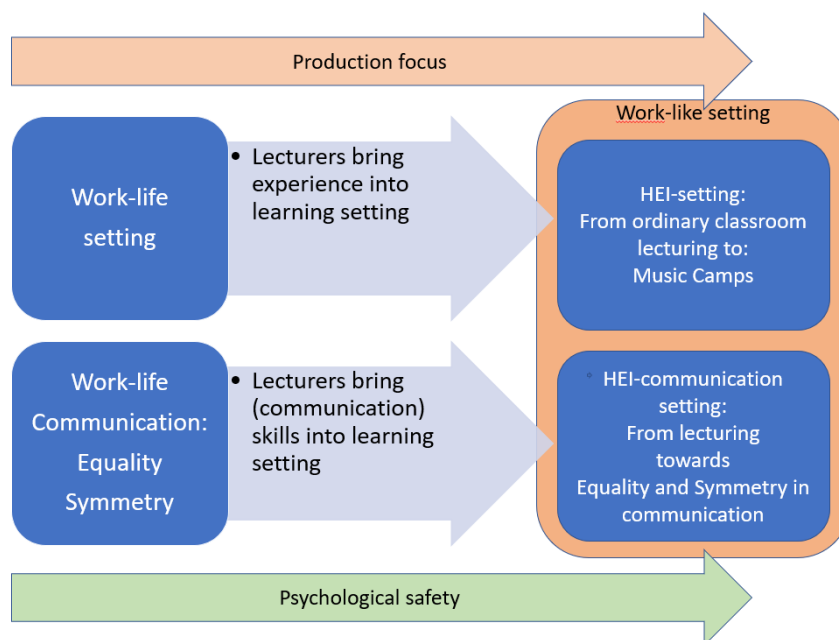


Figure 1: Our Conceptual Model for the Investigations

**4. Findings**

The students in this case study have all reported on relatively good communication. As the students had ordinary lectures where they learned about the different digital tools and also theory on how to build lyrics and melodies, they were able to follow the lectures introduction to the different assignments. The context was thus established

and not disconnected from the messages from the lectures, hence, there was a perceived *communicative rationality* (Habermas, 1985a). The purpose of the presentation of the assignments was to make the students understand the task at hand and avoid what Searle (1969) suggest may alter meaning if the semantic rules were not in place. The lecturers were also perceived to be clear about the expectations, hence, “illocutionary act” (Searle, 1968; Austin, 1975) was to make the students produce a song with lyrics and melody either freely or within a genre. Even if some of the student groups found it hard to execute the assignment, no groups reported on not understanding the assignments.

The student groups, however, in every session made different songs but within the frames of the assignments. The “negotiations” were both between the group members (students) and the group and the lecturers/supervisors. This “negotiation” we interpret to be similar to the pragmatist social construction of a reality (Mead, 1934). However, this does not come without a context. The lecturers/supervisors had asked the students to register for the seminars with their desire of role in the groups. Some like to produce and work with the digital tools to produce the songs adding different sound effects, etc. Some like to write lyrics and some like to play instruments and develop the melodies. All of them are needed in the group in order to finish producing a song, hence, the lecturers/supervisors divided the groups in such a way that the different roles were distributed evenly in the groups making sure they had someone to produce, someone(s) to write lyrics, and someone(s) to develop the melody. Which students who were assigned which roles was also made clear in the introductory process. As the students have communicated their desired roles and the lecturers assign the roles, much based on the students own input, this form of “negotiation” resemble a social act of communication and a “socially mediated act” according to Mead (1934), underpinning a possibility of the different group members to have a “self” and “mind” within the group and within the social realm of the educational setting in the seminar. When the group starts to work, this is also allows the knowledge to be constructed within each of the group members (Piaget, 1976). During the seminars the supervision and own experimentation, as well as feedback from the group members and supervisors, they will gain and develop knowledge within their role and within the group. As the seminars progresses, we may assume that the students develop “schemes” which again are developed as they attend more and more seminars (Piaget, 1976; Lyngsnes and Rismark, 2014). Comments like “I learn more about the tools and how to use different tools every time” and “I thought I knew how to make music, but I had to rethink that when I started here” are examples of how students alter their schemes as they attend the seminars. They also express that they appreciate learning the digital tools that they use in the industry and that they can “play around” with it in order to master them as they recognize the value of this when entering the work-life in the music industry.

However, one of the most noticeable features about the seminars are the way the lecturers/supervisors facilitate for a *psychologically safe* environment for the students. This is done by establishing, communicating, and executing, rules for communication within the groups, and between the groups and supervisors. This is a part of how the lecturers/supervisors establish trust and respect, according to Edmondson (2019). The students’ feedback on this is unanimously positive. Statements like “It was hard at first not to be negative if I did not like it, but after a while I understood how we could develop it to something that we (the group) liked” and “It took a while before I dared to present my idea, but when I did, I was so happy that it was not met with negative feedback, which made me feel comfortable in the group” confirm the positive outcome of these rules. There are also examples of where the students were less happy with the results: “I did not like the idea that came up, but I had no better idea myself, so I did not say anything. I was not too happy with the result, but it was ok, and I did learn a lot from the process” and “I did not agree with the structure of the song, but I did not know how to make it better. It was when the supervisor came up with a new suggestion, that we all understood what to do to make it a better product”. Here the supervisors have intervened in the process and come up with a better suggestion.

Also, the lecturers’/supervisors’ ability to take part in the groups is commented on. They are perceived as knowledgeable, positive, engaging and personal. They are also perceived as emotionally and cognitively engaged in the students’ work. Statements like: “[the supervisor] started to sing our song which made us understand better how to modify it and record our vocals again” and “He really pushed us and made us stick to the time schedule and told us about his own experiences when writing songs, explaining the steps in the process as he has done it himself”, and “They really seem to care if we are able to make the product”, show how the lecturers/supervisors share from their own experiences and show their personal engagement in the groups. This resembles what Kahn refers to as “pure personal engagement” (Kahn, 1990).

Upon interviewing the lecturers/supervisors, they also claim to learn from each camp/seminar. They are alert to different situations and by experience they claim to have realized for example that there needs to be a “timetable” for when different “jobs” needs to have been executed for the groups to be able to deliver on time.

They have also learned to look at different personalities in the group members and have incorporated their knowledge about the different students into their work prior to the camps regarding dividing the students into groups.

## **5. Conclusion**

The camps or seminars and the way they are conducted seems to have had the desired effect; be effective learning arenas as well as provide a work-like environment in order to secure both the development of knowledge and skills, but also to provide the students with insights in the music production industry. By communicating with the individual group members on roles and expectations, as well as facilitating the assignments in such a way that they are able to understand the rules and norms to be followed, the lecturers/supervisors are able to establish a work-like environment within the higher education setting. Establishing trust and respect in order to secure psychological safety to promote innovativeness, engagement and a good learning environment is important and is done through being clear in their communication, making sure that the semantics cohere with the assignments, and supporting the role understanding and behaviour in the groups allowing for the social construction of the knowledge as well as the personal development with each student. Their ability to be personal and sharing own experiences and expertise support what Kahn suggest are the important grounds for psychological safety. This is by securing “interpersonal relationships, group and intergroup dynamics, management style and process, and organizational norms” (Kahn, 1990, p. 708). The interpersonal relationships, the group and intergroup dynamics, and organizational norms are dealt with through the rules presented, the management is partly done by the group themselves and partly by the supervisors/lectures that make sure they make the different “deadlines” during the course of the seminar.

### **5.1 Further Research**

The students in the first year of our study have continued working in camps even if the camps are no longer organized (for the second-year students) from the educational institution. It would be interesting to investigate why they organize them, how close these camps are in conduction and performance to the ones organized by the faculty staff, and what learning outcome they experience. Also, it would be interesting to see if they maintain the strict rules of communication constituted by the lectures/supervisors in their first year.

What we as researchers also noticed there were multiple learning processes at play. The students learned about how to develop and produce songs, but the teachers also had a learning outcome. As this was more about group processes and how to approach supervising each student as well as the different student groups, we noticed also a difference in the approach as this study program has a closeness to the business. The subtleties of the differences between supervising groups in an “ordinary” educational setting and this more “work-like” adaption to groupwork, would be interesting to investigate further as it would be interesting to establish what exactly constitutes the differences.

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