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Qualitative Studies

A Method off the Beaten Track: Refining Creative Writing Process through Practice-led Research

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How can you improve your writing processes and your creative projects by examining your own working conditions? In this article, we address this question and the possibilities and challenges of the method called 'practice-led research', which is a method off the beaten track in media production studies. We examine assignments by students from the educational program of 'Screenplay Development' at the University of Southern Den-mark. Our purpose is to clarify how the students have used practice-led research to enhance their screenwriting, and whether this method has contributed to their talent development. The theoretical framework in the article is constituted by Donald Schön's (2013) practice epistemology. As our analytical lens we use Robin Nelson's (2013) modes of thinking, as well as talent development theories by Anders Ericsson (Ericsson & Pool, 2016) and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1996). Based on our findings, we suggest how to get started you're your creative writing and improve your writing processes.

Keywords: practice-led research, screenplay development, writing processes, talent development

A Method for Optimizing Writing Processes

It can be frustrating and hard to get started on a creative writing project, for example a screenplay. You may have a good idea, but not know where to begin, where to sit and what time to start if you want to optimize your writing process. On 'Screenplay Development' (where we both teach), the students often experience the challenge of how to optimize their writing processes. As part of their education, the students must write a screenplay for either a film or a television series. And as part of the program, they attend a course called 'Research and Development' where the themes are creative processes,

methods, and research techniques used in screenwriting. As part of their exam for this course, the students must write an examination paper about, e.g., their own creative processes and practices in screenplay development. Many of the students use this exam as an opportunity to examine how to improve their approaches to and the conditions for their writing processes. In our article, we define this kind of study as 'practice-led research'. How this method can be used to improve creative writing processes is the focus of this article. We thus examine how practice-led research can contribute to becoming a writer and to write in systematical ways.

In the last couple of years, there have been many calls for diversity in academic writing (Badley, 2019; Gilmore et al., 2019). Our article is also a response to this call because it demonstrates the possibilities of practice-led research as a resource for motivating many kinds of writers and stories.

Methodology

The empirical data of our study are 112 assignments crafted by students from Screenplay Development and supplemented by a survey done with the same group of respondents. The students could choose their own topic and case for the assignment. First, they had to deliver a written synopsis in which they described the theoretical framework and their empirical data. Later, they attended an oral examination in which they would analyze their data and answer their research question. They were not allowed to work in groups but had to write their assignments individually.

Our survey was primarily quantitative, but it also included some qualitative elements (see the appendix). Our study is organised into two levels, which we identify as micro and meso-level. On the micro-level, we examine the approaches and reflections in the 112 assignments. We highlight selected assignments which we find representative for the rest of the assignments. Our survey provides information on the students' experiences with and reflections on practice-led research as a method to improve their writing processes. On the meso-level, we address how practice-led research in general can improve your writing processes and potentially contribute to talent development in (screen)writing.

What is Practice-led Research?

Practice-led research (in the following abbreviated to PLR) can be understood as "[..] an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge, partly by means of practice and the outcomes of practice" (Candy & Edmonds, 2018, p. 63). Internationally, PLR is a developing field of research, for example in screenwriting studies (Dean, 2020; Lee et al., 2016). In this article, we do not intend to clarify PLR as a methodology. Instead, we use the term to define the method our students used in their assignments.

As a method within the studies of the creative arts, PLR represents a way of exploring work with a personal approach. Linda Candy and Ernest Edmonds have defined 'practice' as an activity which connotes 'doing something' (e.g., writing a screenplay) and 'research' as a systematic investigation aiming to establish facts, test theories and attain new knowledge or understandings of a phenomenon (Candy & Edmonds, 2018, p. 63). Candy and Edmonds, however, tend to simplify the concept of practice to 'doings': activities that people do. But as practice philosopher Theodore Schatzki has emphasized, practice is a set of both 'doings and sayings': Something done or said which is linked by practical understanding, rules, teleoaffective structures,[1] and general understandings (Schatzki, 2002, p. 87). Here, we use the concept of practice to concretize our understanding of the students' writing practices and processes. PLR is not to be confused with practice theory, which is often used as a theoretical framework in sociological studies in order to examine specific practices and activities in everyday situations (Gad & Jensen, 2014; Reckwitz, 2002). When PLR is conducted, the study is embedded in practice. Here, the method is used to explore whether a better approach can be developed in a specific situation. The method can thus lead to the identification of new practices. In Graham Badley's words, the method can thus contribute to gaining a critical stance and a reflective self in relation to one's own writing process (Badley, 2019, pp. 182-183). These results can afterwards be turned into models, frameworks, or guidelines to improve other practices (Candy & Edmonds, 2018).

PLR shares many elements with autoethnography. Here, reflexivity is brought into the field (Campbell, 2016) through first-person descriptions, studies based on complete

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[1] A teleoaffective structure of a practice is made up by a range of normative and hierarchically related ends that its practitioners pursue, e.g., the goal of the specific action. The ends people pursue indicate what matters to them, thus furnishing them with an affective orientation. (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2019, p. 374)

membership in a community, reflective ethnographies and other things (Baarts, 2020). We have, however, located some differences between autoethnography and the kind of PLR studies we found in our case study. Both are based on a kind of introspection, whereby you contemplate yourself and your surroundings, from which you later derive knowledge. Whereas the personal life experience in autoethnography is often used to generalize the experiences of a group, PLR on the other hand, is used to derive knowledge about *your own* practice: In the case of our students, this was knowledge about their individual writing processes.

We apply the concept to the students' approaches with the purpose of improving their processes, because the studies they conduct in their assignments are focused on their practices and situations. We complement Candy and Edmonds' definition of PLR with Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's (Smith & Dean, 2009), namely that this kind of research is a combination of the practitioner's trained, specialized knowledge and the process that the practitioner partakes in. This is, however, a deemphasized method in the field of Danish media production studies (Redvall, 2021), which is why we also reflect on how PLR as a method off the beaten track was used by our students.

Practice Epistemology

In the following, we present our theoretical framework, which is inspired by the practice epistemology developed by Schön (2013). PLR is rooted in pragmatism where knowledge is considered a result of practical activities and actions (Gustavsson, 2014). Practical knowledge (called 'techné') is often overshadowed by theoretical–scientific knowledge (called 'episteme'): The 'pure science' and thus the most highly acclaimed kind of knowledge (ibid.). Besides episteme and techné, there is also practical–ethical knowledge (called 'phronesis'). Phronesis is a kind of knowledge which seeks to make things ethically better and increase the wellbeing of either oneself or others (ibid.). Our point of departure is a mix of techné, episteme and phronesis, because we focus on how the students used PLR to improve their processes in terms of not only writing techniques but also knowledge on, e.g., creativity and motivation, as well as ethical findings on how to take care of their own processes in the best ways.

Schön has criticised academia for its one-sided knowledge-understanding: the dominance of episteme (Gustavsson, 2014). He has argued that the focus on episteme is

based on the notion that practitioners solve their problems by using theory, which are extracted from systematic, scientific knowledge. Reality, however, is often not expressed in well-organised structures, Schön stresses. Instead, it appears to consist of messy, indefinable situations which cannot be explained by technical rationality (ibid.). People have various backgrounds, and they see things and solve problems differently. Therefore, problem solving does not take place through technical rationality, but by inventing and trying out strategies that fit specific problems. Here, phronesis can be useful (a point to which we will return), and in connection with this Schön introduces the concepts of 'knowledge in action', 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action'. Knowledge in action is a kind of knowledge which people reveal through their actions, and which can be hard to express verbally. It is, nevertheless, possible to make this tacit knowledge more explicit through observation of and reflection on actions (ibid.), which is exactly what the students' practices consist of in our case study. Here, the reflections in and on action are relevant. Reflection on action means to think about the action *after* it has taken place. Reflection in action refers to reflection *during* the action (ibid.). Schön, thus, argues that knowledge and action cannot be distinguished from one another because practitioners reflect in and on action. According to our case study, many of the students used logbooks to reflect on their actions in as near real time as possible. They have thus reflected both in and on action.

PLR's Influence on Writing Processes and the Written Work

Our students used different approaches in order to study their individual writing processes. Most of them used logbooks, video observations and scaffolded tasks as empirical data to analyze their processes. They also used other approaches, such as reading screenplays written by others, watching films and series, or conducting interviews with professional screenwriters. In this article, we only focus on the logbooks, video observations, and scaffolded tasks, as they represent the favourite approaches used by our respondents. We define these approaches as follows:

Logbook is a kind of field notes. It is a mainly qualitative method in which the student writes down experiences and thoughts, for example in a journal. This is a fluid, unedited, and honest kind of writing which the student can use to remember situations, feelings, and experiences in the process of creation (Philipsen, 2022; Skjoldborg, 2014).

Video observation is used when the students want to record their own processes. The purpose is, for example, to be able to observe their own writing habits, including practices and/or the degree of immersion and concentration in a task.

Scaffolded tasks here mean constraints in tasks which are imposed by a lecturer, a team and/or the students themselves. Here, scaffolding is understood as constraints in a task formed on the basis of the six levels of scaffolding developed by learning theorists David Wood, Jerome S. Bruner, and Gail Ross: 1) recruitment, 2) reduction in degrees of freedom, 3) direction maintenance, 4) marking critical features, 5) frustration control, and 6) demonstration (Wood et al., 1976). Heidi Philipsen has supplemented these levels of scaffolding with three overall categories: institutional, team, and individual scaffolding, referring to who has imposed the constraints on the task (Philipsen, 2009). The students applied different types of scaffolding during their PLR. For example, one of the students appended the following task, which constituted the scope of the writing process with 'individual scaffolding' and 'reduction in degrees of freedom':

The approach and task:

1. Sit at home in comfortable surroundings
2. Define the task: Develop an idea while keeping one eye on the added scaffolding (vertical thinking)
3. Brainstorm ideas: As many as I can (lateral thinking)
4. Evaluate and select (vertical)

To scaffold myself, I have added the following:

- Place: A little village in 1978
- Event: A 25-year-old man who steals

Figure 1. Example of a scaffolded task.

The students mostly used logbooks (31%) and scaffolded tasks (27%) as part of their data collection and generation of empirical data. Many of them wrote their logbooks almost likes personal diaries with a special focus on the experiences of their processes and evaluation of their written work. Some of them even wrote down the duration of their work processes. Others used logbooks to evaluate whether they experienced immersion in their writing based on theoretical parameters (see figures 2-3). In figure 2, the logbook is based on parameters, while figure 3 is written like a diary referring to parameters.

To what degree did I meet the criteria of Csikszentmihalyi?

- **Clear goals**
    - Not as clear as I had intended. I did not know where to begin so I went back and forth and got stuck a lot of times.
- **Unambiguous feedback**
    - I think I was easily able to assess whether an idea would work, for example dramatically, and there were many times where I thought, e.g., "No, this does not work, because…"
- **Balance between skills and challenge**
    - I was not 100% pleased with the result, but this was not the goal either this early in the process
    - I was neither bored nor frustrated because of the level of complexity
- **Full concentration**
    - I was distracted many times
        - When people walked into the room or made noises outside
        - I became very hungry
        - When I became aware of the silence
    - Still, generally a good concentration
- **No fear of failing**
    - No
- **No self-awareness**
    - I became aware of myself, because it was quiet in the room, so I felt that every time I touched on the keyboard it made a lot of noise
- **Transformation of time**
    - No
- **The activity became the goal in itself**
    - Partly, but because I was distracted many times, I never really had the experience of flow

Figure 2. Logbook based on nine theoretical parameters.

First work procedure December 13, 2021

Place: My desk

Time: 06-07

Music: No music

Immediate thoughts: I could feel a kind of performance anxiety, probably because of the thought of being filmed, and I was thus aware of whether I experienced flow or not.

In relation to the goal of the work procedure, I had a clear goal: I had a screenplay for a short film on 15 screenplay pages, which I had to read in preparation for writing a new draft. I did not asset myself the goal of correcting the whole script in one go: This was just the first step towards writing a new draft so I could see how far I had come.

I felt concentrated, but did not experience flow. I managed to go through and edit ten pages of the script, and I am now doubting whether they are to few pages, even though I felt I was working the whole time. Too much self-awareness and too much performance anxiety.

I did not think about the fact that there was no music.

In relation to Csikszentmihalyi's nine characteristics of flow

Fulfilled: 1, 2, 3, 5

Not fulfilled: 4, 6, 7, 8, 9

Figure 3. Logbook based on nine theoretical parameters but written as a diary.

In these two examples, the students focused on the mental activities, for example thoughts about concentration, fear of failing, and the balance between the task at hand and the skills. In figure 2, the student also describes her physical surroundings. The purpose of the two assignments was to study whether music affected their motivations in the writing processes. As it appears from figure 1, the lack of music highly influenced this student's writing, because he sometimes experienced problems with concentrating. The silence influenced his writing process because it prevented him from doing his work: "I was distracted many times: […] When I became aware of the silence. […] I became aware of myself, because it was quiet in the room, so I felt that every touch on the keyboard made a lot of noise." This student experienced that he needed music when he was writing, otherwise he risked being distracted and not able to improve his work or skills. The student from figure 2 also focused on the use of music in her writing process. However, she experienced the quite opposite: The lack of music had no immediate consequences. She described how she felt concentrated and that she did not think about the lack of music. Here, she applied her theoretical parameters in order to conceptualize her experiences as a feeling of 'flow': the experience of being so immersed in an activity that you forget, for example, place and time and your own concerns (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). She used these parameters to conclude that she did not necessarily need music to become immersed in her work or motivated to write.

The two students used their logbooks to systematize and evaluate their experiences of the writing processes, so the logbooks functioned as a way of collecting data for evaluation. Both students finally used the knowledge they had gained through their PLR to conclude which locations represented useful conditions for their writing processes and which kind of music (if any) they should listen to. Their use of logbooks thus helped them advance their experience of concentration.

Some of the students supplemented their logbook with video observations. This is an ethnographic method which is often used to study how people act in different situations and how activities are conducted through the interplay between speech, behaviour, and the use of different tools (Heath, 2016). The students used video observations as a method to gain knowledge about their surroundings and how these influenced their actions during their writing activities. One of the students examined how the environment affected her screenwriting process. This offered her more knowledge about her writing conditions than

the logbooks. Before she started her writing process, she described the environment in her logbook, the purpose of the task, her level of motivation, and so on. The logbook was designed as a brief survey to herself.

Is there any noise or is it quiet?

- There is no noise. There are many people, and I can hear many conversations. There is also music played through the speakers.

How do the surroundings affect you right now?

- I am already distracted, I accidentally listened to the music and hummed along to it (internally), I am not able to ignore other people's conversations

What is your goal with the task?

- I want to write the opening scene for my screenplay which I am writing in another course – Screenplay Development 1. I know how the scene plays out but there is not that much dialogue, so it may become descriptive

Is the task clear?

- Yes, I know what to do, but I am only just getting started

Are you motivated?

- Yes

Do you miss something (water, warmth, silence)?

- No, I have just eaten, the temperature is fine. But I do miss silence.

Figure 4. A logbook before the student began the screenwriting process.

During the screenwriting, she recorded herself by using the video camera on her computer. After her writing activity, she wrote about her experience in her logbook, for example why she thought the surroundings made it difficult for her to focus.

I could not focus. On the other hand, it helped that I knew how the scene would play out, because I could then read the 'outline' of the scene and get to work before I lost the thread. It almost made the time feel slow, but writing the scene felt faster than expected, because I knew what it was going to contain.

Generally, I found it distracting. In the beginning, I found it stressful, also because I was not comfortable by sitting in a place surrounded by so many people. But the scene was written, which I think was caused by having the clear goal. I was especially distracted by the four girls who sat diagonally opposite me. They were writing an assignment, talked a lot, and one of them had trouble with Word, which I know too well.

Did the surroundings affect the writing process negatively or positively?

Negatively – I could not focus, and I thought a lot about the arrangement (the setup and so on) of my writing (instead of just writing). The songs I heard, which I knew, I couldn't not hum along to them (the same is happening as I am writing this). The table as shaking a lot, which was also distracting (which I only noticed afterwards)

Did you feel motivated?

Yes, but it was demotivating that I could not concentrate.

Figure 5. Logbook after the screenwriting process.

In the above, the student describes how she found the place stressful because she was surrounded by many people. However, her logbook indicates that she still managed to complete her task of the day which was to write a scene. But she also mentions in her logbook that she was anticipating a very difficult writing process because of her distracting surroundings: "I could not focus, and I thought a lot about the arrangement (the setup and so on) of my writing (instead of just writing)". This indicates that, even though she completed her task, the quality of her writing was not necessarily good enough, according to her own expectations. Finally, she compared the knowledge from her two logbooks with her video observation and she was thus able to confirm (validate) the experience described in her logbook.

According to the video:

It shows many times that I am distracted and looking out the window (to the right) or looking at the people in the room. Every time I look up, I get distracted and lose my focus. This happens for example when a couple walk into the place and sit by a table diagonally opposite me. I get distracted and stop writing (14.56). This supports my logbooks above.

Writing assignment

From: 12:54-13:24

Figure 6. Extract from the student's comparison of data from logbooks and video observation.

Based on the results of her logbooks and video observations, she concluded that what worked best for her (because of her ability to concentrate) was to write alone instead of surrounded by people. This illustrates how the use of logbooks and video observation in PLR made it possible for the student to improve her writing process. We also found examples in which students used a more quantitative approach in their logbooks.

Logbook

Values from scale 1-10

Day 1

Day of the week: Monday

Music: None

Time: 16.00-17.00

Tiredness: 6

Mood: 6

Sequence: 7

How many pages: 3

The quality of the written work: 8

The quality of the invention: 7

How hard it was to experience flow: 7

Notes in relation to the music:

I had no music.

General notes:

I just started writing the scene which was closest to me without thinking about the order. The non-present music made me feel like I had to perform. Now it is serious. The situation of writing a scene at the same time made me feel like I needed a push to get started.

Appendix G: Collected data from screen record, writing exercise day 1-5

DAY	NUMBER OF WRITTEN SIGNS	TOTAL MINUTES OF WRITING	TOTAL MINUTES OF "BREAK"	LONGEST "WRITING FLOW" (MINUTES)	LONGEST PAUSE (SECONDS)
DAY 1	6954	0.27.41	0.02.19	0.08.59	0.00.48
				00.13.35 – 00.22.34	*00.29.12 – 00.30.00*
DAY 2	5048	0.27.49	0.02.11	0.05.31	0.00.27
				00.18.47 – 00.24.18	*00.28.45 – 00.29.12*
DAY 3	5875	0.27.49	0.02.37	0.10.02	0.00.32
				00.20.25 – 00.30.26	*00.05.38 – 00.06.10*
DAY 4	5467	0.25.44	0.03.16	0.06.12	0.00.32
				00.07.54 – 00.14.06	*00.05.38 – 00.06.10*
DAY 5	5760	0.28.15	0.01.45	0.06.33	0.00.35
				00.20.32 – 00.27.05	*00.14.26 – 00.15.01*
TOTAL	29104	2.18.18	0.12.08	0.37.17	0.02.50

Figure 7. Examples of quantified logbooks.

The quantification of their work (for example, the number of written words or the quality of the written work) is also a way for students to clarify the effect of the conditions for their processes. The student in the example above (with scores from 1-10) described that her work from 4 AM until 5 AM resulted in three written screenplay pages and she regarded the scenes as being of relatively good quality. Her quantification also indicates that, even though she was able to write three pages, her mental condition was not good. She estimated her mood and level of tiredness at scores of 6/10, and she also wrote that she found it hard to experience flow. This indicates a potential schism in the student's evaluation of the quality of the work and her feeling of carrying it out.

While the students wrote these assignments, they were also introduced to basic screenwriting tools on another course. The survey we conducted indicated that some of the students, before being accepted onto the Screenplay Development program, had already worked in the media industry. For that reason, the different activities in their writing processes seemed 'natural', while for others they did not. Still, for both types of students the combination of logbook and video observation pointed out actions and patterns in their processes which they had never thought of before. Besides the use of logbooks, one of the most used approaches in the students' PLR was to use scaffolding in tasks (Philipsen 2009). In figure 8, a student gave himself such a task:

Appendix 1: Clear goals

Clear goals for the screenplay development in my living room

Development of the storyworld

- Brainstorm: Write down all the different storyworlds which are interesting in real world worldbuilding (divergent)
- Narrow down the brainstorm: Collect all the best features of the different storyworlds (convergent)
- Collect all these features into a coherent world. Add other features which fit (convergent)

Figure 8. Example of a scaffolded task.

Figures 9-10 illustrate examples of a short description of a film idea and a brainstorm:

Appendix: Current idea after research and scaffolding

Below I have summarized the current idea after research and scaffolding and have also completed the screenplay development template (see appendix 5):

My idea

In short:

Genre: Social drama

Protagonist: Girl about 10-12 years old

Premise: The complexity of being a child who loves her parents, simultaneously with being experiencing betrayal

Antagonist: The alcoholic dad

"Normal World": The alcoholic home

Point-of-Attack (POA): Violent event at home

Figure 9. Example of a short description of a film idea.

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Appendix 4.

                    Short film idea (exercise)

Divergent thinking:

    -   Bicycle thief (hunt)
    -   Family reunion (abnormal and unconventional family)
    -   The favor (two waiters are rivals at the workplace)

Convergent thinking:

    -   The bicycle thief: Would be a short film that most people could relate to, thus creating a
        better possibility for people to experience sympathetic insight
    -   The family reunion: Relatively unrealistic, but of you can see past this, it could become an
        entertaining short film with some fun features as well as some lewd
    -   The favor: A cross between being realistic and unrealistic in appearance
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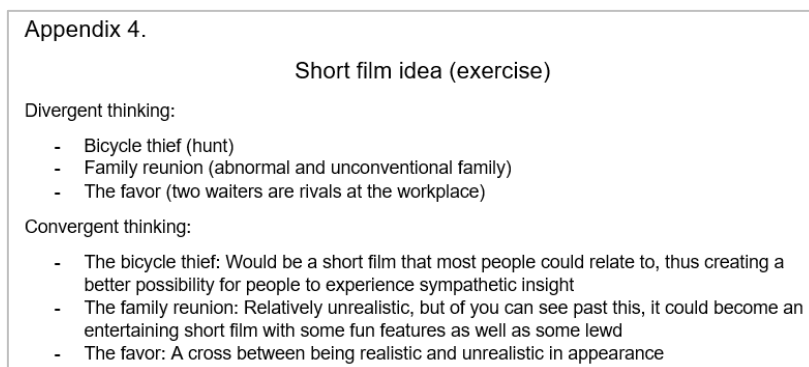
Figure 10. Example of a brainstorming process.

As a part of their oral exam, many of the students who had used scaffolding in tasks described the scaffolding as important for their motivation during the writing processes. Philipsen (2009) has illustrated that creative practitioners often experience constraints as useful and motivating because they offer their processes focus and direction in the form of a clear goal. This experience is demonstrated in many one of the student's logbooks. Here, we see an example, where a student regarded the scaffolding as one reason for her final concentration:

"Generally, I found it distracting. In the beginning I found it stressful, also because I was not comfortable sitting there surrounded by so many people. But I managed to write the scene, which I think was due to the clear goal." (See figure 5).

We could also identify some improvements in the written scenes from the same student. She wrote four scenes sitting in four different locations. One of the first scenes was written in a place where she felt very distracted, as mentioned in the quote above. The scene is characterized by a slow pace. For example, long dialogues. It also starts a long time before the actual action toke place, ends after the conclusion, and moves slowly toward the main conflict in the scene. Most screenwriting on literature emphasizes that dynamic scenes contain changes (for example, character change and/or a change in the action line). A scene ideally starts as late as possible and ends as early as possible in relation to the main action that takes place in it (Nielsen & Rukov, 2019; Truby, 2007). The scene which the student wrote while feeling distracted did not fulfill these criteria.

Later, when she wrote another scene in a silence place where she felt concentrated, we found a (minor) improvement in her writing. The beginning of the scene is still slow, but the scene ends 'early' with a character saying: "Mum is dead." This example emphasizes an improvement in the student's writing when her writing process took place in a location where she felt able to concentrate and the task had a clear goal. Her improvement could also be caused by other factors than the location and type of scaffolding she used for this task. Perhaps she had a good talk with a friend or read a useful chapter in a book on how to write scenes before she sat down to write the scene that turned out well. There are lots of unknown and influential factors when you start looking into writing processes. For that reason, it is important, both for the individual writer and for researchers like us in this field, to write down as many factors as possible when carrying out PLR. The use of logbooks and observations, however, shed light on more details of the processes than working without these tools. It thus seems fair to conclude from our overall findings in this case study that such tools do hold a potential for optimizing the processes and through this the writing. Screenplay students, and writers in general, who use this method will be able to 'reflect on action', as Schön calls it, if they use logbooks right after their activities finish.

Badley makes a similar point when he stresses that: Writers learn to improve themselves as storytellers by, e.g., telling others about their experiences (Badley, 2019, p. 184). Reflecting on experiences by sharing them with others or keeping a logbook thus has the potential to initiate self-critical behavior (ibid.: p. 187). The knowledge that students and writers gain from this approach can be defined as 'know what' (Nelson, 2013). Often what you write in a logbook is more honest and trustworthy than what you choose to tell a friend. It seems fair to conclude that logbooks have more PLR-potential for improving writing processes than speaking to friends (Philipsen, 2022; Skjoldborg, 2014).

PLR Can Facilitate Critical Reflection

Critical reflection on processes is described as an essential and indispensable part of PLR, because the research tradition is based on the interplay between practical knowledge and more abstract, conceptual thinking, often understood as verbally articulated (Nelson, 2013). This constitutes our analytical lens when, in the following section, we further

address how the students' use of PLR contributed to improve their writing processes and also their writing. The interplay between practical knowledge and more abstract, conceptual thinking has been described by Barbara Bolt as a "double articulation between theory and practice, whereby theory emerges from a reflective practice at the same time as practice is informed by theory" (Bolt, 2016). Nelson expresses the dialogical, dynamic approach in this model:
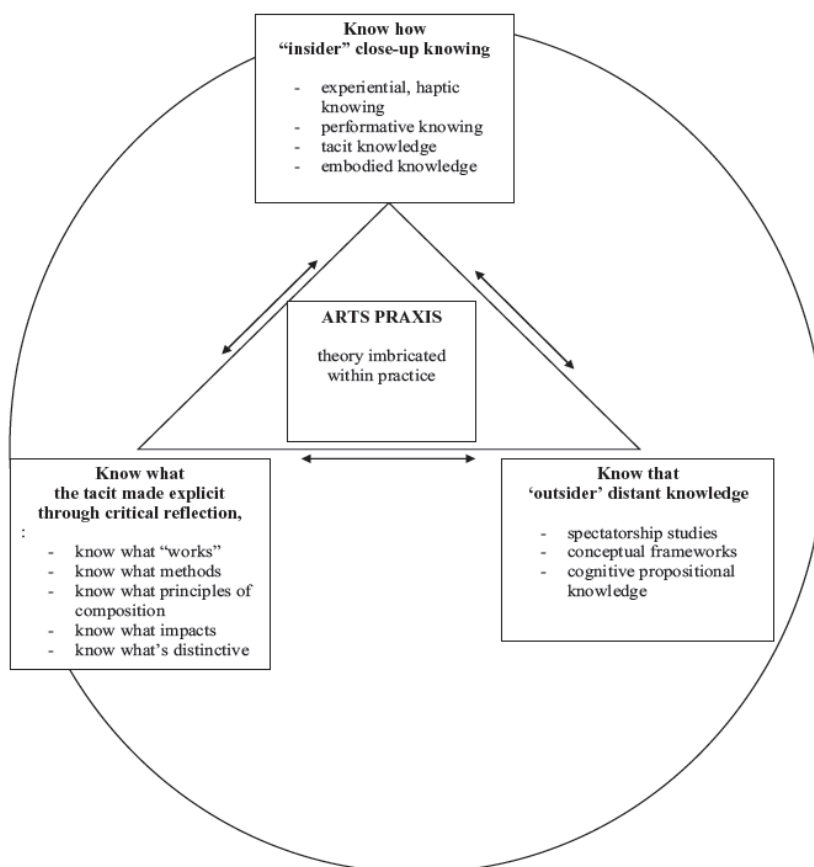
Figure 11. Nelson's multi-mode epistemological model (Nelson, 2013, p. 37)

In the middle of the model is 'art praxis', the practice itself. The three kinds of knowledge are placed in each corner of the triangle, which illustrates Nelson's point that they all influence the practice. The arrows between the different kinds of knowledge mark the interplay between them because the creative practitioner can move between them while practicing (ibid.). 'Know how' is process-related knowledge and can be compared with Schön's 'knowledge in action'. It thus represents techné. 'Know that' is academic knowledge (episteme), which is articulated in words and/or numbers. When we describe

various kinds of knowledge in this way, they can appear to be linear modes in which, one after the other, they build up to the next mode of thinking. That is not the case, because PLR is an iterative process: a reflection about what works is undertaken so that the reflector can deduce the methods that make it work (ibid.).

The terminology used by our respondents indicated that they gained a kind of 'know how' from their research. This became clear when they demonstrated that they understood the notions and terminology of screenwriting, e.g., when they used concepts like 'point of attack' to clarify specific elements in their stories (see figure 9). They thus used 'know how' and 'reflection in action' when writing. They were not necessarily aware of this as they were working, which is why it can be difficult to capture and conclude whether 'reflection in action' actually occurred. However, their use of the fundamental concepts indicates that they did gain some knowledge. In the previous paragraph, we illustrated how some of the students wrote logbooks both before and after their writing processes with the purpose of capturing the immediate experience of the creative work *after* it took place. In their logbooks, the students started reflecting upon their individual experiences of the writing process and the writing they produced. This can be considered a kind of 'know that', because the students gained knowledge (e.g., about how different environments influence the work), and they articulated this in their logbooks. This leads us back to Badley's point that it is possible to improve one's writing by telling others about the experiences.

When the respondents subsequently sat the exam and used episteme to explain and understand why they experienced the work processes as they did, they used 'know that'. Here, the knowledge they had gathered during their studies was part of an informed reflection about their processes and writing because they reflected 'on action' (Schön, 2013). They pointed out strengths and weaknesses in their own approaches as researchers and practitioners and suggested solutions for their future writing processes and ideas for how to improve their writing. Through their critical (self-)reflection, they were able systematically to identify the problems and possibilities in their writing processes.

For some respondents (those who did not keep a logbook), the learning curve became a linear process between initial 'know how', then 'know what' and, finally, 'know that'. The ones who used logbooks in their research emphasized a more iterative process between the three modes of thinking (Nelson, 2013). In figure 5, a student initially wrote

a logbook, then worked on a creative project while recording herself in it, and thus captured a part of her 'know how'. When she finished her writing, she stopped the recording and once again wrote notes in her logbook, codified her experience of the process, and was able to show that her modes of thinking had moved from 'know that' to 'know how' and back to 'know that'. The student examined the recording (which represents a codification of 'know how') from which she wrote down observations. In this way, she was able to support her points from the logbook. In the exam, she used 'know what', because she implemented episteme to explain her experiences and suggest solutions for further improvements. She thus 'reflected on action'.

The respondents who used different methods of data collection and empirical data moved between the various modes of knowing in approximately this order: know that, know how, know that, know what. The PLR method thus contributed meaningfully to their writing processes, their development, and also, to some extent, their writing skills. The method made it possible for them to conduct a critical reflection on themselves and their writing practices (aspects such as time, place, surroundings), which in turn contributed to their concentration and made it possible for them to improve their flow and thus their writing. The latter is expressed in the example from figures 5-6. The student deduced that she could not concentrate if she was surrounded by many people because this affected her writing negatively. PLR contributed in a positive way by helping her develop her skills as a screenwriter because it gave her an awareness of how to create a room for concentration. Even though it is possible to read flow-theory literature and pick up some general best practices for creating flow conditions (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, Skjoldborg 2014), it still varies from writer to writer what is noisy and what is helpful in the processes. For that reason, our conclusion is that it is crucial to conduct individual PLR studies.

In the following section, we reflect on not only the contributions but also the challenges of PLR as a method. We now examine how the approach contributes to talent development. In this way, we move from the micro to the meso-level of our analysis.

Influences on Talent Development

"Writing is a heart-oriented enterprise," as the experienced, American screenwriter and teacher Richard Walter has emphasised: "Writers love having written, but we hate to

write" (Walter, 2010, p. xvi). This conclusion might seem strange, as writers are often very passionate about writing, but we recognize the mechanism Walter is pointing out in the behaviour of the respondents in our study. Many of their assignments start with phrases such as "I love being a writer but find it hard. I want to understand how to handle this paradox". As illustrated in this article, the students are able through PLR to find individual methods for handling this challenge. Some realize that they need stricter scaffolding, others need to write in more peaceful surroundings, and so on. This self-reflexiveness is attained because of their use of PLR, since the method facilitates the student's reflections on their experiences (Badley, 2019). As Schön (2013) has stated, creative practitioners are navigating in complex and unpredictable situations when they create new things. Walter adds to this that a special circumstance for writers is that:

> "They must deal with seemingly separate items – story, character, dialogue, and many others – that are not separate at all but exist only in combination with one another." (ibid., p. xx)

Even though the students have added new skills and aspects of their talent during the educational program, they still need to develop their skills because they work (or want to work) in a creative field where they must invest personally in the stories in order to interest an audience and renew the domain. And what does our study, in this regard, have to offer their talent development? To reflect on this, we include a brief section on talent development in relation to practitioners within the creative field, even though most research in this field has been carried out with a focus on sports or musical talent (e.g., Ericsson and Pool, (2016)) or business talent (e.g., Larsen (2012)). Little has been written about talent development in the media industry (Philipsen et al., 2014).

Our analysis illustrates that some of the students used PLR as a method to clarify *where* creativity and productiveness were for them individually (in which physical locations for example). The question is not whether they have a talent for writing, but *how* they enhance this talent. Those who can adapt to situations that make this happen potentially learn to handle resilience (crises in the writing processes for example), which is an important skill in the competitive media industry. In this regard, PLR illustrates the practices that the students undertake and how they can learn *where* and *how* they are most creative or/and

productive in their writing. Such competences bring 'know what' into play, i.e., phronesis, because the students potentially learn to reflect on what works for them individually (Gustavsson, 2014; Nelson, 2013).

In their studies, many of the respondents displayed an ability to self-reflect on the conditions and to adapt to the conditions necessary for them to acquire the optimal writing processes. In the assignments, they also carried out what talent researchers have named 'deliberate practice' – as opposed to 'deliberate play' (Ericsson & Pool, 2016). We conclude that they used deliberate practice because the processes they went through all lay within the domain of screenwriting (instead of other types of creativity). According to Ericsson and Csikszentmihalyi, it is important to get to know the domain in which one practises very well, that is, to know its discourses, methods, references, etc. This requires students to continue and persist in terms of working with the processes in their area of talent. Scaffolding and PLR seemed to help our respondents in this regard.

Talent definitions are usually concerned with both qualifications and passion (Larsen, 2012), as well as the ability to carry out intensive training within a certain domain (Buhl, 2010; Ericsson & Pool, 2016). None of the talent approaches we have found directly define self-reflexiveness as an important skill. We argue, however, that the self-reflexiveness writers/students can obtain through PLR will help them establish and use relevant scaffolding, to adjust this supportive concept along the way, and to act in flexible ways whereby they learn to handle and motivate their own writing processes. In so doing, they potentially strengthen their talent for writing.

Even though the facilitation of the PLR as a method to improve writing process and writing turned out to be well-functioning in our case study, we did also find some points of criticism. Most of the time, the respondents in our study worked alone. Although they gained important insights by doing so, teamwork is the mode that often characterizes the media-production industry (Redvall, 2009, 2013). Our respondents learned to optimize processes on an individual micro-level, but not on a team level. Instead, they must find team-level experiences elsewhere in the study program or in their practice within the industry. Whereas techné, as briefly introduced above, is oriented towards the production of something, episteme is oriented towards knowledge of something that can be helpful for the production (e.g., models of dramaturgy). But phronesis, which is the basis of insight into the making of good decisions and appropriate actions, has still not been

reflected fully upon in our findings. We concluded that most of the respondents brought 'know what' into play when they did their assignments and exams. 'Know what' can, we argue, be compared to phronesis. Phronesis does not deal with science or truth (Aristotle, 1995). Instead, this type of insight often deals with complex and changing situations that require the ability to make wise choices alone and/or in teams. Phronesis focuses on choices that cannot be captured by universal rules (e.g., dramaturgical models). It requires good judgement in relation to, for example, how to best achieve one's goal (ibid.) or the goal of a story. In a writing process, the screenwriter must locate a meaning or structure which is not already there. This is what PLR may be able to teach the students/writers.

Creative talents use their own imaginations as resources. If they want to pass on a message and attract audiences, they must invent stories from scratch, and these stories often stem from something they have personally experienced, felt, or imagined. According to Walter, every story must have a personal link from the screenwriter to the story (Walter, 2010). This drawing on personal resources challenges the often hard, creative processes. Our study illustrates that what the respondents often do is to break down or separate these interlocking items systematically and apply them as a learning process through the use of PLR in their assignments.

Contributions and Challenges

The students' PLR studies all had one thing in common: They yielded a systematization of their individual writing processes. Furthermore, they contributed by making the applied theory practicable, because the respondents could use it to clarify the possibility of improvement in their individual practices. Many of them explained in our survey that they experienced how PLR offered them self-knowledge, because it made it possible for them to know more about themselves, their work, the work of others, and made it possible for them to improve from this knowledge. As a method to enhance writing processes, PLR is relevant because it improves the consciousness on how the writing process affects writing. The method helped the students to reflect on action by moving between different modes of thinking (e.g., from know that to know how, know that, and know what). PLR thus made is possible to examine the conditions of their writing processes and decide where, when and how they should do their writing. When the respondents realized what kind of writing conditions they needed, they also discovered how they could improve

their concentration and immersion in their work, which can be a motivating factor. Our analyses have illustrated that when the respondents felt that they were concentrating during their writing, they also had better conditions to locate the strengths and weakness in their work. This is in line with Csikszentmihalyi (1996), who pointed out that the most important question for a creative talent is not to ask *what* creativity is, but *where* it is: in which surroundings and situations. We thus argue that PLR has the potential to promote the development of a talent for writing (such as screenplay development). We also argue that it is a useful method to improve writing conditions, because it can be used by all different personalities. Our respondents examined how their surroundings influenced their concentration in different ways, even though many of them used almost the same methods. Writers/students are *different people* who work best while sitting in *different places* at *different times*. As Schön (2013) has argued, people thrive in different conditions and can thus come to different conclusions. PLR as an improvement method in terms of writing processes pays attention to this crucial point.

Preparing the students for the practices they might encounter in the media industry is one of the reasons why practice (and the emphasis on techné) is included in higher educational institutions that feature educations like Screen Play Development. We, as teachers of Screenplay Development, have experienced how theoretical perspectives can contribute in terms of explaining and improving the writing processes. After trying out PLR studies, the students often gain a better understanding and a better 'language' to help them explain what they need in the processes and in the dramaturgical models. This is emphasized both in this article and also by the Danish screenwriter Pernille Hyllegaard, educated from our education, who has stated that "acquiring a language for the dramaturgical rules also means that you know why you use them or break them" (Philipsen, 2019).[2]

Based on our case study, we argue that PLR studies can contribute to learning process by demystifying the writing processes through scrupulous exploration of practitioners' competences and the kinds of knowledge they use. In other words, the students/writers can use this method to learn about a given practice by experiencing it systematically through action. The fact that PLR is so flexible makes it possible to study and conduct a

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[2] [Our translation from] At få et sprog for de dramaturgiske regler gør jo også, at man ved, hvorfor man bruger eller bryder dem.

critical reflection on your own practices. It thus unites know what, know that, and know how.

Finally, the results presented in this article indicate that PLR is a useful method to bring a more post-academic form of writing into media production studies. Traditional academic writing is criticized by Badley for being a writing practice that "becomes a view from nowhere, the viewpoint of no one in particular" (Badley, 2019, p. 180). Badley calls for a movement towards 'post-academic' writing where the writer is, e.g., more prominent in his or her own research. The respondents, we examined, meet this request. But according to Badley post-academic writing is also a more personal approach to academic writing. This is expressed when he emphasizes that the road towards post-academic writing can be found by:

> "[…] adopting a human stance, revealing a human perspective, developing a human voice, improving ourselves as human storytellers, learning more about the human craft of postacademic writing, enjoying our serious and playful manifoldness as human creatures, and continuing our human conversations." (ibid.: 182)

In the assignments we have examined, that personal reasons for writing a story are often in focus: To improve your skills, your writing, and thus yourself as a storyteller. To write a screenplay is a personal thing to do, but it must not be too personal. The It thus needs to be backed up with a critical distance, and an ability to work in structured and effective ways as writers. We argue that PLR, in the case study we have carried out, contributes to balancing the writing processes as being personal and yet professional.

Conclusion: A Method Off the Beaten Track

So, what happened when the respondents researched their own writing process? They gained motivation and were able to learn from their PLR. The method can be considered rather off the beaten track because it is very deemphasized in Danish media production studies. However, the method has the potential to improve not only writing processes, but also the writing itself and talent development. The majority of the 112 assignments

illustrated different kinds of reflections on the part of the students, and thus offered insights into several items from the (screen)writing domain. Through PLR, the students learnt to act wisely regarding their own writing practices. No universal episteme knowledge can teach the students what and where creativity is because they all have different profiles and motivations. However, studying and improving their own phronesis by using PLR systematically can. Our case study only focused on the processes relevant to screenplay students; but it can offer perspectives on talent development in the media industries much more broadly. Our findings can be modified and applied to other educational institutions, such as the National Film School of Denmark and other educations that have a focus on writing stories. This is the kind of 'reflection on action' study that the field of media research and education needs more of.

We have addressed how PLR can contribute to talent development in (screen)writing. Our study has illustrated how students used the PLR method to clarify what kinds of problems they individually faced in their writing, and how they could improve their conditions, their concentration, and their motivation. The method also enhanced the project they were working on at the time. In other words: when they examine what works in their writing process, they can attain better work practices and ultimately better stories.

Based on our findings, we argue that PLR is a useful approach to develop your creative writing processes and writing, because the conditions of the process and the product (the screenplay) are connected. The method is useful because it can contribute by clarifying work, by which we mean practices specifically in their own context. It is thus possible to develop new empirical knowledge. Finally, we argue that PLR offers the individual insights into their own creative process and writing, because it addresses the opportunity to write about and reflect on your writing experiences. Badley stressed: "As talking and reading and researching and writing animals, we learn to be human." (Badley, 2019, p. 187). But we conclude instead: As talking, reading, (self-)researching and writing animals, we learn to *be writers* and *to write* – in this regard, PLR is a useful method off the beaten track.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we want to propose how you can use the PLR method to get started on your writing and/or to improve your writing.

When am I most efficient in my writing process? You can try to test your writing at different times of day and use logbooks. For example, you can start with writing in the morning one day, at lunchtime the next day, and in the evening the third day. Use a logbook every day before you start writing and when you have finished your writing or other tasks (depending on how much time you have allowed yourself to work). You can have a specific focus in your logbook, or you can keep it more like a diary with no specific focus or structure. You can also write questions for yourself in your logbook, such as "How motivated am I on a scale from 1 to 10?" or "How satisfied am I with the work I have done today?" When you have tested different times of day, you can compare your logbooks and conclude when you are most efficient. The same exercise can be done if you want to know where to sit in order to be more efficient in your writing.

How do I get started on my writing? You can assign yourself different scaffolded tasks. This can be for example "Use five minutes on brainstorming ideas for your protagonist's goal in the story" and thereafter "Use 10 minutes to evaluate your ideas. Then use another 10 minutes to choose the three best ideas." You can initially try to assign yourself different scaffolded tasks in order to figure out what kind of scaffoldings you are most comfortable with before you start to assign yourself tasks related to your actual writing task. A scaffolded task does not need to have anything to do with the development of the story. Constraints can also relate to your physical location of work. You can give yourself a scaffolded task like this one: "Use one hour writing on your project in a café. Also use one hour the next day, but this time at home. Finally, use one hour on the third day to work on your project, but this time at the local library. These assignments can be supplemented by logbooks in which you initially note your degree of motivation and/or concentration and later how the place influenced your motivation, your concentration, and thus your work.

What do I experience when I work? You can also supplement both exercises with video observation. This does not need to be complicated but can be conducted by using your phone and/or computer camera. When doing PLR, logbooks cannot capture what you are doing or experiencing during your writing unless you remember this precisely afterwards. If you, for example, experience immersion in the task if can be difficult to remember when you are engrossed in your work. Video observation can be a useful tool because it can supplement with insights about this.

Finally, we want to remind you that the kinds of PLR we have explained and studied in this article, and that we now recommend, do not amount to a 'one size fits all-model'. You need to test different methods and situations more than once if you want to improve your writing process and thus the quality of your writing. For the same reason, it is not certain that the keeping of systematic logbooks, like the ones we have examined in our article, is useful for everyone. As we mentioned earlier, the logbook is a personal tool, and it can be modified to your specific methods. If you want to write your logbook as a diary, feel free to do so! If you want to write questions for yourself and design your logbook as an interview guide, you can do that. It is up to you. This is also one of the strengths of PLR: It is a method that can be modified to fit the individual person and thus contribute to the development of individual people's writing process and creative products.

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Questions from Our Survey

Please state your age:

- 20-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70
- 71-80
- 81-90
- 90+

Do you study Screenplay Development as a postgraduate course or as part of a bachelor?

- Postgraduate course, class 2020
- Postgraduate course, class 2021
- As a part of my bachelor, class 2020
- As a part of my bachelor, class 2021

What do you do for a living?

If you are a student what is your major, for example Danish, Media Sciences, English?

Do you have any experience in film and television production?

- Yes (please explain how)
- No

Do you want a career in the film and television industry?

- Yes
- No
- I do not know
- I already work in the film and television industry

When you designed your assignment in the course Research & Development, what did you think of the most: The result of the exam or that you wanted to use the knowledge you have gained after your education?

- The result of the exam
- I wanted to use the knowledge I have gained after my education

- Both

- I do not know

- Something else (please clarify)

Did the course on Research & Development and the assignment for the exam improve your skills so that you are able to get a job in the film and television industry?

- Yes

- No

- I do not know

Can you use the knowledge you have gained from the course Research & Development and from your assignment for the exam?

- Yes

- No

- I do not know

Have the academic approaches to the creative work improved your skills as a screenwriter?

- Yes (please clarify why)

- No (please clarify why)

Do you feel that the competences from the course on Research & Development can be used in other situations, for example on your job?

- Yes

- No

- I do not know

What did you as a creative practitioner gain from examining yourself or other creative practitioners as part of your exam assignment in Research & Development?

What have you learned from your exam assignment in Research & Development that you can use in your creative work, regardless of whether you want work in the film and television industry or not?

What methods that you were introduced to and/or applied in your exam assignment in Research & Development do you want to use in the future? (You can select more than one)

- Logbook

- Video logbook or observation

- Scaffolding task

- Work plan

- Something else (please clarify what)