

# Assessment and critical feedback in the master-apprentice relationship: rethinking approaches to the learning of a music instrument

Professor Ryan Daniel (James Cook)

Dr Kelly Parkes (Virginia Tech)

# The context: higher education

- One to one lessons dominate (Burwell 2005, Nerland 2007, Carey 2010, Watson 2010, Parkes and Daniel 2013)
- Comes from the master-apprentice tradition (Hallam 1998, Presland 2005, Monkhouse 2010)



# The 'lesson' culture

- 19<sup>th</sup> century saw significant growth in the 'private lesson' (de Val and Ehrlich 1998, Golby 2004)



THE FIRST PIANO LESSON

# The context: higher education

- HE studio teachers usually appointed due to their high-level performance skills (Purser 2005, Wexler 2009)
- Few have any formal training in pedagogy (Burwell 2005, Parkes and Wexler 2012, Collens and Creech 2013)
- Some teachers rarely plan or structure lessons (Gaunt 2008, Zhukov 2012)



# Extant research: studio lesson

- Growing body of work in last two decades in particular
- Significant work on interaction between teacher and student (e.g. Howe and Sloboda 1991, Siebenaler 1997, Creech 2012)
- The type of questioning approach used has an impact on student engagement and learning (Burwell 2005)
- Teacher talk/direction typically dominates (e.g. Colprit 2001, West and Rostvall 2003, Daniel 2008, Creech 2013)
- For example:
  - Parkes and Wexler (2012) analysed 14 hours of lessons - teachers followed “teacher-centric guidelines they are familiar with and that have been held as part of the accepted master-apprentice roles” (p. 56)
  - Creech (2012) analysed 23 hours of studio lessons involving 11 violin teachers and their students (aged 8-16)

# Creech 2012: lesson analysis

Table 3 *Overall percentage of time engaged in different behaviours*

Coded behaviour	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Pupil play (tuning, playing alone and accompanied)	10.24	60.56	38.05	11.38
Teacher talk (direct, diagnose, attributional and non-attributional feedback)	13.14	48.96	29.14	7.64
Teacher scaffolding (model with playing or singing, play along, hands-on practical help, accompany pupil)	2.30	52.74	27.73	14.53
Teacher questioning (open question, seek agreement, check understanding)	3.03	17.11	8.78	3.52
Pupil talk (agree, disagree, contribute own idea, self-assess, choose what to play)	.001	8.96	3.30	2.74



# Assessment and feedback: learning a music instrument

- Central is the 'expert' performer and/or teacher
- Lessons, masterclasses, ensembles, exam or audition panels, competition juries
- Significant power in these settings



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# Power and control

- Power relationships within the lesson can lead to negative effects or even psychological harm (Creech and Hallam 2010, Gaunt 2011)
- Maris (1997) - “many musicians who can recount horrifying tales shared by friends or colleagues who suffered from years of destructive interactions with ... teachers” (p. 18)
- Ames (1998) - “some teachers will break students down [and] you’re left with a broken person you can’t put back together again” (p. 28)
- Fleming (2001) - the teacher “really let me have it, and I would start to cry” (p. 18)
- Booth (2009) - musicians “carry bruises from [their] past testing experiences” (p. 167)
- Serra-Dawa (2010) - 40% of the 64 singing students surveyed indicated a wish to change teacher as a result of interpersonal issues
- Collens and Creech (2013) - “one-to-one tuition can develop into a site of interpersonal conflict and high anxiety where the relationship itself can become an obstruction to learning” (p. 151)



# Assessment - music instruments

- Teacher as 'centre' of lesson = assessment *of* learning (Scott 2012)
- Recent push for assessment *as* learning (Lebler 2008, Scott 2012, Harrison *et al* 2013, Silveira 2013)
- Scott (2012) argues the need for self-reflective work:
  - Melanie uses formative written feedback from her teacher to further develop her upcoming vocal performance;
  - She video records a rehearsal for this event;
  - Melanie discusses some technical issues with a peer mentor and seeks suggestions and advice from them; and
  - She then applies this learning to the next stage of practice and personal development of the performance.

# Self assessment in music

- Proven to offer students a range of benefits and outcomes (Hallam 1998, Flowers 2003, Lebler 2008a)
- Goolsby (1999) - students developed stronger listening skills and thus practice and performance skills;
- Daniel (2000) - the requirement that students engage in a video review and analysis of performance enabled them to develop stronger critical assessment skills and insights; and
- Silveira (2013) - students reflect on recordings of their performances over time as a key element of a music portfolio.

# Peer assessment in music

- Hunter and Russ (1996) - students prepared more thoroughly for performance, became more experienced in assessment processes, critical listening, evaluation and negotiation skills improved considerably;
- Searby and Ewers (1997) - as students became more experienced in assessing peers, they identified greater value in the process;
- Daniel (2004) - structured peer assessment procedures had a significant influence on the ability of students to engage in critical evaluation and feedback; and
- Lebler (2005, 2007, 2008) - enabled students to enhance their critical skills as well as obtain a greater variety of feedback and opportunity to benchmark their work.

# Literature: summary themes

- Master-apprentice tradition remains strong
- Studio teachers typically appointed for their performance skills and expertise
- Role of 'expert' remains strong within lessons, audition & exam panels, competition juries
- Significant need for additional research in relation to the studio lesson which takes place 'behind closed doors'
- While a growing body of work in relation to the lesson, there is limited research that specifically interrogates the impact of assessment and feedback on learning
- General agreement that musical independence is the goal

# Recent research (Parkes, Daniel)

- Survey sent to HE teachers in UK, Australia, NZ, South Africa, USA, Scandinavia
- 171 respondents
- Designed to explore motivation, identity, recollections of teachers and teaching
- Data published in BJME, IJME (in press) and RSME (in press)
- Data explored again for this presentation in order to look for themes relevant to assessment and feedback
- Minimal reflection about assessment and feedback from their own teachers other than expectation setting

# Earliest lessons

- Reflections included being evaluated for potential:
  - *My teacher said I was not interested*
  - *It turned out I had some talent*
  - *[I was] not particularly a front runner*
  - *Being good at it*
  - *The stickers that the teacher put in the book if you did well!*
  - *I was making as a joke some funny sounds and my first teacher said: "great"*



# Pre-tertiary lessons

- Comments reflected high expectation feedback, for example:
  - *He made heavy demands in terms of technique*
  - *My private instructor inspired me to do my best each and every time I was in a lesson*
  - *Encouraging highest possible standards*
  - *My High School Principal who taught the love of ... excellence*
  - *My private teacher, because of her ... high standards.*
  - *She ... expected me ...to do my best all the time*
  - *He was exacting (not as in 'personality') but similar to 'demanding' etc.*

# Pre-tertiary lessons

- They also reported getting some feedback about their performance:
  - *The church made me feel that I was good at singing*
  - *My bassoon teacher taught me that I could achieve a great deal in a short space of time*
  - *My private instrumental teacher. ... made me feel like I was very good*

# HE lessons

Comments fell into two categories

## **High standards:**

- *Strive for excellence at all times*
- *Her ... high standards*
- *Expect the best and more from each student*
- *High expectations of my performance*

## **Feedback:**

- *He was interested in my progress*
- *He has a fantastic way of explaining things*
- *Helped me understand what I needed to do to be successful*
- *Unique ways of explaining on many levels*

# A new conceptual approach

- Student at the centre of the learning
- Theoretical principles of constructivism as well as Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978)
- Recognises the environment as a community of practice where students learn through social practices as per the theory of situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991)
- Influenced by Butler (1996), who in the context of practising classroom teachers, argues for a focus on professional development led by the practitioner, rather than a focus on 'training' and external input
- Reflects McTighe & Wiggins (2012) view of teachers as "coaches of understanding"
- Also akin to the definition of the word 'assessment', which is "derived from the Latin root assidere meaning 'to sit beside'" (McTighe & Ferrara, 1998, p. 2)

# A new conceptual approach



# Rethinking assessment and feedback

- Variety of forms of evaluation and feedback
- Shifts focus to the student to evidence that they can plan, act and reflect on learning over time
- Suggests a *portfolio of learning* as an assessment item:
  - learning plans, recordings, analyses of recordings, research papers, reflective journals, advice or feedback from experts, peers, audiences
- Assessment also becomes a negotiated item done *with* the student, not *of* the student



# Concluding thoughts

- Studio lesson will retain a place in HE music
- Directions should arguably include:
  - Communities of pedagogical practice are formed
  - Teachers explore different styles of teaching and their impact on learning
  - Teachers reflect on their teaching as part of professional development
  - Students evaluate teachers and teaching
  - Institutional leaders set intended outcomes of the studio lesson and for graduates

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