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

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The context: higher education

- Comes from the master-apprentice tradition (Hallam 1998, Presland 2005, Monkhouse 2010)
The ‘lesson’ culture

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

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