When students are learning and when they are performing in instrumental lesson interactions: A conversation analysis approach.

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ABSTRACT

Background
Within the growth of qualitative research in music psychology there has been an attempt to explore the interactions that take place between teachers and students in music lessons (e.g., Burwell, 2006; Karlsson & Juslin, 2008). This research, however, has yet to look at the turn by turn talk that takes place in pedagogical discourse, in addition to exploring how playing, singing and demonstrating are woven into the sequence of the interaction. The current study explores the interaction that is played out by teachers and students in conservatoire music lessons, using conversation analysis (CA). Its focus is on how students demonstrate learning, in contrast to performing, in lessons, and how teachers receive and respond to these aspects within the turn. CA combines social psychological and sociological approaches to language and social interaction and is concerned with the structure of conversation, how it is organized, and how individuals listen and respond to one another in talk. Key to studying verbal interaction is the notion that talk achieves things: that is, we are always doing things when we talk. It focuses on how key features, that include how sequences in talk are organized, repair in talk, pauses and silences in speech, and turns taken in the talk, make up interaction. It is only within this level of detail that we can see how learning and performing are embedded in the structures of pedagogical interaction.

In addition to mundane talk, conversation analysts also explore institutional talk. For example, research findings in educational contexts have significant implications for our understanding of pedagogical discourse, where studies have explored the ways in which teachers give feedback (e.g., Vehviläinen, 2009), and how students demonstrate knowing and understanding (e.g., Koole, 2010), for example. In contrast to these educational studies, there is very little work that has analysed musical interaction using CA (although see Forrester, 2010; Weeks, 1996).

Aim
The study’s aim is to examine how students indicate to the teacher, through their interaction, when they are learning in contrast to when they are performing, and how this is received, taken up, and orientated to by the teacher as a performance or as part of a more complex pedagogical process.

Method
CA has an interest in using naturally occurring data, that is, data that would occur without the intervention of the researcher. Thus, music lessons provide an excellent resource for analyzing pedagogical interaction. 17 video recordings were made of UK conservatoire music lessons which lasted between 50 minutes and two hours, generating 22 hours of data. Relevant extracts were then selected and transcribed further using Jefferson (2004) conventions, where everything from pauses, sighs, intonation, emphasis, laughter, to interruptions was noted.

Results
The analysis will look at a) the role that acknowledgement tokens, such as ‘mhm’, ‘oh’, ‘ok’ ‘uh huh’, have in the interaction as they function to continue or close the conversation, b) the use of ‘sorry’ in talk; both teachers and students would frequently apologize for going wrong when playing, and c) how playing and demonstrating forms part of the conversation. Through looking at this level of detail we are able to see the shifts between learning and performing within the lesson, and how these are taken up and understood by both the teacher and student.

Conclusion
CA allows musicians and educators to understand, more fully, the significance that each turn in talk has in the learning process. The complex interplay between talk, demonstration and performance all help to show when learning, in contrast to performing, is taking place. Teachers can see how misunderstandings and conflicts are played out in talk, and in how they are resolved. CA therefore has practical applications for enhancing music pedagogy.

Keywords
Conversation analysis, interaction, instrumental lessons.

REFERENCES