

# Feeling and thinking about studio practices: Exploring dissonance in semi-structured interviews with students in higher education music

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*While studio-based instrumental and vocal learning is widely regarded as both important and effective in higher education music, research to date has offered little concrete information about studio practices that students have regarded as ineffective. Two recent case studies investigated what appear to be exceptional instances in which students expressed dissatisfaction with the approaches taken by their current teachers. In this paper, data from these studies is mined again, focusing particularly on verbal behaviour from semi-structured interviews. The two studies are compared with each other and with data from a broader study from which they had been drawn, asking how the 'dissonant' cases are distinct, and how student interviews might cast fresh light on the complexities of studio practices.*

## Introduction

Studio-based instrumental and vocal learning, and the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student, are held to be of central importance in higher education music (Carey et al., 2013; Gaunt, 2008; Presland, 2005). While in general terms they are regarded as highly effective, by participants (Burwell & Shipton, 2011; Gaunt, 2010; Presland, 2005) and by professional bodies (Music Council of Australia, 2011; Association of European Conservatoires, Polifonia Profession Working Group, 2007), research to date has offered little concrete information about studio practices that students have regarded as ineffective. References to these tend to be indirect or anecdotal, and student participants may be reluctant to discuss any difficulties arising with their teachers, for fear of undermining the success of the one-to-one relationship (Hanken, 2011; Gaunt, 2010; Nerland & Hanken, 2002).

Recently, I took advantage of what seemed a rare opportunity to investigate two instances in which, exceptionally, students expressed dissatisfaction with the approach taken by their current teachers (Burwell 2016a; 2016b). These case studies were drawn from a broader study in which questionnaire, interview and video data supported the exploration of studio lesson behaviour. Within the broader study, 27 students were invited to characterise their current teacher's approach to lessons, and to comment on whether that was appropriate for them, at their current stage of development. The two students who replied negatively to this question expressed themselves in very different terms: Sandra, a singer, explained her response by emphasising the affective aspects of her learning (Burwell, 2016a) while Gavin, a guitarist, gave a more analytical account of the professional aspects

of his lessons (Burwell, 2016b). A close description of the data helped to identify what might be at issue in their studio lessons, including aspects of communication, maturity and independence, loosely grouped under the metaphor of 'dissonance'. The cases could not be held to be representative, but it was argued that they represented authentic possibilities among studio practices, that might lend themselves to conceptual – if not statistical – generalisation.

The aim of the current paper is to contribute a little further to our understanding of 'dissonance' in the studio, by considering these cases in relation to each other and to the majority of students from the broader study, who reported that their teachers' approaches were indeed appropriate to their current stages of development. In particular, the current study investigates student attitudes through their verbal behaviour in interviews – what they say, and the terms they use to express themselves. How might the 'dissonant' cases prove distinct? And how might their verbal behaviour cast fresh light on the complexities of studio practices?

### **Interview studies of studio-based learning**

The semi-structured interview has become the most common method of data generation in the social sciences (Madill, 2011; Roulston, 2006; Peräkylä, 2005; Potter & Hepburn, 2005), corresponding with an increasing interest in 'experience, meaning, life world, conversation, dialogue, narrative, and language' (Kvale, 1996, p. 11). Through interviews more than, for example, observations, qualitative researchers can investigate the perceptions, intentions, and attitudes of participants, though importantly, it cannot be assumed that interviews, or any method of data collection, can offer direct and unproblematic access either to the respondent's views or to the subject that she may be discussing. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explain:

Poststructuralists and postmodernists have contributed to the understanding that there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual . . . Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they have done and why. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 21)

While it is widely accepted that 'reality' is constructed, in the social if not the physical world (Pring, 2000, p. 60), there is some debate about the extent to which research participants can be regarded as having stable, psychosocial characteristics that might explain their behaviour, and as being reliable sources of information about their social world (for example, Hammersley, 2003; Potter, 2003). In some cases the limits on the reliability of respondents have been clear, and noted as a topic of interest in itself. For example, Hallam (2001) interviewed children about their practice behaviour, and noted differences between what they reported doing, and corresponding video evidence; she described the discrepancy as a 'production deficit' (p. 10). This was related to child development, and in particular, the development of linguistic competence; it is likely to be exposed when the task at hand – for example, practising the violin – 'could be construed as reflecting or embodying certain intellectual competencies which have nothing intrinsically verbal about them' (Flavell, Beach & Chinsky, 1966, p. 297).

Another mismatch between participant reports and observation evidence presented itself in a study conducted by Koopman et al. (2007), who compared written logs and questionnaires from conservatoire students, with video data of their lessons and practice. Discrepancies were found between student reports and the researchers' analysis of the video data, concerning the number of initiatives students took in lesson interactions, and the clarity of both homework instruction and lesson aims. The researchers suggested that the students may have felt that these were 'sufficiently manifest' in what they were doing in lessons, and that with a focus on practical results, 'the explicit verbalisation of aims was not considered as necessary' (p. 388).

It seems important that Koopman et al. responded to their apparently inconsistent data, not by questioning the honesty or competence of student participants but by asking how the discrepancy might have come about, and by proposing a more richly textured explanation for the situation they were studying. A similar attitude perhaps was adopted by Gaunt who, having interviewed 20 conservatoire teachers (2008) and students (2010), compared their responses in a further study (2011). Aside from drawing out common themes, Gaunt noted that the two groups tended to describe the teacher-student relationship in different terms, with teachers referring to friendship or parental roles, and students tending to focus on the felt benefits of the relationship. The differing perspectives served to highlight 'the complexity of the student-teacher relationship [and] the individuality of each relationship over a sustained period of time' (p. 174).

Of course, some of the ambiguity apparent in interview data may arise from attitudes to the situation itself, particularly with an interviewer who may be an academic in the same institution, and who therefore might be regarded as representative of it. Gaunt notes that her position as an 'insider teacher-researcher' gave her access to interview participants, and an opportunity to cultivate a degree of understanding and trust (2010, p. 181); arguably, however, her position as a colleague of their current teachers might be associated with an apparent unwillingness of students to criticise them, in contrast with their remarks about past teacher-student relationships. This possibility might be linked to the reluctance of teachers and students in a Norwegian academy of music to engage in the formal evaluation of studio teaching, as required by the institution: according to Hanken (2011) this was partly because that formal mode of communication was perceived as unnatural and redundant:

Teachers and students alike feel uncomfortable in this situation; especially since there is a prevailing expectation that the relationship between an instrumental teacher and his or her students should be so open and trusting that the students can raise any problems face to face with their teacher. (Hanken, 2011, p. 253)

Both Gaunt (2010) and Hanken (2011) draw links between students' ability or willingness to articulate concerns about their studio lessons, and the perceived need to maintain a positive teacher-student relationship, founded on trust.

In a number of studies, insight into student attitudes has been sought through interviews combined with video observation, using video-recall methods to embrace participant intentions and concerns in both data collection and research design (Johansson, 2013; James et al., 2010; Nielsen, 2010; Hultberg, 2005). James, Wise and Rink (2010) explain that the procedure 'has the potential both to allow insights into their experiences

that could not be gained from viewing the footage alone, and to facilitate participants' conscious access to processes that they may not often think about or articulate' (p. 225). In the broader study from which the current paper was drawn, participants were interviewed about their work shortly after their lessons had been filmed, relying on fresh memories rather than video recall. Within that, sub-studies have used 'rich transcription' to explore a total of four studio lessons, with a close description of verbal, nonverbal and performance behaviours, and with teacher and student interviews casting further light on the observation analysis (Burwell, 2010, 2012, 2016a, 2016b). Rich transcription is a satisfying, but painstaking and time-consuming task, that would be difficult to sustain over a larger number of analyses. It highlights however the complexity that lies in both studio practices and participants' representations of them, alongside the value of establishing a sense of context for individual cases.

### Procedure

In the current study the 'dissonant' cases of Sandra and Gavin are contextualised by considering their interviews alongside those of their 25 colleagues. In the rich transcription of their cases, interviews were regarded not as reports about studio practices, but as accounts to be interpreted; even so, the main focus was on the analysis of video data, with interviews providing signposts and sidelights on lesson behaviour. Concentrating on the interview data now would allow, and indeed call for, a more reflexive approach to its analysis. Thus Potter and Hepburn (2005) draw attention to the presence of the interviewer in discussions, the interactive nature of the procedure, and the relative footing of interviewer and respondent; although the differences between interviews and naturally occurring talk are sometimes exaggerated (Potter, 1998, p. 236), interviews share some of the asymmetrical features of 'institutional' talk (Madill, 2011). Patterns of verbal behaviour, and a sense of order, might be evident in interview data as much as lesson behaviour, though they may be more or less explicit for the participants. Through a free interplay of analytical techniques (Kvale, 1996) qualitative researchers can investigate how interview accounts are constructed, as well as casting light on the practices under discussion (Roulston, 2006; Hammersley, 2003; Potter, 1998).

Participants were identified for the broader study through a call for volunteers among instrumental and vocal teachers in a university music department; the teachers in turn helped to identify student participants. The final selection of participants was made with reference to the range of instruments and styles covered, and the convenience of scheduling interviews and the filming of lessons. The procedures were consistent with the ethics protocols of the host university: participants were not classified as being particularly vulnerable, were involved through informed consent, and were assured of anonymity in reporting, while the topics under investigation were not considered particularly sensitive. In quoting interview data, names are given to any participants who have been given pseudonyms already in previous research, or who are mentioned more than once in the Findings and Discussion to follow.

The data collection relevant to the current study involved filming three studio lessons for each of nine teachers, during the final weeks of the academic year, shortly before performance examinations took place. After each lesson was filmed, teachers and students were interviewed individually; it is important to note, in the light of the previous discussion

and the nature of the study, that the interviewers were lecturers and researchers working in the same department. Students were asked for some biographical information, focusing on their experience in music teaching and learning, and to comment on their studio work, in the lesson just filmed and in more general terms. The interview schedule consisted in a series of prompts, allowing for further questions and the elaboration of topics as they arose.

For the current study the interview data were analysed again, repeatedly interrogating the responses that Sandra and Gavin gave to the question about their teachers' approaches, and considering those in the context of the whole body of interview data. This involved the adoption of 'an analytic mentality which is sensitive to a range of features of discourse' (Potter, 1998, p. 239), with some reference to features of the organisation of everyday language (p. 240). The procedure was used to establish whether and how the dissonant cases might be distinct from the rest: firstly in their accounts of their teachers' approaches; secondly in the occurrence of two salient hallmarks, *feel* and *think*; and finally in remarks related to the order of lesson interactions.

### Findings

The point of departure for this case study was the interview question asking students whether their teacher's approach was appropriate for them, at their current stage of development. Of the 27 students interviewed, only two answered this question negatively:

SANDRA: I don't really think it is actually. I just don't feel comfortable sometimes with it. I feel a bit let down. I asked her last week 'How am I doing in comparison to everyone else?' because I just feel that I am not as good as what she is used to. She doesn't encourage me as much as I want her to. Her style is to make me bring out a big sound but it's not very appropriate because the piece I am doing at the moment is very light and this big sound doesn't really go with it, I find.

GAVIN: It is not really. I want more self-discovery, exploring different ways of doing things. I don't want to be told that there is a definitive way. Today he was talking about playing vibrato on a particular note with three fingers. I was playing it with my little finger. I couldn't hear the difference. I can't see the benefit of putting my whole hand out of position to play it.

How distinct were these responses from the remaining 25? Five students (19%) answered the question positively but almost automatically, in that they provided no immediate elaboration – for example, 'Yeah: I am very happy' and 'Just what I wanted'. 17 students (63%) answered positively and added some explanatory information, referring for example to choice of repertoire, clarity of instruction, flexibility and devolving responsibility.

Not all of the students answered plainly: three students (11%) gave answers that were positive but included some ambivalence. One of these was Beth (discussed in detail in Burwell, 2012), who demonstrated an emotional attachment to a previous teacher, saying 'Well, I would rather have my old teacher but he's great... if she didn't exist then he would be perfect'. The next student indicated that all was well, but this had not always been so: 'When I first came, because I suppose I am quite shy, and to play in front of her was quite strange... but I think we have got used to one another now'. The remaining

student, known as Rebecca, answered positively about her teacher's approach but went on to remark that *today's* lesson had been frustrating: with performance exams imminent, she would like to have spent less time on detail.

Sandra and Gavin stood out for their frankly negative answers, particularly as their teachers each had two other students involved in the study, and all of them answered entirely positively. While Gavin emphasised professional issues in explaining his response, however, Sandra's response emphasised the more affective aspects of her learning, indicating how she felt about her situation before attempting to explain it. In the response quoted above she used the word *feel* three times; the third of these introduced an opinion, but the first two referred to Sandra's personal feelings – she felt *uncomfortable, let down* – and she wanted more encouragement from her teacher.

How distinct was this reference to personal feelings? In the interview schedule there were two consecutive items referring directly to the teacher, inviting students to characterise their teachers before proceeding to the 'appropriate' question. In responses to these questions, the words *feel, feeling, feels, or felt* were used 22 times. Eight of these references were to personal feelings: four students used the word *feel* once each, in positive descriptions of their lessons, while the remaining – negative – references all came from Sandra and Gavin. Gavin reported leaving lessons 'sometimes feeling quite disappointed', and later, he left a statement about his feelings incomplete:

Then I played [the piece that I had prepared] to him in the first lesson and he completely trashed it and I felt so – I thought, I wouldn't do that to my students. I don't think that is necessary.

How distinct was the reference to feeling, across whole interviews? In all, the words *feel, feeling, feels, or felt* were used 72 times; 29 of these referred to affect, and 9 of those (31%) were negative. Three students referred to negative emotions in this way, once each: Beth recalled that her previous teacher 'had this amazing way of making me feel really bad if I didn't do any practice'; Rebecca, as previously noted, reported that she felt 'completely frustrated' – and 'I never want to see those four bars again!'; the third student, a singer, felt 'depressed' today because she was not performing well. Sandra and Gavin referred to negative emotions three times each, and were the only students to link negative emotions to their teacher's approach.

It has been noted that sometimes the word *feel* was used not to describe *feelings* but to introduce an opinion; in such cases, *think* could be substituted for *feel* and the statement would still make good sense. Across whole interviews, 39 student opinions were introduced by the words *feel, feeling, feels, or felt*; of these, allowing for some overlapping, 18 (46%) referred to the teacher's approach, 13 (33%) referred to the self, and eight (21%) referred to the subject. Of the 39 opinions, 22 (56%) were critical, and of these, 15 (68%) concerned the teacher's approach, six (26%) involved self-appraisal, and one (13%) concerned the subject. The 22 negative opinions introduced by words based on *feel* came from only six students, and two students were responsible for most of them. Five negative opinions came from Rebecca, who – while acknowledging the good intentions of her teacher, and her own responsibility for taking initiatives in lessons – criticised the time-management in today's lesson, for example:

You can spend three-quarters of an hour looking at one bar, which is all very well and very interesting, but when you have got limited time and something to work towards and you have an exam that is coming up, I feel I need to keep going.

Gavin however stood out for introducing 11 negative opinions in terms of feeling. Six of these referred to his teacher's approach, and five to self-appraisal. Interestingly perhaps, Gavin introduced opinions in this way in only two other places, both positive, and both concerned with his own work, whether playing ('I felt I had really got to grips with this piece of music') or teaching ('I feel [my pupils] need to hear good things about their work'). Three other students used the word *feel* to introduce opinions that were effectively self-compliments, about their capabilities or progress.

To what extent might the use of words based on *feel* depend on the initiative of the student? Gavin stood out by using *feel*, *feels*, *feeling* or *felt*, in whatever sense, no less than 19 times; he was followed by Rebecca (12) and Sandra (seven). The interviewer used those words far more rarely, with only 32 usages across the 27 interviews, and yet it was the interviewer who used them first, in the interviews with Gavin and Sandra. The following extract comes from an early stage in Gavin's interview. In all such extracts, the speech of the interviewer is shown in italics; here, the word *feel* is highlighted for the convenience of the reader.

*The head of our department takes the view that Performance Studies are central to the degree programme. May I have your response to that?*

I agree. I think it is one of the most important things.

*Is it the same for everybody, or do you **feel** this is a personal choice you have made?*

That's what you are asking me isn't it? In my opinion it is.

*Is it set up that way or is it the way you have decided to play it?*

No – I **feel** that it SHOULD be one of the most important things and – are you asking me whether it has been given that level of importance within the department?

*Yes – do you **feel** WE give it that?*

No.

*You don't think we give it enough importance?*

No.

*What do you think we should do?*

I think the instrumental lessons are too laid back. I want more from them.

*You want them to be more demanding, more challenging?*

Yes and I want more in the way of performance-orientated teaching. And I want more pastoral care as well. I want to **feel** supported.

In this extract, each use of *feel* by the interviewer is matched shortly afterward, by Gavin; and with the last usage, Gavin begins to apply the word in discussing his lessons. He goes on to use it more or less regularly during his interview. A similar pattern occurs in Sandra's lesson, when she uses the word *feel* shortly after it is introduced by the interviewer; a moment later, she uses it three times more in asserting that her teacher's approach is not appropriate for her – as previously quoted. In contrast, Rebecca uses words based on *feel* 12 times before the interviewer uses it at all, and the last seven of these are embedded in her discussion of her lessons and her teacher's approach.



It has been remarked that in expressing opinions, *think* could be substituted for *feel* without loss of sense. How distinct were they, in the student interviews? The words *think*, *thinks*, *thinking*, or *thought* were more than three times as common as words based on *feel*, with 232 student usages altogether. Of these, 53 (23%) did not signal opinions at all, but referred to thinking as an activity, often elicited by the teacher: for example, '[He will] get me to think of at least three different ways that I can interpret it'. In the 171 opinions introduced by words based on *think*, students referred to the subject (44%), the teacher's approach (36%), the self (16%), or the camera (8%). The remaining nine usages of words based on *think* were reports of the teacher's views.

Among student opinions introduced by words based on *think*, only five (3%) were critical. These were identified by the intention, rather than the grammatical function. Thus for example 'I don't think so' was used by eight students when asked if they had anything to add at the end of the interview, but while the structure of the expression was negative, there was no criticism evident in the context. All of the opinions that were taken to be critical concerned the teacher's approach. Three of these came from Gavin, who has already been quoted ('I thought, I wouldn't do that to my students', 'I don't think that is necessary', 'I think the instrumental lessons are too laid back'). The two remaining negative opinions were less directly expressed. One came from Pamela, who in discussing her teacher's approach, offered a tentative reservation – 'I think it is maybe, sometimes, with some people it seems it might be better for younger children': eschewing all modification from this statement would have given a starker impression – 'It would be better for younger children'. The other negative opinion introduced by *think* came from Sandra's response, again already quoted, when she was asked whether her teacher's approach was appropriate for her, at her current stage of development. Without the verbs *think* and *feel*, and without the adjectives *really*, *actually*, *just*, *sometimes*, and *a bit*, that response would have been 'It is not; I am not comfortable with it; I have been let down'.

The tendency to modify such claims implies a constraint on what students were prepared to say *about* their lessons. The interview evidence suggested that some of the students were more, or less, conscious of the constraints that might apply, *in* their lessons. For example, when Gavin remarked that he could not 'see the benefit' of his teacher's suggestion about vibrato, the interviewer asked whether he had said as much, to his teacher:

Did you say that?  
No. I just take what comes. [laughs]

Sandra, on the other hand, claimed that she was likely to assert herself with her teacher:

Sometimes I do disagree with the way she asks me to do it because sometimes I run out of breath.  
*You do discuss this, though... you take the initiatives?*  
Usually I say, rather than she asks. Usually I say 'I am not really happy with that'.

This claim was not borne out by the transcript of Sandra's filmed lesson, in which she made no verbal objection to the proceedings; and although this particular lesson may have been atypical, Sandra said in her interview that it was not: 'That's what we normally do, yes'.



Explicit objections to the course of a lesson, however, might not be easy to make. The interview evidence suggests that of all the students, Rebecca was the one who objected most, if not to her teacher's approach in general, then to the particular course of her filmed lesson, in which she had felt frustrated about the approach to time management, in the light of her impending examination. Yet Rebecca too was frank about not taking initiatives of this kind: asked whether she had discussed the issue with her teacher, she replied 'No – well maybe at one stage, but no I haven't: you can't just come out with it.'

## Discussion

When 27 students were asked how appropriate their current teachers' approaches were for them, at their current stages of development, Sandra and Gavin stood out for being directly negative. The examination of the other 25 interviews shows that the contrast was not entirely simple, in that three other students gave somewhat ambivalent responses, even if they endorsed their teachers' approaches generally, while five more students answered so briefly that their responses might seem to be automatic. Perhaps the contrast between 'automatic' responses and those that were immediately explained was not entirely simple, either, in that the large majority of students answered that their teachers' approaches were appropriate, whether they explained their answers or not. There may be a sense, here, that this was the 'right' answer to the question; if so, it would resonate with research focused on lesson behaviour in the same music department, in which students appeared to give automatic responses to 'cliché' questions, while teachers tended to accept their answers at face value (Burwell, 2005, p. 207).

The sense of there being a 'right' thing to say might be extended to the hallmark use of words based on *think* and *feel*, in the interviews. Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) explain that *I think* can be an 'uncertainty marker' that might be used, for example, in politely correcting other speakers (p. 378); Wooffitt (2005) adds that while the significance depends on the context, such markers allow speakers 'to manage sensitive interpersonal matters in delicate and subtle ways' (p. 117). In the context of their interviews, it seems possible that students might have used *think* so often to modify their assertions because of their perception of the interview situation: Mishler (in Scheurich, 1995) asserts that there is a 'striking asymmetry of power' in the structure of traditional interviews (p. 246), while Madill (2011) notes similarities between interview and 'institutional' talk (p. 345). Having an interviewer who was also an academic in the same department would presumably enhance the impression that student respondents were in a subordinate position in their interviews.

Although the markers *feel* and *think* might function in the same structural sense, by introducing and modifying an opinion, there was arguably a significant difference in the meaning produced by each, in these interviews. The students introduced opinions with words based on *feel* (39) far less freely than with words based on *think* (171), and the 'felt' opinions were far more likely to be critical (22, or 56%) than the 'thought' opinions (five, or 3%). It has been noted that *feel* was also used in several instances to introduce self-compliments. While Mayer and Tormala (2010) suggest that both markers imply that subjective impressions are being shared, Holtgraves (2015) adds that *think* implies greater confidence than *feel*. In this particular context, student respondents who were presumably

unaccustomed to the interview situation, and who were more or less conscious of the asymmetry of the interaction between them and the lecturer-interviewer, modified many of their remarks about their own experience in studio teaching and learning, typically by using the *think* marker; and they were likely to go further by using the *feel* marker, if they used it at all, for remarks that might seem sensitive, or out of order. Thus, both criticisms of the teacher's approach, and self-compliments, were framed with care.

*Feel* also has affective implications, and while Sandra stood out for highlighting her personal feelings when she responded to the question about her teacher's approach, Gavin and Rebecca stood out for using *feel* to refer to their emotions most often, across whole interviews. These three were the only students to mark negative emotions in this way, and only Sandra and Gavin linked negative emotions to their teachers' general approaches. Given that *feel* could be used in slightly different ways – to introduce an opinion that might be sensitive, or to refer to personal emotions – we might ask whether one can lead to the other. Mayer and Tormala (2010) assert that *think* and *feel* can act as cognitive and affective cues, respectively, drawing different kinds of information from interview respondents. The interviewer in the current study never asked the students, directly, how they felt; but it is interesting that the interviewer was the first to use the word *feel* in interviewing Sandra and Gavin, and possible that this might have cued not just a prominent usage of the word, in their own responses, but more affective accounts of their lessons.

Since the interviewer's cues for feeling were not direct, this is perhaps an exaggeration, and it could not be said on the strength of the evidence that this choice of word led the students to misrepresent themselves. Even so, the nature of the semi-structured interview – with the interviewer observing a series of preconceived prompts, but engaging with and at times pursuing particular ideas as they arose – would presumably give students the impression that the development of their accounts was sympathetically supported. In a study comparing verbal behaviour in semi-structured interviews with naturally-occurring talk, Madill (2011) noted that interviewer contributions, along with commiseration, joking, contradictions and giving advice, tended to be minimal in the interview situation – as might be expected; but that respondents were likely to voice complaints in interviews in the same way as they would when talking to friends. In the 'distinct interactional form' (p. 349) of the interview setting, it seems that students might raise and discuss topics, which that other distinct interactional form – the studio lesson – might not seem to support.

### Implications

The close investigation of interview data confirms that 'dissonance' was present and distinct, not only in what Sandra and Gavin said about their studio lessons but in the fabric of their interview discussions. Their cases proved distinct, in producing directly negative accounts of their current teachers' approaches, and in referring to those approaches in terms of their own negative feelings. At the same time, they framed those accounts by using the markers *feel* and *think*, or other modifying language, to introduce remarks that seemed to be delicate. In this their behaviour stands out, but has some support nevertheless, from the interviews of other students. *Think* is often used, across the sample, to modify opinions, and *feel* is used to modify opinions on particularly sensitive topics. While there is no evidence here to suggest that student dissatisfaction is common, it does seem clear

that criticising one's teacher is a particularly sensitive topic, and not easily done; hence the efforts made by Rebecca and Pamela, to modify their criticisms of any aspect of their lessons. While it may not be clear that students are conscious of it, criticising one's teacher is evidently – even literally – out of order.

That there is an implicit order regarding studio-based learning is supported by Hanken (2011) who draws on Institutional theory to investigate attitudes to formal student evaluations; she explains that members of an institution are 'influenced by collectively anchored values, norms and ways of thinking and acting that permeate the organisation and influence the way in which they will interpret the demands and, consequently, how they will choose to act' (p. 246). This relies on a conception of institutions as 'given, static, and constraining', explaining continuity more than change; and yet discourse theorists have begun to seek sources of change within institutions themselves (Schmidt, 2010, p. 2).

In previous reports about the case studies of Sandra and Gavin (Burwell, 2016a, 2016b), I have cited Jørgensen's (2000) suggestion that institutions of higher education music should be taking a more active role in supporting the development of studio lessons, and argued that if students are able to articulate their concerns to an interviewer, the institution should be able to create a space in which they can articulate them to their teachers: a space in which teachers and students can engage in purposeful and objective discussions about their collaborative practice, working through any 'incidents of studio dissonance' (2016b, p. 511). The argument is complicated if the interview is regarded as a unique interactional form, in which students feel able to complain as if to friends, even without friendly commiseration – a view supported by the current study. Teachers and students often talk of their relationship in terms of friendship (Burwell, 2016b, Gaunt, 2011) though the professional setting of the studio must give it, also, an institutional character (Hanken, 2011, Nerland, 2007). But whether students can complain to their teachers about the approach taken in their studio lessons, is not the point: if objective discussions can be developed between them, mediated by a formal institutional framework, then student concerns, questions or anxieties about studio practices – 'dissonance', rather than impasse – can be addressed by participants before they can develop into less fruitful impulses. The evidence suggests that teachers and students are working within cultural norms that may be more or less explicit, more or less static; but it does not suggest that they would be averse to engaging with those in new ways, perhaps with the assistance that can be offered by theory and research; nor that institutions cannot support, in this sense, the evolving dynamics of the studio lesson.

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## Appendix

Interview schedule for students:

- What is your principal study?
- How long have you been studying it?
- How long have you studied with this teacher?

Tell me about your previous experience in studying your instrument.

The head of department takes the view that 'Performance Studies is central to the degree programme'. What are your responses to that?

Why did you choose to do your degree course at [this institution]?

What are your ambitions regarding your principal study?

Do you envisage further study?

Do you intend teaching your principal study?

Tell me about your current teacher (approach, style, temperament)

How appropriate is their style/approach for you and your stage of development?

What did you do/cover in the lesson?

To what extent was that a typical lesson?

How did this lesson compare with your idea of an ideal lesson?

Looking at the [given] list of Areas of study, which of these did you cover within the lesson?

What sort of teaching strategies/approaches did your teacher adopt in the lesson?

These are the strategies [given] we outlined in the questionnaire. Which of these do you think your teacher mainly employed?

Is there anything else you would like to add?