Preparing Students for Effective and Autonomous Learning
Through a Transformative Critical Response Process

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Abstract
Higher music education has recently increased its focus on preparing graduates for
diverse and sustainable careers. This has necessitated an evolution in the approach to
instrumental and vocal one-to-one tuition, from traditional instructional models, often
referred to as the Master Apprentice model, to ones that are more transformative and
prepare students for lifelong learning. Liz Lerman’s Critical Response Process (CRP),
which is gaining recognition as a valuable and effective process to give and receive
feedback, is one approach that aligns with transformative pedagogy. CRP is a
collaborative and inquiry-based process for receiving constructive feedback in a
supportive environment. At the core of CRP is meaningful dialogue aimed at
strengthening students' abilities to solve problems inherent in their own creative
endeavours and in turn their autonomy. This autonomy, which includes the ability to
problem solve and reflect, is important for emerging musicians, who are likely to have
diverse portfolio careers, and to also become the next generation of music teachers.

Through a qualitative study involving focus groups with eight community vocal
teachers enrolled in a Masters in Vocal Pedagogy program, one conservatoire
investigated whether CRP is beneficial to one-to-one teachers wishing to develop a
transformative approach to lessons and whether its use contributes to fostering
student autonomy. Through the insights gained in this study, it is evident that CRP
has the ability to increase teachers’ awareness of their pedagogical approach to
lessons, and importantly, to break down the master-apprentice stereotype. CRP
enhanced these teachers’ ability to use transformative pedagogical strategies such as
critical questioning, collaboration and placing the responsibility for learning with the
student, leading to more student autonomy of learning, responsibility and awareness in relation to their learning needs.

While some teachers experienced an initial discomfort in adapting the CRP process to the one-to-one context, working collaboratively through professional development opportunities assisted them to become more comfortable and confident in using its principles in their teaching practice. It would therefore appear that for transformative learning strategies such as CRP to be effectively implemented, professional development is both beneficial and desirable. While this investigation was conducted within a single institution, there is potential for the CRP to be applied both within instrumental and vocal contexts in other institutions, or within other educational contexts including higher degree research supervision, workshops and mentoring settings. This is turn will ensure students are better prepared for diverse and changing musical educational and employment opportunities where self-direction and critical thinking are key.

Keywords
Critical Response Process, one-to-one music teaching, student autonomy, transformative pedagogy.

Introduction
Higher music education has recently increased its focus on preparing graduates for diverse and sustainable careers, which researches have identified as involving the development of skills such as autonomy and self-management, disciplinary agility, effective communication, critical thinking and problem solving (Bennett, Richardson, & Mackinnon, 2015; Bridgstock & Hearn, 2012; Deloitte, 2017). This has necessitated an evolution in the approach to instrumental and vocal one-to-one tuition in Conservatoires, from traditional instructional models, often referred to as the Master Apprentice model, to ones that are more transformative and prepare students for lifelong learning and diverse portfolio careers. This aligns with education research
more broadly which has identified effective student learning as that which fosters autonomy and builds students’ capacity to be resilient, resourceful and problem solve (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Boud, 2012; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Transformative pedagogy has been a crucial advancement, as traditional modes of one-to-one instrumental teaching have been found to provide little opportunity for autonomy and indeed tend to stifle the development of independent thinking and creativity (Daniel & Parkes, 2017; Duffy, 2016; Carey, 2010; Carey & Grant, 2014; Carey, Coutts, Grant, Harrison, & Dwyer, 2018; Gaunt, 2007), which can result in a limited professional career in music (Hennekam & Bennett, 2017). While traditional music teaching practices and thinking are still evident today (Daniel & Parkes, 2017; Duffy, 2016), it is hoped that an increased understanding of alternative one-to-one teaching and learning approaches will continue to result in more effective and autonomous student learning. This in turn will ensure students are better prepared for diverse and changing musical, educational and employment opportunities where self-direction and critical thinking are key.

**Transformative Pedagogy**

Transformative pedagogy places emphasis on student ownership of learning (Weimer, 2012) and is “characterised by a ‘deep’ approach to learning orientation … and pedagogical agility in terms of its collaborative, explorative, scaffolded, meaningful, and contextualising qualities” (Carey, Grant, McWilliam, & Taylor, 2013, p. 361). Essential to this approach is the building on students’ prior knowledge, providing students with a safe space to problem-solve, developing students’ abilities to learn, fostering students’ personal and artistic development, and adapting to the needs of each student. It also relies on teachers being able to reflect critically on their teaching and consequently adapt their approaches according to the needs of their students.
(Coutts, 2016; Gaunt & Carey, 2016; McAllister, 2008; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Taylor, 2008). In particular, this approach relies on teachers being able to ask effective questions and engage students in meaningful dialogue. One institution’s research, however, found that communicative approaches to transformative pedagogy—including effective questioning—are not necessarily intuitive for teachers (Carey et al., 2018). This would appear, at least in part, to be due to the fact that most one-to-one teachers have not had formal training in pedagogy and may themselves have come from traditional master-apprentice models (Daniel & Parkes, 2017; Duffy, 2016). This had led some institutions to seek ways of enhancing teachers’ ability to develop transformative approaches through collaborative and reflective working forms such as the Critical Response Process.

**Critical Response Process (CRP)**

The Critical Response Process (CRP) is a collaborative and inquiry-based process for receiving constructive feedback in a supportive environment. It was created by choreographer Liz Lerman, who developed the CRP process due her frustration with the feedback she was receiving on her own artistic works, and what she describes as a “yearning for something deeper; something more consistent and persistent” (Guildhall School of Music and Drama, 2016). At the core of CRP is meaningful dialogue aimed at strengthening students' abilities to solve problems inherent in their own creative endeavours and in turn their autonomy.

There are three roles and four steps involved within CRP. The three roles include: Artist, Responder and Facilitator (outlined in Table 1).
Table 1. Roles in the Critical Response Process.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Artist</td>
<td>Needs to be able to discuss their work openly with responders and be in a position to receive positive and constructive comments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responders</td>
<td>Provide honest feedback. It is important that they genuinely want the Artist to produce excellent work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Facilitator</td>
<td>Ensures that responders and artist understand the sequence of steps involved in the process. Checks the artist is comfortable with the direction of discussions, helps the Artist to break down questions where needed and encourages Responders to participate.</td>
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The Critical Response Process (outlined in Figure 1) begins with the Artist presenting the work on which they would like feedback. The facilitator then invites feedback from the Responders which might include comments such as what was exciting, meaningful memorable, compelling and the like. The Artist is then invited by the facilitator to request feedback from the Responders on a specific aspect of their work. Responders are asked to avoid being leading or opinionated, seeking instead to further understand the Artist’s intentions and aims of their work through more questions. In the fourth and final step, the Responder, with the permission of the Artist, offers an opinion, which is couched in a positive manner. A more detailed description of the process is available through Lerman & Borstel (2003) and Williams (2017). While the above describes CRP in its orthodox form, Lerman acknowledges that CRP can take many forms depending on the context, and is adaptable to the individual needs of participants at any one time. If in a context such as a one-to-one lesson, for example, the artist is the student and the teacher takes on the roles of both Facilitator and Responder.
Figure 1. Steps of the Critical Response Process.

The CRP has recently become a focus of attention for Professional Development in select UK, European and Australian institutions and organisations, such as The Guildhall School of Music and Drama the Innovative Conservatoire (Duffy, 2016), The Royal Conservatoire, The Hague and the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University. The working form has also been documented in a practical guide for pedagogues seeking to increase the quality of their practice (Williams, 2017). Despite these practical applications, there is currently limited research exploring the adaptability, usefulness and practical application of CRP within the one-to-one instrumental and vocal music studio context. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating whether CRP is beneficial to one-to-one teachers in fostering student autonomy. The value of this study lies in its insights into fostering transformative approaches to one-to-one learning and teaching that contribute to forming the next generation of musicians and teachers. Moreover, it responds to the call for educators
to promote student self-awareness and transferable skills in order to optimise the chances for a sustainable career (Hennekam & Bennett, 2017).

**Study Design**

One Australian higher music education conservatoire piloted CRP in the context of a postgraduate Masters program in Vocal Pedagogy in 2016, in which there were approximately 15 students enrolled. The program has a combination of research and practice-based courses focusing on the one-to-one learning and teaching context. CRP training was embedded into a practice-based pedagogy internship course within this program, the aim of which is to provide professional training and supervision in implementing effective practices in studio vocal teaching.

The participants in this qualitative study consisted of eight community vocal teachers enrolled in the program (six females and two males). Qualitative data was generated through two semi-structured focus groups ($n=3$ and $n=5$) that aimed to understand these teachers’ knowledge, perspectives, interpretations and experiences (Mason, 2002; Roth, 2005; Silverman, 2001) with CRP in the context of their vocal teaching practices. Questions pertained to teachers’ perceptions of CRP, how they implemented CRP into their teaching and their perceived challenges or successes in relation to their student learning. Focus groups took place in the final semester of the Masters program, eight months after teachers were first introduced to CRP. This timeframe ensured teachers were provided with an opportunity to work with the CRP process for a reasonable period in order to enable them comment on its evolution, and to discuss any outcomes associated with its use.
Focus group data were analysed through thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Starting with descriptive themes aligning with transformative pedagogy, such as student autonomy, effective questioning and adapting teaching to student needs, this approach also allowed inductive themes to emerge from the data.

**Initial Responses to CRP**

When teachers in the Masters program were first presented with the CRP, many questioned its practical application to their teaching contexts. As one teacher explained, “I initially went, ‘oh no, not another technique, something to interrupt the flow between people’. Because I often think that methods are just something to get over so that we can get on with it” (T1).

Despite the explanation of the process teachers were doubtful about how to incorporate it in the context of their studio teaching. T2 had concerns how it would work, “particularly when [students] are coming to us to find out information.” There was also initial concern about how students would know “what’s good for them vocally” (T7). These comments highlight assumptions about students being recipients of information and uninformed about their needs.

Conceptually, teachers agreed that CRP was very clear and made sense in relation to student learning, but they were uncertain about its practical use within lessons. Their initial experiences trialling CRP were “messy” (T4) and “confusing” (T5), with some teachers being resistant to implementing it. Being part of their pedagogical training within their internship they were afforded the time and impetus to persevere. They agreed that it takes time to adapt to the process in order for it to become a natural part of their teaching, stating that this is more “dynamic” (T8) and “subtle” (T4) for them.
than explicitly performing each step sequentially. T4, through viewing videos of others’ teaching within the internship course, noticed that while all the elements of CRP were evident in each lesson, “they were matched with the dynamic of that particular teacher with that particular student”, highlighting the deeply contextual nature of implementing such a process. This process thus allows for the teacher to be pedagogically agile (Carey & Grant, 2013), adapting to the individual needs of a student at any given moment.

Teachers commented on the value provided by the opportunities to collaborate and discuss their teaching in class, further helping them to understand how CRP could be incorporated into the one-to-one lesson context. As self-reflection and teacher transformation are not necessarily intuitive nor always comfortable for teachers, collaborative professional development is a powerful tool for teachers to adopt such an approach effectively (Carey et al., 2018).

**Gauging Student Receptiveness and the Need for Scaffolding**

As with teachers, some students also appeared initially resistant to the process, as indicated by their requests to instead be “told what to do”. While T5 observed that “self-reflection freaked [her students] out”, T3 explained this might stem from “a complete inability [for students] to identify [their learning needs] . . . [because] they clearly haven't ever been asked to think for themselves.” This, she argued, means students may not already possess self-awareness, nor the ability to self-evaluate or articulate their needs. T7 also thought the student-teacher relationship also plays a factor in a student’s ability to share and reflect. This supports findings in a study by Coutts (forthcoming) that indicated a teacher’s approach to lessons impacts a student’s inclination and ability to engage in critical reflection.
Teachers also mentioned the need to be mindful of students’ attitudes at any one moment. As T6 explained, it is important to judge where the students are intellectually and emotionally, and to be mindful that this can change week to week. T4 posited the student’s level of maturity is also a consideration, an insight reflected in prior research (Merriam et al., 2012; Carey et al., 2018). She commented that as a teacher there is a need to balance this approach with more teacher-led approaches until the student “is ready.” In each of these scenarios, teachers realised the need to guide the student through modelling of thought processes and steps, particularly for students who were less familiar with reflecting autonomously.

T2, T3 and T5 each described their approach in these instances, as providing students with ideas about what to focus on, asking their views and reminding them of options explored in previous lessons. Here, the teacher’s role aligns with that of Facilitator in CRP, providing guidance on how to engage with the process. Over time, these students became more confident in articulating and directing teachers to their own specific challenges. As T3 explained,

Now, six months down the track, they're the ones who are coming saying, ‘Well, I want to work on this piece today because I'm having trouble with this. And I want to have a look at this piece.’ So, it's really changed their sense of independence, I think.

T7 also acknowledged that her students had become “more empowered and more assertive” relatively quickly, to the point that she no longer needs to initiate the process. Each focus group had shared experiences of students assuming more responsibility, observed through an increase in students articulating their own specific goals for their lessons.
Language and Feedback

One of the most noticeable self-identified transformations by teachers was the change in language used in lessons, from that of instructive and correctional, to a more inquiring and student-led approach. In one example, CRP training led T3 to notice her habitual pattern of jumping straight in to provide students with her opinion of their work. Lerman and Borstel (2003) argue that providing opinions straight away undermines a student’s ability to think for themselves and creates judgemental undertones, two factors that disempower students and often create resistance to receiving feedback. T3 realised she could instead engage her students by asking them more questions. This helped her to uncover the types of feedback that would be most useful any given moment.

As Dweck (2007) & Green (1986) argue, language choice is important, as it can either create tension and adversely impact a student’s focus, or promote awareness and inherent feedback that can then lead to positive action. This was realised by teachers, with T2 explaining, for example, that rather than correcting a student, he could instead ask a student to focus on a certain technique, without any mention of what was wrong previously. This, he argued, meant the student would not feel judged, but become curious, helping to develop reflective skills. Teachers also started to encourage students to explore options rather than provide a “correct” approach to their practice, and to ask students for their observations before offering their own. This, they explained, helps them to gauge students’ self-awareness and to promote problem solving. As with student ownership of the lesson agenda, this led to a perceived increase in students’ abilities to problem solve independently.
Some teachers also explained that CRP had encouraged them to be specific when providing feedback. This specificity enabled T1 to help students break through plateaus. Specificity of feedback is well documented within education research and literature as promoting deep learning (e.g., Biggs & Tang, 2011; Sadler, 1989), but how this might be executed within a one-to-one music lesson context is less apparent. In these instances, CRP provided teachers with a practical framework, encouraging them to ask specific and open questions and to suspend judgements and a ‘fix-it’ mentality. This was initially challenging for some teachers, however they learned that trust and empowerment could be gateways to engaging students with solutions to their challenges, breaking down traditional stereotypes of the roles of the teacher and students.

**Breaking Stereotypes**

Typically, the traditional one-to-one teaching model for instrumental and vocal students positions the teacher as ‘master’ who has all the information the student requires for their learning. This positions the student and teacher in a hierarchical relationship, with the student being the recipient of the teacher’s knowledge. A transformative approach such as CRP, with its focus on student understanding, leadership and insights, has the power to break down this perception of hierarchy, instead promoting a horizontal relationship in which the exploration of possibilities or perspectives oscillates between that of the student and teacher. (Lerman, 2014).

Given teachers self-identified as coming from learning backgrounds that aligned with the master-apprentice model, it took a change of mindset to trust in students’ abilities to identify their learning needs. For example, T1, T3 and T7 were initially concerned that students would not know what was required for improvement, but found that
honouring students’ perceived challenges is a respectful and inclusive way of guiding students to other challenges that require attention and led to greater student engagement. T3 stated she was amazed at how vastly different students’ perceptions were to hers at any one time. She stated, “They would be worried about the rhythm in this bar, and I would be thinking, ‘well, your breathing is terrible.’” This highlights a discrepancy between what students and teachers deem most problematic at any one time. This teacher, and others in the focus group, further explained that by starting with students’ concerns, they could then more easily direct students to focus on what they suggested required work. Thus, acknowledging students’ feedback and focusing on what is most relevant to them builds rapport and mutual trust in such a way that students more readily engage more broadly.

As the relationship between teacher and students shifted, other teacher barriers that upheld their perceived ‘master’ status started to break down. T2 explained that she is now more inclined to admit to mistakes in front of students, and to share that she herself is also still taking vocal lessons. T4 explained that she is explicitly open to students challenging her, describing this as a “more igniting” way to teach. For T8, this evolution was “difficult” and “confronting”, which he thought was “really, really important”. He continued, “It removes the student-master element of teaching, which I think is a really good thing. It flies in the face of every way we've been taught before.” This does not negate the need to provide guidance, but as T7 articulated, “rather than, ‘I’m telling you what to do’, it’s, ‘I’m going to help you find where you want to go.’” Teachers agreed that there is a respectfulness to this approach that supports and empowers students to become more engaged in their learning.
Conclusions

The findings from this analysis suggest that working forms such as CRP can be beneficial in developing a transformative approach in one-to-one lessons through enhancing teachers’ abilities to use strategies such as critical questioning, collaboration and placing the responsibility for learning with the student. Teachers’ reflections suggest that CRP can also lead to more student autonomy of learning, responsibility and greater student self-awareness in relation to learning needs.

While some teachers experienced an initial discomfort in adapting the CRP process to the one-to-one context, working collaboratively through professional development opportunities assisted them to become more comfortable and confident in using its principles in their teaching practice. It would therefore appear that for transformative learning strategies such as CRP to be effectively implemented, professional development is both beneficial and desirable. This is an important consideration for other institutions seeking to enhance one-to-one teaching and learning approaches and to increase students’ abilities to sustain diverse musical careers.

Given the small scope of this research, there are limitations with regards to the conclusions that can be drawn from this study. Further research is required to understand students’ perceptions of their learning through this process, and to what extent it enhances students’ autonomy and their ability to apply the skills of reflection to other contexts. Such understanding would highlight whether transformative approaches such as CRP are useful in assisting teachers and in turn institutions to help optimise students’ professional lifespan and career opportunities where self-direction and critical thinking are key. While this investigation was conducted within a single institution, there is potential for CRP to not only be applied within instrumental and
vocal contexts in other institutions, but within other educational contexts including higher degree research supervision, workshops and mentoring settings. While acknowledging each learning context is unique, shared understandings of transformative critical response processes will potentially, over time, help ensure that students will have the skills to be better prepared for diverse and changing musical, educational and employment opportunities.

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