Why do this research?

In Queensland’s graduated driver licencing program, learner drivers obtain two hours extra credit for each one hour of professional driving instruction, to a maximum of 30 hours of log book professional driving instruction. However, much remains unknown about what exactly happens during the learner lesson, and very little is understood about higher order instruction during the learner lesson.

What did we do?

Using goPro cameras, six driving instructors recorded 43 driving lessons with learners during a one week period. One camera captured the forward roadway, and a second goPro camera captured the in-cabin communication. Audio was captured via both cameras. The lesson content was transcribed verbatim for a random sample of 10 learner lessons, and the nature of the communication was then analysed.

What did we find?

Instruction related to five main categories.

Instruction number 1 was ‘introductory instruction’, and this captured conversation related to preparing the vehicle for the learner lesson such as where the hands are positioned on the steering wheel and adjusting the seat so that it suits the learner’s physique. Introductory instruction related to 26% of the verbal communication.

Instruction number 2 related to navigation. Helping to navigate related to around 12.5% of the communication, for example, “use the left indicator to tell anyone behind what you are doing”, and “it’s time to get into the right lane and merge as soon as you can where it is safe”.

The third instruction type related to providing warnings, in particular warnings relating to blind-spots and shoulder checks, “so when you go to take off, change lanes, turn, roundabout, you have to do the mirror, indicator and shoulder check”. Warnings related to 15% of the communication.

The fourth category related to positive feedback. For example, acknowledging good manouvres such as changing gears with comments like “that was a real good gear change”, or acknowledging...
their road position in relation to other vehicles such as “your road position is good”. Positive feedback equated to around 10% of communication.

The fifth instruction type was higher order instruction. Higher order instruction related to about a third of the communication, and most commonly featured tips where the instructors gave learners general advice. Typically the word ‘always’ featured; for example, “you need to always look in the direction you are going to go, figure out if you have to stop quick, you might come off the accelerator just in preparation”, and “this is a park so you are going slow enough to brake quickly in case or something ran out”.

What does it mean?

This project served as a pilot for a much larger research project, with this pilot information providing unique inside into what actually happens during a learner driving lesson, a relatively unexplored phenomenon. Ideally, higher order instruction emerges from events that happen during the supervised drive. Therefore, this larger project will examine exactly what happens during higher order instruction, in addition to identifying missed opportunities for higher order instruction.