

Teaching Teaching to Undergraduates: A Case Study of an Independent Study in Music History Pedagogy

C. Nicholas Godsoe, Musicology Department, University of Toronto
Elizabeth A. Wells, Music Department, Mount Allison University

Abstract

Teachers at the post-secondary level are not taught to teach, except in rare cases in which graduate programs offer teaching training as part of their coursework. With no previous training, many students who go on to graduate school are often asked to teach undergraduates. For those who go on to teach in high school, middle school, and elementary school settings, education degrees prepare students for certain kinds of pedagogy, but miss out on the rich opportunities that are afforded by the university environment and its particular way of engaging with adult students. For those who go on to business, the arts, or science careers, the supervision of direct reports, junior colleagues, and employees is changing from a top-down authority-based relationship to more “teaching”—an exploring, developing and sharing relationship of peers. As well, students who are seeking graduate school acceptance need an arsenal of skills and competencies to compete for places, and training in teaching undergraduates strengthens the dossiers of these students. This paper outlines an independent study course in pedagogy that transformed both participants. Course objectives, assignments, feedback, and evaluation as well as caveats for those wanting to design a similar course, are described.

Key Words: Independent study; Teaching development; Teaching practicum; Teaching in the humanities; Music history teaching

Preamble

This paper summarizes an interactive, discussion-based session and we have therefore attempted to replicate the mood and intent of the session by alternating voices. In this way we can most clearly demonstrate the collaborative nature of the project and our presentation of it.

Elizabeth: Context

In the fall of 2014, a promising undergraduate student who was destined for a graduate career as a musicologist, approached me to undertake an independent study project in teaching. Although I do not have educational degrees, I was very familiar with the teaching issues in my discipline, having taught for over twenty years, completed over twenty publications and presentations on teaching, and having earned four teaching awards, including the 3M National Teaching Fellowship. The student had already showed himself to be a gifted teacher in his role as my teaching assistant in a first-year foundation course in music history. He was enthusiastic, engaged, prepared, and had a natural way of bringing subjects alive for my students. I thought he would make an ideal independent study student, and I set to

work to create a course syllabus that would put him through his paces while allowing me to reflect on what elements I thought were important for an emerging teacher to master. The course became MUSC 4951: Music History Pedagogy. My objectives were very clear. I wanted to introduce the student to general readings and philosophy on teaching; I thought it was important for him to discover why he wanted to follow this particular path. I wanted to provide opportunities for him to create learning instruments for imaginary courses. I wanted him to have some experience with syllabus design and curriculum exercises, and I also wanted him to practice teaching with feedback from me. Because I teach in a university with many gifted teachers, I wanted him to observe some of these people in action and talk to them about their pedagogy. And, I wanted the course to comprise a series of shorter assignments that would allow him to constantly develop his skills and ideas.

I designed the course in three parts, a form I prefer to the usual two-part course with a mid-term in the middle. This allows me to avoid conflicting with other mid-terms, and to organize the course around smaller, more manageable units. The three sections became: Foundations, Putting it Together, and Practicum. In Foundations, I assigned a number of readings about teaching in general, and teaching music history in particular. The first week's reflection was entitled "Why Am I Here? The Heart of Higher Education", taking Parker Palmer's recent publication of the same name as a starting point. In week two, I assigned readings on issues and contexts for Arts and Humanities teaching. I wanted the student to understand what particular aspects and challenges come in teaching the humanities. The following two weeks comprised readings from two central texts on pedagogy in my field, *The Music History Classroom*, edited by James Davis, and *Teaching Music History*, edited by Mary Natvig. Each of these works include essays from prominent musicologists on style and substance of music history teaching. These readings covered everything from special topics in music history to teaching non-majors. In the second section of the course, "Putting it Together" (the title borrowed from a song by Stephen Sondheim from *Sunday in the Park with George*), I asked my student to start applying a little of what he had learned and thought about. We started with course design, and the tackling of curricular issues. From there, we went on to readings and assignments used in music history classrooms, to assessment and evaluation, and on to lecturing, blended courses, and online learning.

In the final segment, the Practicum, I asked my student to observe master teachers and to interview them about their philosophy and techniques. Two more weeks consisted of him teaching in my courses, with guest observers who would give comments along with mine, and finally to work on a final project: a teaching dossier. The end of the course was marked by a public presentation by both of us for the university community on the project and what we had learned. In this way, I took him from the very roots of teaching, through practical and applied work, and resulting in what amounted to a conference paper, which we submitted to the AAU Teaching Showcase and delivered in October of 2015.

Nick: Context

Although musicology often implies historical research, I have always found myself drawn more to issues surrounding its pedagogy. I was interested in pursuing this independent study because I believe that exploring new and different ways to teach musicology is crucial to the disciplines' ongoing stability, relevance and growth. Research in the field is certainly thrilling, but if we do not continually search for means to make this research truly matter to anyone but academics, are these contributions really the most productive they can be? I asked Dr. Wells if she would supervise this independent study because I wanted to better understand how to bring musicology into the realm of interest and practical application for undergraduate students. The outcomes of this course has opened my eyes to the unique ways that we can go about accomplishing this, and has sparked a passion for pedagogy that will stay with me throughout my ongoing studies in the field.

Nick: Assignments

Toward a Philosophy of Teaching

For the first assignment of the course, I was asked to reflect on the role of musicology in the post-secondary, liberal arts environment and from this, develop a personal philosophy of teaching. I began by considering how music may specifically lend itself to successful student engagement, and then how I as a pedagogue could go about utilizing this in the classroom. I quickly came to realize that as a teacher of music, I am in a unique and exciting position. If I am teaching a class, whether it be to music majors or non-music majors, each student will have at least some interest in some kind of music. Of course, it is not that easy; just because students enjoy and relate to some music does not mean they will enjoy or relate to the music I will be teaching. This is especially problematic when introducing students to new kinds of music that may be outside of their comfort zone. To many students unfamiliar with the genre, classical music can be perceived as elitist and antiquated, which can create a wall of inaccessibility between the music and the student. Recognizing this, I am not discouraged. Rather, this informs my pedagogical philosophy. Although I cannot assume my students relate to all music, I can assume my students relate to some music. Drawing on this, I can assume my students could relate to any music. As a teacher, I believe it is my job to expose the underlying musical excitement that I know my students have, and help apply their passion for the music they love to different and new musical genres and styles.

I aim to achieve this with a holistic approach to teaching music. Music, although certainly vast in its manifestations, is also deeply connected and unified on many levels. When I teach, I strive to expose commonalities inherent in music in an effort to break down divisionary boundaries that are often so vigorously enforced when teaching music. Using more familiar or accessible music as a point of departure when introducing students to a new type of music, for example, will bring the students understanding of music they feel comfortable with to new musical genres and styles.

A View from the Crowd

This assignment asked me to put myself in the place of the student, and question what is most important for students when learning about music history. In an effort to get a true view from the crowd, I asked many of my peers about what they thought of music history classes. The responses were overwhelmingly consistent. Many seemed frustrated with the emphasis music history classes place on the memorization of details. Others seemed concerned with musicology's apparent distance from other musical pursuits. Others lamented on the challenges of creating quality written work. Most profoundly, one student responded: "It feels like what we're taught is unnecessary to the things we do and the goals we strive to achieve." This led me to contemplate: as musicologists, what *are* the things we do, and what *are* the goals we strive to achieve? Although these may seem like obvious questions to consider when teaching any discipline, it surprises me how often this can be overlooked when music history is taught.

So what do we do? As musicians, we perform. As musicologists, generally, we research and think about music, and share our findings with others through writing, presenting and teaching. I believe students need all of this in the music history classroom; as a pedagogue, I want to bring all of this together. I want to bring the element of performance my student's value into the realm of practical, transferrable skills that are actually used in musicology. For music students—whether they plan for a life in academia or not—the musicology classroom is the place to bolster their research and writing skills; skills that will benefit not only musicology classes, but also their overall success as professional musicians and individuals. I would bring the performative nature of music together with practical musicological skills by

having students “perform” musicology in a sort of musicological studio class. This would involve having students give sample oral presentations or share excerpts of writing. Then, similar to a music performance studio class, I would open the floor to the class to provide constructive comments and feedback. This brings the study of music history into the realm of both the present and the practical. Not only does this give music history the frame of a “performance class” that music students would recognize and value, but it also brings a sense of legitimacy and relevance to music history that many students all too often believe is absent. No longer is musicology strictly the study of music history, but it is a place for students to practice becoming better researchers, writers, and presenters. And, therefore, better musicologists.

Specialized Topic Teaching

One of my core musicological research interests involves the relationship between classical and popular music, and this assignment invited me to consider how I might bring this scholarly interest into a pedagogical context. Including popular music in the music history classroom is, at this point, necessary. The musicology classroom is, for most students, their only exposure to the discipline, and therefore their understanding of what musicology is will be shaped and informed by these experiences. The intentional exclusion of popular music from academic music classes may cause students to, regretfully, question their own personal musical preferences. This could also perpetuate to students the notion that musicology is not concerned with the study of non-classical music. This may have been true in the past, but today things have changed. This awareness should be reflected in our teaching. This assignment, then, invited me to think about how I would bring popular music into a general music history or music appreciation course.

The assignment encourages students to respond to both classical and popular music with critical, evaluative and personal lenses; a practical writing exercise that is suitable for any music history survey or music appreciation class. The student will begin by selecting four pieces of music; two “classical” pieces and two “popular” pieces, by the students’ own definition. Each pair of popular and classical pieces should contain a “good” and “bad” piece of music, again, according to the students’ own definition. Then, the student will articulate why they believe each of the pieces they have selected are either good or bad using musical language. Following this will be two comparative sections: students will compare the similarities between the pairs classical and popular pieces they have labeled as good and bad respectively. In these comparative sections, the student should consider if there are any similarities between the two works, and describe if this speaks to their personal musical taste. The assignment ends by asking the student to reflect on their personal music taste by articulating what exactly draws them to the music they love, and turns them away from the music they dislike. Students are encouraged to consider how or if such musical attractants or deterrents transcend the boundary between classical and popular music.

Beyond bringing popular music into the classroom, this assignment encourages students to articulate and defend a musical opinion, a challenge for those who are not used to writing about this abstract art form. Musical preference is a largely inward and personal experience, and encouraging students to openly discuss this can be difficult. By asking students to discuss the music they both love and dislike, students may feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings about music in writing.

First Week Classroom Activities

In this exercise, I was asked to consider how I would begin a Twentieth-Century music history course. Teaching music from this century is a challenge because the neat narrative of music history falls apart. Music suddenly shoots into various new and different directions; no longer is there a standardized,

sensible order to present the information. From the first day of the class, I want my students to have an understanding that—although much of the class would be devoted to learning about the art music tradition of the 20th century—a stylistic binary against this complex music develops simultaneously. Popular music becomes established and widespread alongside developments in art music. It is important for students to be reminded that, while we are talking about the complex music composed by the likes of Stravinsky, Stockhausen and Crumb, this is also when hugely popular and influential musical movements such as jazz, the British invasion and disco are also underway making international waves. I find that Twentieth-Century music courses are often so caught up in trying to teach the big names in art music that they fail to consider popular musical movements whose societal and cultural influence are arguably much more profound and widespread. By casually introducing this idea of two strands of musical development in the twentieth century—complexity and accessibility—at the beginning of the course, my hope is that students will go into the course with a contextual awareness of the disparate and polarized nature of music in the century.

Ideally, I would spend the first two classes of the course on establishing this context. Each class would investigate two decades. From each decade, I would select a representative “complex” and “accessible” piece, and play them for the class, providing a short background on each piece with general information on the style, composer, and context. Playing music written in the 1930s by Gershwin and Bartok respectively, for example, will immediately paint a more representative picture of Western music in that decade. This shows students that many musical trends we often associate as very separate are actually occurring simultaneously, while also capturing the students’ attention and exposing them to the exciting music that will be analyzed in more detail later in the course.

Learning Activity for Non-Music Majors

In a course for non-music majors, you need to find ways to make classical music come alive, be “relevant” and connect with the students’ own experiences. This is because classical music, for those who are not familiar with the genre, carries lots of baggage; it is often viewed as intimidating, abstract and irrelevant. In this learning activity, my goal is to challenge these conceptions. The activity will provide students with an understanding of classical music’s relationship with the public throughout history, and will encourage students to contemplate how classical music, in its provenance, may have been more in line with our contemporary understanding of popular music rather than our contemporary understanding of classical music. The class would begin with a discussion about the contemporary differences between classical and popular music. Based on interviews with various music and non-music students, I imagine the discussion would end up looking something like this:

<i>Differences between classical and popular music?</i>	CLASSICAL MUSIC	POPULAR MUSIC
Who listens to it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Upper class - Older people - Conservative, sophisticated people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Middle/low class - Younger people - Less sophisticated people
What is attending a concert like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More proper - Dress codes - Audience expectations, strict protocols 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More casual - Crowded - Dancing, cheering - Loose/no protocols

<p>What do people like about the music?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appreciation of particular famous composers - More conservative, tame, safe, "pure" - Less infected with sexuality, the media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appreciation of particular artist/band - Fandom - More liberal, with the times - Accessible and relevant content
--	---	---

Based on the class's feedback, I would use examples from the history of classical music to show students that "classical music," in its own historical context, was actually more similar to how we contemporarily perceive "popular music," according to the observations about popular music just established. The instructor simply needs to expose this. One of the most obvious examples of this is the history of opera. The ubiquitous nature of opera in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is hardly comparable to opera's highbrow place in culture today. Opera, before the twentieth century, was largely a form of widely consumed popular music. Another example is "Lisztomania." Franz Liszt, a famous composer and virtuosic pianist from the nineteenth century, had an impressive following of fans that is known today as Lisztomania. I would show the class how Liszt was, in the Romantic period, comparable to a contemporary rock star. Using primary source documents, I would show the class the hysterical reactions from female audience members at Liszt's piano concerts; girls swooning over him, fighting over his disposed cigar butts and handkerchiefs, fashioning jewellery from his broken piano strings, and trying to obtain pieces of his hair. I would draw parallels between this and more contemporary examples of fandom in popular music culture, such as that experienced by Elvis, the Beatles ("Beatlemania"), and Justin Bieber.

By showing students that classical music has not always been the way it is contemporarily perceived, it will make the study of classical music more engaging and relevant to non-music majors. I would hope that after this class, students would start to question their own perceptions of classical music, and be more open-minded and interested in learning about the genre.

Nick: Outcomes

The skills fostered in this course became evident this past fall as a first year graduate student in musicology at the University of Toronto, where I was assigned two simultaneous teaching assistant positions. Rather than attempting to teach myself how to effectively grade student assignments, design tutorial sessions, and search for my pedagogical voice all for the first time alongside other new responsibilities, I was able to focus on refining these skills and becoming a stronger, more nuanced teacher. Most importantly, though, this course confirmed that I am passionate about undergraduate music education. In this independent study I was challenged to think about how to make musicology more exciting, accessible and useful for students, and this sense of experimentalism will stay with me throughout my career. After this course, I felt energized and excited about my upcoming educational endeavors, and I look forward to continually improving my teaching.

Elizabeth: Evaluation

Teaching evaluations and testimonials from the students summed up what they thought of being taught by Nick.

"I liked Nick's approach to teaching the class; he was easy to follow and made good points that were made clear."

“We love Nick! He’s very approachable, seems passionate about his studies and is very encouraging as a mentor.”

“Nick was very confident and engaging. He asked the right questions to ensure understandability.”

“Nick’s style is extremely clear, well-elaborated and engaging.”

“Nick makes sure everyone is getting what he is saying and engages the class with thought-provoking questions.”

Although this course was designed specifically for music history, I believe that a course of this kind could be adapted to any discipline or area of study. There needs to be a balance between philosophy and

Reflection as well as hands-on creativity and learning activity development. Essential to the success of such a course is a practicum and it is best if the student can watch master teachers, who are usually easy to find in any university or college. The final project should reflect what goes into a good teaching dossier: philosophy, practices, evaluation and reflection. Meetings every week or every other week are essential and reaction papers to readings help to focus the student on the readings of the week. Although the activities and assignments presented in this article are very specific to our field, they could easily be adapted to other disciplines.

References

- Davis, J. (Ed.). (2012). *The music history classroom*. Farnham: Ashgate.
 Natvig, M. (Ed.). (2002). *Teaching music history*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
 Palmer, P. (2010). *The heart of higher education: A call to renewal*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Author Biographies

C. Nicholas Godsoe is currently pursuing a Masters in Musicology at the University of Toronto. He graduated from Mount Allison University with a Bachelor of Music in spring 2015, with concentrations in tuba performance and musicology. Nick is interested in the study of popular music, specifically its intersections with classical music and the cultural implications of such intersections. In the summer of 2016 Nick will be working as an administrator for the International Federation of National Teaching Fellows, and will travel to London in September to assist with the federation launch. As a tutorial instructor at the University of Toronto, Nick strives to bring new meanings, relevancy and applications of musicology into the classroom.

Elizabeth A. Wells is Pickard-Bell Chair in Music at Mount Allison University. She has authored over twenty presentations, workshops, and papers on teaching and learning. Her research interests include American and British musical theatre, opera at mid-century, and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. She is former Chair of the Council of 3M National Teaching Fellows.