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Using Cohorts and Podcasts for Learning Global Music

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Abstract

The aim of this autoethnographic account follows the journey of an instructor's pedagogical shifts to illustrate the importance of engaged learning. Even for music majors, examining and understanding cultural concepts outside of Western traditions is challenging. Studying global music-cultures requires, at minimum, a patchwork of basic knowledge of a culture's musical practice, geography, political structure, history, and religion or belief systems. These challenges can stymie learning resulting in either a teacher who teaches with an ethnomusicological approach beyond students' abilities or a broad survey course void of academic rigor that leaves students occupied with dreaded busy work. To sidestep these seemingly unavoidable pathways, the author developed a student-focused learning approach to exploring world music through engaging and creative projects for a better learning experience. Questions raised include the validity of traditional training in music school, challenging the notion of lecturing from a textbook, and seeking to collect data to better understand how deeply students are engaged in cooperative learning.

Transformation to Performer-Scholar

I have been formally trained as a performer, more specifically, as a performer of the Western classical canon of commonly named great composers such as Johannes Brahms, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Ottorino Respighi, and Camille Saint-Saëns. My proudest moments centered around prize-winning competitions, successful auditions, and sharing the world's stage with renowned artists like Renée Fleming, Itzhak Perlman, and Emanuel Ax. I studied under some of the most distinguished performers in the world including János Starker, Joshua Bell, and Emmanuel Pahud.

It is never easy making a career as a classical performing artist, yet I persevered, lived through my starving artist phase, and managed to secure positions as both a performer and a teacher. Nearly my entire life I lassoed my dreams, pulling them ever closer to the realm of reality, feeling as if my accomplishments were crescendoing to a tangible mass. After spending many years working abroad, I returned to the United States in August 2019 when I joined the faculty at a liberal arts institution in a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor of Music. At the moment when I felt most confident in my abilities as a highly specialized and expertly trained performer, reality seemingly shrouded me with a fog of uncertainty. Surely, teaching my personal craft was not the problem. Rather, this shift to a diminished-like doubtfulness grew from an assigned academic course—The Diverse Worlds of Music.

How was I, a classically trained performer of a Western art form, going to teach a course on global music? During the decade I owed to earning my education I had several questions post-graduation. For one, was I trained correctly? The classical music world as an industry witnessed a significant change in the early twenty-first century. Much of the industry suffered from some loss of interest from the general public. As Kolb (2001) noted, “there is an audience that can replace the aging subscriber group [who are] demographically similar to subscribers...because they have a broad-ranging interest in both classical and popular music, [therefore] traditional classical music marketing efforts will not reach them” (p. 58). My entire orbit was tilted, and while I could feel myself sliding off the surface, I hung my talents on a single chord in hopes that I could prevail as my teachers had before me.

In this article, I illustrate how my teaching has dramatically changed through an autoethnographic account of my experiences with one course at my home institution. I will detail my journey from classical performer to classroom teacher noting my failures, accomplishments, and future research goals. My pedagogical transformation outlines how I became a more engaging and inclusive teacher through the use of podcasts within the context of a cohort-learning design. I raise questions about my traditional training in music school, challenge the notion of lecturing behind a textbook, and seek to collect data to better understand how much my students are engaged in cooperative learning.

Imposter Syndrome is Real

Beard (2007) stated, “the journey from graduate school to gainful employment in academe can be long, complex, and at times disheartening” (p. 40). I knew many highly talented recent graduates of music programs who wished to be college teachers, but many found work as adjunct faculty in fields outside of their sub-discipline. Music administrators, Stepniak and Sirotin (2019), stated that university-level professors of performance studies found “programming within their own institutions” not viable based on the “repertoire and discipline worthy of lifelong examination” and questioned why students need to closely model the learning and experiences of their teachers to earn or maintain a job in their profession (p. 9).

I have not been trained in ethnomusicology, and to complicate matters, my institution prides itself on excellent undergraduate teaching and houses sophisticated centers for teaching and writing on campus. I never attended a liberal arts college, nor did I have significant training as a teacher. So, how was I going to teach a group of scholarly-minded students the diverse worlds of anything outside of my specialty?

Scholars in the field of psychology recognized the negative impact of Imposter Syndrome among individuals of various fields (Fields et al., 2021; Gardner, 2016; Haney et al., 2018; Ochs, 2022). Sakulku and Alexander (2011) stated, “individuals with the Impostor Phenomenon experience intense feelings that their achievements are undeserved and worry that they are likely to be exposed as a fraud” (p. 75). I was experiencing this phenomenon for the first time in my professional career. Most of my anxiety stemmed from knowing that each of my students was taking a class with other professors in the department, and I was convinced those professors’ classes were far superior to mine because I was teaching so removed from my specialty within the field. Sakulku and Alexander

(2011) stated, “impostors often secretly harbour the need to be the very best compared with their peers” (p. 79). For me, this was true. Musicians are highly competitive creatures.

The Traditional Approach

Famed ethnomusicologist Rice (2003) described his “fundamental method” as incorporating “participant-observation at music events, interviewing, and audio and video recordings, for acquiring culturally situated knowledge of a music tradition” which is similar to traditional field research (p. 65). My fundamental method was lacking in all fundamentals of global music. Knowing much about Western music but not much about world music I decided to make a foolproof plan. Like most foolproof plans, mine was foolish but at that time I only had one semester to develop an entire course. I located the most promising textbooks, musical examples, and web materials for an engaging course. I took the time to carefully design all of my quizzes and exams and wrote a well-structured syllabus. I dedicated more time than I anticipated to reading extensively about music-cultures I never knew existed. Did this mean I had done enough to prepare?

Spring 2020 comes and I am finally ready to launch my course. I regained some confidence in my ability to teach, and on a maiden voyage across the globe with more than one hundred students, we dove into the textbook and PowerPoint slides. I lectured intelligently and explained difficult vocabulary with other, more difficult vocabulary. We listened to musical examples together as a class, where I instructed students to listen critically. And, by week three of the semester, everything was falling apart.

Students did not come to class, regardless of the attendance policy, and those who did come to class appeared spiritless and unimpressed. As a whole, the class was poorly prepared and few students produced quality work. I was dismayed and confused by the actions, or inactions, of my students. Gump’s (2004) research with students’ attendance, in multiple sections, showed that “students are more likely to come to class if they find ‘the instructor/material interesting’ [and less likely] ‘because attendance is part of the grade’” (p. 158). Obviously, the attendance policy was the least of my worries. I had much larger problems than I originally calculated. Thankfully, I found help on campus related to engaging my students in class.

In my first year, I joined a faculty learning community for new teachers through my institution’s teaching center. Bringing my issues to the group I quickly learned not only about the learning culture of my institution but also about what other teachers are doing in their classrooms. The changes I made in my pedagogy were directly linked to how students learn.

Essentially, students do not want a passive learning environment, instead, the dynamics within the classroom are of vital importance to how they experience, retain, and transfer knowledge. Gosper and Ifenthaler (2014) found that “understanding students’ experiences and managing their expectations are integral to the provision of an effective and engaging curriculum” (p. 4). From my perspective, I delivered an engaging learning experience. Students watched fascinating videos, listened to music from cultures from around the world, and read a textbook that included a comprehensive companion website. Unfortunately, all of these activities were generated by me (or

from other sources) and students were spending most of their time sitting and listening.

My entire approach was flawed. Teaching from a textbook, even a book that I found to be well-written, was the least dynamic experience I could offer. My thoughtfully designed PowerPoint slides were also a big flop. Again, they were static and void of engagement. What was worse perhaps was my quizzes and tests. Another strike against me that I would not realize until after the semester concluded and I reviewed my course evaluations. What I needed was more engagement, a way to get students actively involved in their learning. Johnson and Johnson (2008) encouraged students to “take an active part in their learning, rather than being passive while the teacher lectures or engages in other forms of direct teaching.”

The middle of the semester would have been an excellent time for me to make a quick pedagogical shift, at least I could salvage some of the course and regain the attention of my students. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe and the world changed nearly instantaneously. Now, I had to convert an already floundering class into an online course in seven days.

Much can be written about this online-conversion period of my life, but for the sake of brevity, know that I ported all of my highly static slides into online learning modules and most of the class met asynchronously for the remainder of the term. The exams were a disaster. Naturally, I curved most of the scores into some form of a passable grade, though I felt like I completely failed my students. In many ways I did fail them, but not for lack of trying to make the best learning experience possible.

Pandemic aside, I learned several things about teaching at my institution. Firstly, teaching from a textbook with PowerPoint slides was not going to work. Secondly, students expected far more from me regarding a dynamic and engaging classroom experience. Thirdly, the quizzes and exams I was writing did not align with the typical model of assessment for an intercultural creative arts course. By now summer was blazing and I had just three months before my second attempt at teaching this course.

Shift to Cohort Design

During the early summer of 2020, I read my course evaluations and reflected on how to improve my course. What I learned during the 2019–2020 academic year in my faculty learning community helped me greatly, including attending the Original Lilly Conference on College Teaching. What I gathered was a wealth of information both in the form of usable teaching techniques and from my lived experiences. I was beginning to believe that I could make this pedagogical shift and begin to emerge from my fog of perceived ineptitude.

One of the most coincidentally important pedagogical shifts I made in the course occurred only because of the shift to online learning during the pandemic. Once my course unexpectedly changed to an online delivery mode, I immediately perceived a drop in student engagement. Meeting the needs of over one hundred students online was a seemingly insurmountable task. The university already announced that the vast majority of classes would remain online during Fall 2020. I already knew that an asynchronous online course would not be suitable.

Therefore, I needed a solution to effectively teach in an online, synchronous environment.

I asked the department chair to reduce the number of students in my course. I was assigned 90 students for the upcoming semester, still a large number for an online course. Nonetheless, I decided to utilize the breakout room feature of Zoom. This would allow me to divide students into smaller groups. As Cano (2022) remarked, “online distance learning allows passive learners to articulate their ideas and reservations” (p. 544). I have always aimed to be a more inclusive teacher and I was quickly learning how inclusivity could be addressed in the online learning space.

In one study, Zoom’s advanced features were used to engage students in active learning. The breakout rooms were used to facilitate real-time group assignments, which promoted higher cognitive learning. Overall, the class grade averages from the year on Zoom were not significantly different from the year before, during face-to-face instruction (Singhal, 2020). This gave me newfound optimism that I could markedly improve the learning experience for my students.

With a smaller number of students and powerful online tools, I began to further refine this approach. I conceptualized a kind of miniature research group, a virtual environment where students could work together in a more intimate setting. The breakout rooms afforded me smaller groups of students yet I could only be in one room at a given time. Also, I was not exactly sure how to prevent students from turning off their screens and waiting for the time to pass during class. Designing an engaging learning environment where students would be encouraged to participate was a necessity. I felt the key to this mystery was harbored in the design of the student groups. The next step was to decide how to divide the groups most effectively.

There are many approaches to deciding how to form student groups. Before I was able to decide which approach was best, I first needed to decide what I wished them to learn. In my course evaluations from the first year, many students remarked how memorization of course content for exams was consuming the time they could have used engaging in other material. As musicians, we memorize an incredible amount of music throughout a given period. Initially, I did not understand the grievance. Again, I was focused on experiencing this class as a musician and not as a student, most likely a non-music major, engaging with the material for the first time.

After much consideration, I finally realized that I did not want my students to memorize anything for this class. What I actually wanted my students to do is show up, listen critically, take notes, and engage with one another. As Bunce (2009) stated, “When students do review the notes, they may have lost all recall of what connects the facts and concepts written in their notes, leading to a strategy of memorization rather than understanding for either succeeding or just surviving in the course” (p. 675). It was most important to me that students learned something transferrable and developed an intercultural awareness.

After consulting with several of my colleagues, we all agreed that having a textbook for students to use as a main point of reference was good practice. Considering this topic further, I decided that the text I was using was the best choice for my students. Therefore, I decided to use the text but in a completely different way. The textbook

is organized into chapters by geographical location all written by different authors. It provides vocabulary specific to many musical practices and traditions from a given region and includes a companion website with audio examples. As a resource of reference, it is a solid tool. Due to how it is organized, the book does not make connections between cultures on specific topics. And this aspect—cross-cultural connections—was what I wanted my students to learn. By relying on the text to do this for me, I was asking students to make connections across chapters without supporting their learning with appropriate assignments.

This is not a groundbreaking pedagogical idea, but I decided to stop assigning chapters of the book for reading and study. Instead, I would take a few pages from each chapter to make topical connections. I will discuss this aspect of my course design later.

I wanted my students to prepare well for class, which meant they needed to listen to audio materials and read the assigned pages of the text before our synchronous meeting. Aagaard et al. (2014) stated that students “generally preferred the use of group discussion and application of material to real-life” (p. 138). Therefore, I hoped that working within a cohort would encourage students to come to class prepared for a discussion.

Once I discovered what I wanted students to learn I needed to decide how I wanted them to learn. As already stated, I am not an ethnomusicologist, but I did want my students to study developments in various musical cultures and how society, religion, economy, politics, education, and like factors impact traditions. How was I going to teach students anthropological views of global music traditions without being an expert?

Given that I have many cultures to explore and only fourteen weeks to teach, I realized that expertise may not be the most important marker. Instead, exploration and exposure seemed more appropriate for my learning outcomes. I wanted my students to engage in some undergraduate research, even if it was more breadth than depth. To reorganize the curriculum of studies I broke my course resources into topical themes. Instead of learning from expert knowledge, my students engaged in light research to form a broader understanding of global music-cultures. So then, how did I finally group my students for optimal learning?

A Diverse Roster of Students

My course roster is comprised of music majors and non-music majors from all four years of undergraduate classes. This class is offered as a general education course nestled in the liberal arts core curriculum. All students at the university must choose a creative arts course, my course being one of several options. Similarly, the music curriculum required all music majors to register for at least one global music experience.

I decided to use that incredibly diverse course roster to my advantage. After all, this was *The Diverse Worlds of Music*, so I might as well use my diverse course roster to accomplish the intended learning goals. The course roster lists the student's major(s) and minor(s). I first made generic study groupings such as STEM fields or business. Then, I thought about what roles might each of these young scholars be best suited for in the course given the research topics. I deduced that I needed a total of six roles: ethnomusicologist (music and arts), shaman

(religion), ambassador (culture and humanities), historian (history and society), economist (business and economics), and politician (leadership and government structure).

I then created groupings of six students, each assigned one role, based on their major field of study. The art education major became an ethnomusicologist, the international studies major a shaman, the classical studies major became a cultural ambassador, the future social worker was now a historian, the human capital management major became an economist, and the sports leadership major a politician. This was far from perfect, but I was able to gamify learning, create an engaging dynamic within the course, and allowed students to bridge the void between their major and learning about global music.

Without oversimplifying the complexities of studying global music-cultures I wanted to offer bite-sized learning for understanding in 14 weeks to 90 students of different majors. Each group included one of the six roles and was named cohorts after important global musical centers, such as Cartagena, Beijing, and New Orleans. These cohorts worked equally towards a common goal throughout the semester. I hoped that this collegial bond would create a mutually respectable work environment for all members. With my newly-formed groupings of six students, I was edging closer to an engaging learning model one might say was fun.

Maximizing Cohorts with Podcasts

Reorganization of Course Material

Late in the summer of 2020, I began updating my syllabus with my newly designed course topics. I decided to group course topics into four main units: (a) Inclusivity and Exclusivity: Music and Society, (b) Religion, Spirituality, and Ecstasy in Music, (c) Global Music: The Spectacle, and (d) Colonial Impacts, Globalization, and Cultural Influence. Now that I had regrouped my course materials, I carefully divided the course readings from the textbook into smaller sections.

For example, I taught for one week on “Effects of Urbanization on Music” which included discussions on how the phenomena of urbanization created genres of musical hybridity in Mexico, Columbia, and Brazil. Students explored how European music was introduced to the Americas through the slave trade routes, mixed with native music cultures, and was deeply shaped by the musical traditions of enslaved Africans. Beyond discussing the creation of hybrid music genres like cumbia, nortec, and forró we discussed the impacts of the slave trade and analyzed modern lyrics that reflect on this violent past. In addition, we discussed the mass migration of South Americans from rural areas to urban centers, thus creating genres like tango.

I noticed two simultaneous actions in play. On the one hand, I was covering a wider variety of materials but on the other hand, I noticed students were more attentive and engaged in class activities. My instinct would have been to avoid covering a wider range of topics in favor of learning more in-depth about a single topic, for example, the music of South Asia. But the music of South Asia itself is too large and, even worse, less specific and less memorable than the week I spent teaching the revised version of that lecture entitled “The Great Partition,” where I linked colonization, religious practice, and the impacts of Islamic music on Hindustani in South Asia.

I found that I could go bigger and broader, instead of smaller and deeper, and achieved better results with student attentiveness. Also, the general quality of student work improved, including written assignments. I believe many current teachers could recollect several courses they took in college without a single, memorable learning moment. I did not want my class to be an empty shell on a transcript. It was my goal for students to take what they learned in my course and make connections in another field of study. This transferable knowledge across the curriculum should be at the heart of a liberal education.

Another aspect that I changed—I threw out the big vocabulary. I decided that my non-music majors would most likely never need to recite the names of every instrument in Javanese gamelan. Nor would my music education majors often need to explain the complexities of sub-Saharan African drumming circles to a group of students. Instead, I wanted my students to learn about music, not as an international language (because it is not), but as a weapon, an extension of a political arm, a device to divide communities of the faithful, or as an exclusive thread from heaven unwoven only in dreams. Essentially, I wanted my cohorts to be truth seekers empowered with knowledge of how the world of music around them was created. This meant that students were going to learn about traditional music-cultures but also about slavery, colonization, canonization, Westernization, globalization, and music as propaganda.

Using Podcasts for Engaged Learning

In the Spring of 2021, I participated in a faculty learning community fellowship program at my institution hosted by the writing center. This program focused on how we, as faculty, can help our students write better. It was an intensive experience that required a great deal of time, thinking, and retooling of course materials. There were three key takeaways from this fellowship that reshaped how I view writing in my classroom. First, exposure to different genres of writing is just as important as perfecting a long-form paper. Second, the ideas of threshold concepts and prior knowledge. Third, and perhaps most importantly for me, writing is not a natural process—it is something all of us must practice.

I often complained to myself about the quality of work my students submitted. However, after workshopping my assignments through the fellowship program, I realized that students were only writing as well as my assignments would allow them to write. I was composing vague assignments that asked too many questions or were simply poorly constructed. I asked too much of the student in many cases, forgetting about the experience of first-time learners of the subject material. To make matters worse, my assignments were completely lacking in creativity.

Oliveros (2005) stated hearing is “the physical means that enable perception” (p. 13). I wanted my students to experience global music-cultures through sound much like musicians do, so what is one possible way to integrate reading and writing into this experience? My answer was the podcast because it integrated both writing and music without expert knowledge of musicianship.

Cooper et. al (2009) notes that using podcasts in educational contexts has a multitude of positive impacts. Our

student populous does not all learn in the same manner, for example, those who learn by digesting smaller amounts of information or those who learn best in a particular environment outside of the classroom. Podcasts provide educational mobility within an engaging format of information delivery where students can learn by walking across the campus or while on the road. Furthermore, podcasts are proven to enhance reflection and communication while developing crucial skills such as critical thinking, time management, and problem-solving. Finally, podcasting is an excellent tool for alleviating anxiety with greater inclusivity (Cooper et al., 2009).

I thought about how musicians experience their craft and compiled a list of the most universally common practices. Musicians must listen, collaborate, practice, and perform (or produce). The podcast project offers many engaging learning processes all of which a complete novice can employ. My students were to listen critically to the assigned musical materials (listen), write a script together (collaborate), rehearse the script (practice), and produce the podcast episode (perform). Each cohort was to produce one episode for each of the course units.

I built each assignment in the following way. First, students were to read materials from the textbook and perhaps watch some online content before coming to class. During class, I would deliver a short mini-lecture of five to eight minutes on a topic. Then, cohort groups would work together on posed critical questions. Usually, the class would reunite for a short group discussion via Mentimeter.com or another such interactive tool. Second, after class students would listen to a podcast related to the material at hand. For example, after a lecture on Islamic music during the Arab Spring, students listened to the 2019 episode “War of the Worlds” from NPR’s podcast Throughline, which discussed how music was transformed throughout the long history of the Sunni-Shia divide (Arablouei & Abdelfatah, 2019–present). Third, using Google Docs, I scaffolded scriptwriting assignments for each unit.

Regarding the writing process, podcasts usually include a transcript, which is another important tool for students to analyze when constructing their own projects. I encouraged students to first listen to the podcast episode on their own time, away from home, perhaps on a walk or between classes. Then, come back to the transcript of the podcast. I asked questions like ‘what was a memorable point made by the podcast host?’ or ‘at one point in the podcast did you stop paying attention?’ Then, I would have students identify in the transcript which part of the podcast was engaging and which part was static. From there, they could adopt or analyze a similar scriptwriting style.

Cooperative Learning

Because students have unique roles in their cohort, each member contributed to the project differently. With the use of Google Docs, I was able to review how each student contributed by assigning colored text by role. For example, the historian used blue text. Thus, when I provided feedback to the cohort, I easily identified specific students (roles) who needed additional support or guidance. My grading scheme included not only a group project grade (50%) but also an individual grade (50%). I wanted students to experience working together but also remain motivated by individual contributions. This form of learning is known as cooperative learning.

In cooperative learning environments, “students work in small groups to achieve a shared set of goals relating to academic assignments” (Johnson & Johnson, 2008, p. 29). Cooperative learning was a perfect solution for my podcast assignments because, “all group members [were] expected to contribute to the work of the group by sharing their ideas” (Johnson & Johnson, 2008, p. 29) Providing students time to work on their scripts in class and at home with the use of a shared live document, each person could reflect on their own work as well as review the work of others in contrasting environments. As Jainal and Shahrill (2021) stated, this form of learning “allows each student of different learning abilities to work together in the same learning environment and simultaneously, being sensitive to their needs” (p. 254).

Observations of Cohort Learning

The theories of Soviet psychologist Vygotsky inspired Sir James Britton and several of his English colleagues to create an active learning process known as Collaborative Learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). Britton (1985) conceptualized natural learning as intuitive; thus, creating student groups helps them create a new culture of learning. I observed this with my own students—a signature, natural learning environment inimitable by another cohort. While I implemented a cooperative learning model, the seeds of natural learning grow roots that allow student groups to work together and, as a result, magnify each cohort member’s learning.

As stated, using live documents such as Google Docs, I traced and edited responses to student group work. Examining these seemingly small changes in student responses could indicate they are cooperatively learning. The final version of the cohort podcast script is an excellent example of how multiple points of view are amalgamated.

Assessment

Recently, I assessed podcast projects with detailed rubrics. I feared this form of assessment would not complement the creative process of podcasting, nor would it be the most effective means of assessing student work. To some degree this was true. It was easy for me to grade within this format but left students with a jumble of numbers and generic markers that some could have found too subjective, though no student complained.

Podcasting for Assessment

In a study by Cooper (2008), he used podcasting to assess student work, one student remarked that feedback was “more personal, and...more constructive than written feedback” (p. 159). While I have yet to incorporate comments on student work through podcasting, evidence shows that students could benefit from more constructive feedback using podcasting. As an excellent complement to student work, I plan to incorporate this podcast feedback assessment method in subsequent semesters.

Students need the opportunity to engage the teacher in a conversation about how to improve their work. As suggested by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), “conceptualise feedback more as dialogue rather than as

information transmission” (p. 210). Providing initial feedback in podcasting form will allow the entire cohort to listen and gather questions, perhaps as a group, after which a dialogue can be initiated between the students and me.

Observations Requiring Changes to Method

Overall, the results of my pedagogical shift to cooperative cohort learning were overwhelmingly positive. Though, I must state a few key points that require adjustment. For example, I asked students, “Do you like group work?” Most students in the class emphatically stated, “No!” I assume this is because of several classic issues with group work including the lack of mutual peer respect, unequal workload, and the perceived difficulty of meeting outside of class.

Group Contract

First, I wanted to address the concerns related to relationship dynamics within cohorts. Students have expressed feelings of powerlessness in group work situations, and in this regard, Faulkner (2014) stated that “the issue of the authority that we actually have to make the demands that we put forward as purportedly valid becomes problematic” (p. 17). I understood that my students could not make demands of their classmates, nor should they have. In the spirit of mutual respect, I instituted the concept of a group contract for each cohort. The cohort would create a unique contractual document, not of legality, but of obligation and duty to their fellow members. As Hesterman (2016) noted, “it also provided opportunities to assume collective responsibility to complete the group assignment” (p. 7).

Scaffolded Assignments

Second, I wanted to tackle the complexities of unequal workload. Again, first through fourth-year students, of any discipline, may register for this course. Enrolled is a population of students with a multitude of writing levels, study habits, and social skills. As Oakley et al. (2004) observed, students often do not possess skills for complex teamwork projects. Common problems include poor time management, lack of conflict resolution skills, and poor communication. Therefore, as the instructor, I was obligated to deliver clear cohort expectations, instructions, and scaffolded assignments to provide students with the necessary skills for the logistical and interpersonal issues that often surface in a cooperative learning environment (p. 9).

Hybrid Asynchronous Modality

Third, Ferdous and Karim (2019) discovered that students struggled with finding times outside of class to work on group projects. I have since addressed this issue with a change of class delivery mode. I now offer a hybrid asynchronous delivery mode, meaning each half of the class meets face-to-face synchronously on one day of the week. Students can now utilize the designated asynchronous day to work on assignments outside of class as a cohort. Ferdous and Karim (2019) go on to state another major issue for students working on projects outside is

communication. To address this problematic point, on the first day of class I encourage students to create a group through any messaging platform they prefer such as WhatsApp, Slack, GroupMe, etc. I devote class time to this important step.

Peer Evaluation Tool

Finally, I decided to implement a peer evaluation survey tool to track these aforementioned issues. Peer evaluation is a common practice in the college classroom today, and, as Brutus and Donia (2010) state, “These processes also expose students to an important and difficult organizational duty, that of evaluating, and being evaluated by, others” (p. 652). Using a simple Google Form, I created a questionnaire for each student to submit with their podcast project. Regarding the podcast project, I wanted to know how each student would rate their participation as well as how they would rate the overall participation of all cohort members. In addition, I ask students to reflect on what they taught their colleagues as well as what they learned from others. Finally, I ask two important questions: Did anybody in the cohort dominate the project? Did anybody in the cohort not participate meaningfully in the project? Because students are submitting this web-based survey individually, one cohort member should not know how another cohort member answered these questions. At this point, I will need to examine the results to track trends.

Future Data Capture

The next phase in my continued improvements in this course involves capturing data for analysis. True, the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for innovations in my teaching, though it also caused great disruption to any meaningful data capture. Now that I have a more solid and engaging pedagogy for teaching global music, I need to collect important data.

Data for Cooperative Learning

As I mentioned, the cohort scriptwriting assignments are written cooperatively, yet students submit many supplemental assignments individually through the Learning Management System (LMS). With further examination, I hypothesize that the point of view expressed in students’ individual assignments may vary from the published version of the cohort podcast. If so, this may prove that students are working cooperatively, that is to say, learning from each other to a degree that would alter an individual’s point of view on a particular topic.

I plan to record qualitative data through formative assessment that centers around how one’s point of view on a particular topic may or may not have changed by working cooperatively with their cohort on the podcast project. This assessment could easily be captured with exit tickets or as an additional online survey tool. For example, I may ask a student to compare their views on the impact of colonization on Caribbean music before and after the podcast project is submitted. This would capture individual ideas (pre-podcast) and group ideas (post-podcast). Quantitative data could also be assessed here through sliding scale questions.

Data for Peer Evaluation

I already created a formative peer evaluation survey that captures qualitative and quantitative data. I plan to analyze this data and chart the effectiveness of three components: cohort contract, hybrid asynchronous delivery mode, and podcast peer evaluation. Though I will not be comparing this data against a baseline from previous years, this information alone will provide a great deal of insight into the general health of the cooperative cohort's harmony.

Purpose of Data Collection

Collectively, this data could be used in several ways. First, I could link this data with student course evaluations and note trends. This will be important for me to grow as a teacher and also to showcase my improvements in course development. Second, inevitably I will redesign this course again, at which time comparing this data to future data will be critically important to chart changes in student engagement and learning. Third, share and compare data with both interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary instructors in order to continue growing a community of those who teach with cooperative learning

Conclusion

The redesign of this world music course has come in painful stages. Perhaps more seasoned instructors would have found a quicker path to better teaching, or maybe a degree in ethnomusicology would have equipped me with the skills I have lacked all the while. Nonetheless, my journey to better teaching has been guard railed by excellent writing and teaching resources, conferences, discussions with fellow professors, and faculty learning communities.

I continue to utilize hybrid asynchronous delivery modes to my advantage. In addition, inclusivity remains vitally important to my teaching philosophy and I will continue to seek improvement and enrichment not as an expert, but as a chaperon of learners through their musical journeys. Though even in the most shadowed corners of one's ego, where imposter syndrome anchors its woody roots, perhaps there is where budding instructors sprout a pithy branch toward better teaching and learning.

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