SCHOOL OF
MUSIC & THEATRE

QUALITY REVIEW

NOVEMBER 2017

CASE STUDY

PUBLIC LEARNING PROJECTS

AS INNOVATIVE, RESEARCH-BASED CLASS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

AUTHORS:

Dr Jillian Rogers
John Godfrey

Context

The Department of Music values the development of new and innovative teaching practices, and has done so for many years. Teaching is delivered through a very wide range of methods, from standard class lecturing to one-on-one tutorials; class-based workshops to online forums; musical ensemble classes to field work trips to computer-based studio work. We began to employ Computer-Assisted Instruction in the 1990s, and continue to do so in the use of CAI for Musicianship teaching, online teaching materials for several courses and online resources for both the delivery of content and the submission of assessments. Teaching within courses is often multidisciplinary: courses might combine both scholarly study and performance or creative work, for example, with the intent that students gain a multifaceted understanding of a subject area. Over the years, there has been an increasing tendency to merge disciplinary approaches; while distinctions remain between scholarly, performance-based and compositional courses in many instances, there has been a notable growth in courses that sit 'between' approaches. This has encouraged both a more flexible and latitudinarian understanding in students and also a tendency towards greater appreciation of the interconnectedness of approaches within music; for 20 years, it has been important in this Department to encourage this understanding, but the development of courses that are built on this concept has been a significant improvement.

The same breadth of approaches applies to assessed work, which can range from submission formats like essays and in-class presentations; creative work delivered across a range of modalities including score-based and recorded pieces, installations, video art, sound art, interactive computer programmes; performances both solo and in groups, and embracing both familiar and unfamiliar genres and instruments/voices; online forums; websites; group projects; publicity work in social media and more.

Dr. Rogers' work demonstrates excellence through the employment of a wide range of methodologies, imaginatively applied. The students have responded with extreme enthusiasm to her approach, and the work produced as a consequence has been remarkable in many instances. Dr. Rogers describes her work below.

John Godfrey, Head of Music Department

Origin/Overview

I teach because of the pleasure I take in learning and my desire to share that pleasure with others. My experiences teaching large lecture courses, seminar-style courses, and working one-on-one with students at the University of California, Los Angeles, Indiana University, and University College Cork have enhanced my awareness of the potential for self-actualization that the music history classroom holds. Working with students from diverse backgrounds has led me to develop an approach to teaching music that embraces egalitarianism and collaboration, acknowledges students' individual experiences and needs, and provides students with knowledge and skills useful in a wide range of careers in music and the humanities. This has proven to be an especially important approach in my work with students at UCC, many of whom come to my classroom having only or mostly taken modules in which they are one of a hundred or several hundred students, and thus have never been encouraged to share their perspectives with their peers, or in which they have never been treated as if their in-class contributions are significant and valuable. In other words, many of the students I have taught at UCC have been taught via a top-down model in which the lecturer provides information that students are expected to remember and regurgitate, and with which students have little opportunity to engage critically.

From the beginning of my university teaching career, I have been inspired by bell hooks's "engaged pedagogy," and this approach to teaching has been incredibly fruitful in my teaching at UCC. In her 1994 book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks defines engaged pedagogy as a "practice of freedom": a holistic approach to teaching that demands vulnerability and self-actualization on the part of the teacher, who resists dominant teaching and social norms and social biases by empowering students not only as intellectual beings, but also as human beings with full and often complicated lives. hooks's engaged pedaogy

"values student expression" by making active student participation central to the classroom, in which the teacher treats each student as a "unique being." For hooks, the value of this approach is that it empowers and actualizes both the teacher and the student, and teaches students (and teachers!) not only about the subject at hand, but also about themselves and their place in the world. (hooks 1994, 13-23). This approach is evident in my in-class teaching practices, my means of evaluating student progress, and how I guide students through research.

Purpose

One excellent example of my commitment to engaged pedagogy was my design and implementation, in fall 2016, of Public Learning Projects for the undergraduate Music Department module "Music Making and the Middle Classes in 19th-Century Europe." Here I asked Second- and Third-Year Arts/Music students to develop Public Learning Projects alongside individual research projects, thus allowing them to build on the research they were already conducting. Because I am committed to making training in humanistic scholarship applicable both within and beyond the academy, I often encourage students to present their ideas in myriad formats, including research papers, journalistic essays, and curatorial projects like concert programs and museum exhibits. Cognizant of the technological skill sets required in today's job markets, I also invite students to cultivate digital media skills by presenting research in playlists, podcasts, and short videos. Thus these Public Learning Projects could take a number of forms, including podcasts, documentary videos, public concerts, lesson plans, or websites. Regardless of the format students chose, they needed to be prepared to present their work to a broad audience.

The Public Learning Projects fulfilled several pedagogical aims. First, I hoped that these projects would enable students to see the broader implications and appeal not only of the music and socio-historical phenomena that we were studying during the term, but also of the research skills they were developing. Second, as most of the students in this module wanted to become primary and secondary school teachers after university, these projects allowed them to practice how to present complex topics to broad audiences. In addition, many of these project options permitted them to develop digital media skills, while also giving them opportunities to hone strong writing skills and discover the benefits of working collaboratively. Finally, these projects provided students with opportunities to have something lasting to put on a CV or résumé.

Design

Each class meeting was designed with an eye towards preparing students to excel in their Public Learning Projects and individual research papers. In numerous classes we focused on exploring of a particular topic that would allow students to develop their knowledge of myriad socio-historical contexts of nineteenth-century music—while also acquiring skills in critical thinking, and socio-cultural and music analysis—in ways that would inform their module projects. In other classes, I helped students develop a wide range of skills—from reading, research, writing, and public presentation skills to digital media and advertising skills—that they would need in order to succeed not only in their module projects, but also in their lives and careers after graduation. Regardless of each class's topic, I employed an activity-based teaching style, giving students opportunities to practice working with primary sources, studying scores, and theorizing ways of addressing complex musical, political, and historical issues in groups and individually. I communicated to students how much I had to learn from them by reading, writing, and researching with them. Whether by having students brainstorm descriptive vocabulary for talking about music, or read primary sources and perform music analysis together, I increased their confidence, comfort, and skill in analyzing and discussing music and musical cultures. In addition, I helped students experience the joy of conducting original research through teaching them the value of their ideas and the excitement of finding answers to the difficult questions that can arise in musicological research. Going through learning experiences together inspired my students to speak openly with me about the challenges

they faced, and enabled me to adjust the module to meet their needs. By upending the traditional teacher-student power dynamic and showing students that their ideas and feelings make an impact, I believe that I empowered my students to participate in the learning process and thereby become invested in learning and sharing knowledge with others.

Implementation

As learning new skillsets was central to the Public Learning Projects, throughout the module I brought in experts throughout UCC to hold practicum sessions that would assist students in the creation of their module projects. Claire O'Brien and Elaine Harrington in the UCC Library spoke with students about research skills, Peter Finnegan from Blackstone Launchpad spoke with them about the importance of "thinking big" regarding the implications of their projects, John Hough in the Music Department gave a workshop on audiovisual recording and editing, and Sarah Thelen and Claire Fennell from Instructional Design conducted a workshop on designing and building websites. These and other workshops in the module provided students with class time that they could use to practice these new skills, work with their group members, ask questions, or present their work to their classmates in order to receive useful feedback.

The results of these projects were outstanding. Two of the Public Learning Project groups (each consisting of 4-5 students) decided to design websites, and the other chose to give a public concert. The group that chose to give a public concert consisted entirely of Irish traditional musicians, who through research discovered that the General Post Office had been a theatre where popular music performances took place in the nineteenth century. Knowing this, they arranged with the GPO's staff to perform a concert there in December 2016. They created a program based on nineteenth-century tunes, including some that they found in UCC's Special Collections. One student—a talented step dancer—even created her own choreography based on sources that detailed step dancing in nineteenth-century Cork. They rehearsed for this concert, completed a publicity photo shoot on the recommendation of Blackstone Launchpad's Peter Finnegan, and promoted their concert on Facebook and other social media outlets. In addition, they arranged to raise money via donations at the performance for the Cork Simon Community. The concert was quite successful, especially since they took this as an opportunity to educate the Cork public about the history of the GPO and Irish traditional music through spoken program notes.

[LINK TO VIDEO ON YOUTUBE, CREDIT TO JOHN HOUGH: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGdZToE7ZvE&feature=youtu.be]

The website projects were similarly successful, with both groups using Wix to create easy-to-use, content-rich educational websites. One of the groups created a website entitled Young Ireland's Music (http://dereckwithero.wixsite.com/youngirelandsmusic), intended to teach primary school music students and teachers about nineteenth-century Ireland's rich and diverse musical heritage through accessible text, photographs, and videos. The other group, all members of which were completing individual research projects on nineteenth-century Western art music cultures, created a website entitled The Hopeless Romantics (http://thehopelessromanti.wixsite.com/19thcenturymusic). The goal of their site was to provide secondary school students preparing for the Leaving Certificate in music with additional information about music and music-making in the nineteenth century. The website is visually stunning, well-organized and information, while also offering a reflection of their individual research projects and what they learned throughout the module in readings and lectures. In addition, this site showcases the writing and creative thinking skills that these students brought to and developed through this project, especially in their use straightforward and yet colloquial and often slang-ridden writing style that they felt had the potential to draw in secondary school students.

Impact

The Public Learning Projects have had a much greater impact than I had initially imagined. Several students came to realize that they enjoy creating websites enough to consider website-building as a career possibility. The group that designed The Hopeless Romantics have also been given opportunities to share their expertise in website-building with other UCC students, for instance for Dr. Melanie Marshall's 1st-year music module, "Studying Music at University." In addition, through their work on this website, these students have decided to create a web-based platform for publishing interdisciplinary, but music-focused research and creative projects from undergraduates at UCC. After meeting with me to discuss this idea and asking me to be the faculty advisor of this project, these students found other like-minded students who are interested in web-publishing on musical topics, and also located UCC staff members who agreed to be on the staff/editorial advisory board. Although the students who were interested in developing this platform have since graduated, leaving the project defunct, the initiative and drive of these students demonstrates in any case the extent to which these Public Learning Projects enabled student empowerment and self-actualization in line with bell hooks's engaged pedagogy. This, along with the increased willingness of staff in the Music Department to collaborate with staff members in UCC Special Collections, and to incorporate more public and digital-media based projects, illustrates the ways in which the engaged pedagogy that I practice in and outside of the Public Learning Projects I designed, has begun to shape the teaching practices in the UCC Music Department in meaningful ways.

Dr Jillian Rogers, Lecturer in Music,
UCC School of Music and Theatre

Works Cited

bell hooks. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994.