

Statement of philosophy - Carmen Braden

I am the Graduate Assistant for Musicianship II, a course for second-year music students that covers the basics of ear training that will be necessary for moving forward in the Undergraduate Music program. It develops the students' skills in rhythmic accuracy, harmonic and melodic dictation (writing down what they hear), and sight-singing. I believe this topic is one of the most important in the education of a musician: it is the core development of synthesizing hearing with sound production. In a nutshell, it's learning how to be a better musician! It is also one of the most challenging courses to teach due to the incredibly varied learning methods that work for each student. I am constantly fascinated by the challenge of finding out how each student *hears* and *learns* - all different due to their previous training, personality and practice routines.

For two of their three weekly classes, I teach half of the class - approximately 15 students. I know there are many students who approach this topic with trepidation. Some students have rarely had to sing anything before, and this class is jam-packed with singing. Others have never experienced ear training prior to coming to University, and they learnt simply by reading notes off a page - 'note-bots', as the teacher for this class, Dr. Rod Squance says.

I have always enjoyed this topic and when I learnt I would be the Assistant for this class, I was thrilled. In my undergraduate program, I was a tutor for my peers both formally with students with disabilities, and informally with friends who struggled. During this time I discovered that the training of a musical ear is an amazing process. In every situation where I was guiding someone's ear, I knew that a personal connection or understanding with the individual was necessary, and that principal guides the way I teach here at the University of Calgary.

Because each student connects what they *hear* to what they *understand* so differently, I have found the most effective teaching moments in Musicianship II are when individual or small group interactions occur. For this reason, I decided to offer extra early morning sessions to allow for this to take place. These have been utilized by students who are seeking to improve their performance in the class, and others who do not have as much difficulty with the required material but who still want to extend and improve their musicianship skills.

When I communicate with the class, I try to maintain a level of honesty and openness that reflects my own abilities. For example, when there is a rhythmic exercise that I find difficult, I share that with the class. Or in other situations where I make a mistake when demonstrating a particular melodic exercise - which is not uncommon! - I acknowledge it in a manner that I feel is more reflective of real-world situations. When these students perform, teach, and compose outside of school, these musicianship skills will be used each and every day, and I have tried to impress on the students that a professional musician never stops improving these skills. In this way, as well as in the teaching manner agreed upon by Dr. Squance and I, the students are given abilities to continue independent learning after this class is over.

I have been relying on my own passion for the topic to help motivate students to practice. I regularly encourage them to work together outside of class, to be aware of the topics when they are in rehearsals or performances, and to find creative ways to make the material enjoyable and challenging. In hindsight, I feel that I could have taken a more direct, structured method of motivation in order to impart the seriousness of this class's role in their education. Until now, I have mainly given more direct help outside of class to those who have come forward. After several months of getting to know the students, I am realizing that the personalities of some

people may have prevented them from asking for the help they need. With this in mind, I am beginning to approach certain students who have been struggling in order to find the best way to help them in the course. This course is ideally designed to help students overcome not only course content-related issues, but self-awareness and confidence-related areas of their lives.

I have been very lucky to be working under Dr. Squance. I feel that it is very important to have constant communication with the professor about students who are struggling, and he welcomes this approach. He is also very open to my suggestions and ideas for improving the course, and I have learned a great deal about the philosophy of teaching from him. I feel we have worked together to find effective ways of teaching, testing, and trying new methods, while still giving the class a consistent foundation of expectations.

Detailed descriptions of 2-3 examples of strategies and indication of their impact.

1. Twice a week I hold extra sessions in the early morning (8:15am), with attendance begin optional. These times are offered in addition to class time and regular weekly office hours. During these sessions, I work to engage students in two ways. Firstly, to focus more deeply on the material that is assigned that week in class, and secondly to explore ideas about the course topic that go beyond the course description, but hold real implications in the real world. Some of these include looking at different styles of music like jazz and Renaissance, and I hope to introduce improvisation by Reading Week. There have been several regular attendees during these sessions, and I feel these students show up to class more prepared, more engaged, and with their ears and voices warmed up. These students also have a chance during these early morning sessions to work cooperatively with each other, and are encouraged to give constructive critical feedback.

2. One element of the dictation portion of the class involves listening to short pieces of music by J. S. Bach, which have four independent melodies that occur simultaneously to make up a chord progression, called *chorales*. The students must write down some or all of these melodies, called “voices” and use their theory knowledge to indicate the names of the chords. This 4-voice dictation has been the most difficult part of the course for the majority of the students. After the first term, I realized that an important step had been missing, and I decided to create a study resource to help bridge this gap. During the first term, only two of the four parts were assigned to be written down, and the expectation during this semester is to write all four parts - which is extremely challenging. In order to facilitate the ears of students to be able to hear multiple melodies at once, I recorded examples of these chorales by playing them on the piano in various permutations to allow the students to expand their listening abilities in smaller, more achievable steps. This was a crucial moment for me in reflecting on the pace and expectations of the course, and has helped me to re-evaluate the remainder of the term’s expectations. I know that several students have found these recording resources particularly useful, and have even asked for extra chorales to be provided. As we are only now beginning to grade these difficult assignments, I have yet to see if these extra resources will prove effective, but I know they have helped to make students feel more prepared.

3. My commitment to the importance of this course was the motivation behind an assignment I designed in late November. For this exercise, each student had to make the connection about how skills learned in the class could be used in other parts of their lives, such as in other music classes, in previous musical experiences like performing or teaching, in their future musical

careers, and even how music skills could be used in non-music situations. I gathered the responses anonymously, and then created one document with everyone's answers called "Why is Musicianship Important?" to hand back to the class. This document was useful in the short term to give the students a context and motivation for the class, and possibly opened up avenues for using the material in ways they had not thought of before. Gathering the answers also gave me insight into how these students view the course in comparison with how my views of the topic of musicianship has changed in the years since I was in their shoes. In the long term, I am hoping that this question remains with them as part of the musical toolbox, as I know it will remain with me.

Critical reflection

Approximately mid-way through the first semester, I realized that additional offerings of regular work sessions that were open to anyone would be beneficial, and spent a good deal of time thinking about how the extra sessions would be held. I wanted to address the needs of some students who were struggling, and to also give any students a view into other avenues of using the skills.

As the second semester moves forward, I am becoming more aware of the importance of the placement of this course in the degree of music students. This is the last year that these students have regular, core classes dedicated to raising the level of musicianship across all disciplines (music performance, education, composition etc.). However, now that I know many of the students much more, I am realizing that I have a responsibility to motivate the students to work harder, to reach out to each other, and to learn to take the responsibility for learning into their own hands.

I am also realizing that there are essential components of musicianship that are missing from the curriculum, but could be incorporated in the remaining weeks in ways that would enhance the learning . Two of these include advanced listening skills, and memorization techniques, and I am working to find ways to bring these into the regular classes.