Learning Episode and Reflective Narrative (Jennifer Muñiz)

Description
In teaching MUS-T 213 Music Theory III, which is the third semester of a two-year required sequence for music majors, I realized that two significant changes could improve student learning:
1. Crossing over content from Piano Class to Music Theory.
2. Crossing over elements of online teaching into a face-to-face classroom setting.

The ultimate goal was to improve students' preparedness for the culminating project of writing an original composition (Romantic Composition Project) that utilized chromatic modulation techniques. The main topic of the third semester is chromatic harmony in the Romantic Era, which involves specific chords and how they are exemplified in compositions by composers such as Schumann and Brahms.

As mentioned in the Teaching Philosophy, the four semesters within each sequence of classes (Music Theory and Piano Class) are designed to be taken concurrently. There are usually about **15 students per semester** that successfully matriculate "on-track," although a few students take the courses out-of-sync for various reasons (such as exceling at piano from childhood lessons, but starting at the first level of Music Theory). For these few exceptions, it may only effect one semester: if students qualify out of MUS-P 101 (first level of Piano Class), they can join the second level and be enrolled concurrently in the second level of Piano Class and Music Theory.

Need for Change
In previous years, I had tried requiring students to play their Music Theory assignments in Piano Class as a strategy for achieving the goal of interrelating the two courses. However, one basic roadblock occurred with students not bringing the physical materials from one class to another. I found that the piano skills were not retained and applied to music theory concepts.

Another impediment had been the unequal advancement of more out-going students over introverted students. Although the class sizes were small, I would sometimes misgauge the overall level of comprehension in the class, because the students who felt comfortable expressing confusion would have their questions answered. They participated actively. However, I could not always interpret the level of comprehension with the less extroverted students: did they understand the concepts but preferred not to verbalize it? Or, were they lost? I did not want to wait for a major milestone, like an exam or large assignment, to realize that students were falling behind. Therefore, as a strategy for "leveling the playing field," I decided to incorporate the element of weekly online discussions into the face-to-face theory class.

Approach

Bridging Course Content
To reach my goal of inter-relating course content, I aligned the curriculum so that I was teaching the corresponding topic at the same time. For instance, I taught the topic of augmented sixth chords in Music Theory one week before teaching it in Piano Class. This allowed me to discuss the topic again a week after it was an abstract concept, and make it into a concrete topic: play

these chords on the piano. Then, the students drew upon that physicalized knowledge in order to create the music compositions several weeks later.

Maximizing the Use of Technology

My strategy also involved two common elements of online classes: electronic submission of assignments, and also virtual discussions outside of the classroom.

- **Electronic Submissions of Audio/Video**

In the Piano Class, I decided that the more ephemeral method of submitting piano skills assignments during class time by playing them in-person for me was problematic on two levels:

1. The in-person submission method took time in class for assessment that could have been more effectively used to interact with students
2. The strategy lent itself to "learning for the moment" and then the students would forget the skills.

My solution was to start electronic submission of piano class assignments (audio or video). This liberated class time for more individualized instruction between me and the students, or group activities (ensemble playing): the students amongst themselves, that could not have been done independently. The electronic submission allowed more time for reflection on the part of the student preparing the assignment, and also the opportunity to review my feedback in relation to a retrievable artifact. Therefore, the student could re-visit the skill and would be more likely to retain what was learned.

- **Online Discussions**

In the Music Theory class (meets twice per week), as a way of motivating the students to read the textbook chapters and engage with the material outside of the classroom, I introduced concepts in the first meeting of the week. The students were assigned to read the chapter and post a question by the second meeting in the same week. That way, I would not give a "blanket" approach of what I felt was important for them to learn: I could customize the class to their specific weaknesses. Also, it allowed for all students, regardless of their familiarity with the material or their comfort level of speaking in front of their peers, to ask questions.

Assessment of Approach

In order to see if my approach was effective, I gathered data from several sources. My main source of comparison was the teaching of the course in Spring 2015 as compared with Fall 2016. There were several differences in my approach:

Use of Canvas Discussions	Spring 2015: No	Fall 2016: Yes
Use of Rubric in Composition Draft 2 Phase	Spring 2015: No	Fall 2016: Yes
Use of in-class piano activities (in Theory)	Spring 2015: minimal	Fall 2016: Yes
Use of electronic submission: piano skills	Spring 2015: minimal	Fall 2016: Yes

Evidence of Student Learning
Below, I have provided excerpts from direct feedback from students.

- **Threaded Discussion in Canvas**

Below, I have provided an example of a threaded discussion (I re-typed it exactly as the students wrote) on Canvas related to the topic of Chromatic Modulation from September 2016 (Music Theory III MUS-T 213: 33640). The content that the students are discussing is similar to the content covered when the peer reviewers observed the class this Fall 2017. In this particular thread, I also contributed to the conversation. I have tried both approaches: only responding to the questions in the face-to-face class time, and also responding on Canvas. The students are engaging with one another and the material:

Student A: What is the best way to know when to analyze a prolonged chord instead of each of the simultaneities in between? (As on pg. 609).

Student B: Hi A! I think that if you notice voice exchange, especially if both parts are chromatic, then you can see something special occurring that can't really be labeled.

Student C: You can also tell its just a prolongation of a chord if there is a pedal tone, a common tone throughout, maybe the chords are closely similar and/or return to the same chord, the melody doesn't change harmonically, etc..

Me: I agree with Student C: zoom out and look for patterns in a larger context.

Student D: Could the chord be prolonged by its secondary dominant? For example, mm. 20-21 of our homework p. 346, (as far as I can tell) it alternates between V/ii and ii before going to I. Is that a prolongation of ii?

My Conclusions:
I interpret this Discussion as successful because the students are interacting with one another outside the classroom meetings about course content. They feel comfortable asking one another questions about the textbook and how it could apply to the homework. Their tone is friendly and down-to-earth. Unlike a face-to-face meeting, there is no time limit, so the students can absorb the ideas, or return to concepts on their own time. This emphasizes the idea that learning is a multi-stage process.

- **Focus groups/student survey/SET (course evaluations)**

In Spring 2015, I held a focus group in Piano Class 3 about the electronic submission of assignments: the students suggested a regular schedule of in-person submissions versus electronic submission. Also, in-person training on the technology submission options: I built that into the class time.

After receiving a SEED grant to install video stations in the piano lab in the summer of 2016, I wanted to get feedback about the students' experiences. In Spring 2017, I encouraged students in

MUS-P 104 (who had two semesters of experience with the lab stations) to complete a survey specifically in regard to the use of video submissions of piano playing. Although only 4/7 students completed the survey, it was informative, and I plan to continue gathering information from current students.

These were the four main questions (I have indicated in parentheses how the students responded):

1. I felt that video recording my playing was very helpful (2/4); helpful (2/4), not helpful (0/4).

2. Video recording of my playing made me work harder because I wanted to see myself playing well. (4/6)

3. After I recorded my assignments, I looked at written feedback, but I never looked at my videos again (2/5); I looked at some of my videos 1-2 times to understand the feedback (2/5); I looked at my videos more than 1-2 times to understand the feedback (1/5) [students could check more than one answer]

4. My experience with the video stations was good (3/4), not good (1/4).

The SET's have tended to be generally very positive, without specific reactions to the process of the final project in music theory. However, there was one comment about the structure of our composition workshop days that I plan to incorporate.

My Conclusions:
Once students have a clear explanation of how to submit assignments electronically, they develop a routine that is comfortable. I am not completely convinced that they fully realize the time-management benefits, but I have the perspective of experiencing how much more interactive, non-assessment time there is to work with the students during the class meetings. I would like to continue to create opportunities for gaining feedback from the students, and also structure assignments to build in time for students to reflect on their own playing.

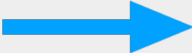- **Grades: Relation of Midterm Exam to Romantic Composition Project**

In order to determine if there was a relationship to how students performed on the Midterm Exam to the Romantic Composition Project, I looked at the numbers comparing the Midterm Exam grades and composition project grades from Spring 2015 to Fall of 2016. The Midterm Exam is given before the Romantic Composition Project. Therefore, the grades are intended to reflect the comprehension of similar material: first absorbed as abstract concepts for an exam. These same concepts are revisited for the Romantic Composition Project. **An improvement from the exam grade to the project grade shows that the students had deeper comprehension of course material after completing the project.**

There were several factors that could misconstrue the results, such as students losing points due to lateness as opposed to a lack of understanding. Also, one student in 2015 completed the Midterm Exam and never completed any of the three phases of the composition project. In order to compensate for this, I dropped the zeros from my calculations. Another factor to consider

when interpreting the results was that there were only 7 students in the Spring 2015 class, and 15 students in the Fall 2016 class.
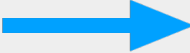
Although the numbers did improve from the Midterm Exam to the Final Project Grade, and also from 2015 to 2016, I see more convincing data from the quality of the final compositions themselves. For that reason, I included a sample student composition [not a music composition major]: the phases of Roman Numeral Sketch and First Draft: Looks Done.

Spring 2015 MUS-T 213 Music Theory III

Students (names substituted with letters)	Midterm Exam	Outline (25 points)	First Draft: Looks Done (50 points)	Final Composition (25 points)	Project Grade
a	76	20	47	20	87
b	86	21	49	25	95
c	84	13	31	16	60
d	74	17	47	25	89
e	70	25	31	16	72
f	79	25	48	24	97
g	94	21	48	25	94
	Avg: 80	➡			**Avg: 84.85**

Fall 2016 MUS-T 213 Music Theory III

Students	Midterm Exam	Outline	First Draft: Looks Done	Final Composition	Project Grade
h	70	15	50	25	90
i	92	24	46	23	93
j	103	24	53	25	102
k	64	23	49	25	97
l	95	24	53	25	102
m	79	0	0	0	0
n	79	23	40	24	87

Students	Midterm Exam	Outline	First Draft: Looks Done	Final Composition	Project Grade
o	70	22	34	25	81
p	100	24	47	25	96
q	58	23	36	14	73
r	81	22	35	14	71
s	78	14	50	24	88
t	81	24	42	25	91
u	90	23	48	25	96
Zeros dropped	Avg: 81.42	→			Avg: 89.76

Reflection

The level of engagement with the material in the Fall 2016 course was very high. I felt that the class gathered momentum through the online Discussions. Even if students had not quite mastered the material by the time of the Midterm Exam, the final project gave them another opportunity to re-visit the material in a way that fostered ownership. The students were motivated to master the material so that they could use it to create something unique. It encouraged total integration of skills and abstract concepts, through a multi-stage process, in order to accomplish higher level synthesis: "riding the bike."

In the future, I would like to give the students more surveys, or conduct focus groups, because it helps me to concentrate on what is working most effectively, and it encourages the students to reflect on their own learning. I tend to ask students questions in informal settings, and I have gathered that they enjoy the online discussions.

I also feel that using the piano in the theory class, and trying to stay as consistent as possible with my terminology between the theory and piano classes is important. Even though there are some students that are not in both classes, it is beneficial for all when I re-visit concepts from one class to another.

Most importantly, **I feel that all of these strategies help me to foster an environment where learning is exciting**; there is room for trial and error; and the skills they learn will continue to be relevant to their studies and performance practice as musicians. This semester, for the first time, I have arranged for these Romantic Composition Projects to be performed for the entire music community at our weekly Convocation. The students are proud of their work.

The next three pages give a sample assignment: the rubric for the Romantic Composition Project; and sample student work: Roman Numeral Sketch, and First Draft: Looks Done (same student).

Rubric for Romantic Composition Project (MUS-T 213 Music Theory III)-- First Draft: Looks Done

Criteria							Pts
Required chord: Augmented 6th	Excellent use of this chord! 4.0 pts	Missing accidentals 3.0 pts	Voice-leading issue, or was not integrated appropriately into chord progression 2.0 pts		Wrong chord tones 1.0 pts	This chord was not present 0.0 pts	4.0 pts
Required chord: Neapolitan	Excellent use of this chord! 4.0 pts	Missing accidentals 3.0 pts	Voice-leading issue, or was not integrated appropriately into chord progression 2.0 pts		Wrong chord tones 1.0 pts	This chord was not present 0.0 pts	4.0 pts
Required Chord: Fully diminished 7th	Excellent use of this chord! 4.0 pts	Missing accidentals 3.0 pts	Voice-leading issue, or was not integrated appropriately into chord progression 2.0 pts		Wrong chord tones 1.0 pts	This chord was not present 0.0 pts	4.0 pts
Required chord: mixture	Excellent use of this chord! 4.0 pts	Missing accidentals 3.0 pts	Voice-leading issue, or was not integrated appropriately into chord progression 2.0 pts		Wrong chord tones 1.0 pts	This chord was not present 0.0 pts	4.0 pts
Modulation to another key (#1)	You used a chromatic modulation technique as discussed in Ch. 30 6.0 pts	You used the same technique as #2 4.0 pts	The key relationship was too close (1 "click" away on circle of 5ths) 2.0 pts	The modulation was attempted, but had significant flaws 1.0 pts	No modulation was attempted 0.0 pts		6.0 pts
Modulation back to original key (#2)	You used a chromatic modulation technique as discussed in Ch. 30 6.0 pts	You used the same technique as #1 4.0 pts	The key relationship was too close (1 "click" away on circle of 5ths) 2.0 pts	The modulation was attempted, but had significant flaws 1.0 pts	No modulation was attempted 0.0 pts		6.0 pts
Length	Your piece was at least 24 bars long 6.0 pts		Your piece was less than 24 bars long 0.0 pts				6.0 pts
Voice-leading	Your voice-leading was fabulous! 8.0 pts	2-3 instances of parallel 5ths/octaves; and/or unresolved tendency tones 6.0 pts	4-5 instances of parallel 5ths/octaves; and/or unresolved tendency tones 4.0 pts	6 or more instances of parallel 5ths/octaves; and/or unresolved tendency tones 2.0 pts	Root position triads throughout 0.0 pts		8.0 pts
Style	Creative piece: it captures the style of Chopin/Schumann/Brahms 8.0 pts	Your piece meets the requirements, but the style is generic, or overly Classical 6.0 pts	The piece features incorrect stylistic elements such as unresolved dissonances, or a melody that does not match the harmony 4.0 pts	An attempt was made to make the piece sound Romantic, but it was unsuccessful 2.0 pts	No attempt was made to make the piece sound Romantic 0.0 pts		8.0 pts

Total Points: 50.0

Sample Student Work (With My Feedback) from MUS-T 213 Music Theory III (2016): Roman Numeral Sketch

RN Sketch - Ternary

10/21/16

B... good! You have all of the requirements. Make sure that your cadences are clear, and I recommend extending the transition of that first modulation. Keep an eye out for parallel motion (and avoid it!) in the next phase

What's your cadence here?

Are you using the common dyad of G# and B? Make that more obvious by extracting those notes before you build the next chord

What's your cadence? I would stretch the cool previous bar into 2 bars, leading to a HC, then cut the vi and IV chords

Very nice ultra-deceptive resolution; just make sure the voice-leading avoids parallels

Great!

Remember 7th resolves down: D to C#: lovely Picardy 3rd!

a♭: i — iv — vii°7/V — V — i — II — III — vii°7 — i — IV

V — ♯i — i — iv — N6 — I♯6 — V — i — V7 — HC

F#: i — ♯i — III4 — N6 — Fr6 — V — vi — IV

A♭: I — IV — V — ♭VI — I — V — F#7/B♭ — B7/E♭ — E7/a — a♭m

a♭: V — i — iv — vii°7/V — V — i — II — III — vii°7 — i — iv

i — V — VI — i — iv — N6 — I♯6 — V — V7 — I
P3
PAC?

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Composition Draft