

Title: Engaging the Whole Musical Self Through Expert Music Analysis Processes

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Summary

My course redesign focused on a second-year music theory class. My aim was to emphasize the processes involved in music analysis, an activity that combines body-based skills of performance and listening with mind-based skills of comparison, evaluation, and critical thinking

Background

Materials of Music III is the third course in a four-semester core music theory and aural skills sequence that is required for all music majors. This course builds on prior skills and content and asks students to take that work deeper as they gain more fluency. For some students, this is the last music theory class they will take; for others, this course is a prerequisite for upper-level classes in analysis and composition.

A stereotypical music theory class has a set list of typical activities that tend to stay fixed while the content changes or deepens. These include:

- writing single examples of each concept using music notation
- writing passages of music using examples of each concept, following specific guidelines for how to connect one concept to the next
- recognizing each concept visually in musical scores and aurally in musical pieces
- playing examples of each concept at the piano

Often, these activities are taught through homework or out-of-class activities. I practice a flipped model of teaching. I teach two 100-minute classes a week, and divide my class time into smaller chunks to engage with the various modalities described above. I am also lucky to have class sizes that range from 9-15 students. A typical class period might be structured as follows:

- review of returned assignments and/or quizzes with discussion of common difficulties
- short lecture to expand on a current topic or introduce a new one
- individual or small-group practice on topic either through writing or at pianos
- individual quiz to test mastery on a previous concept
- analysis of a piece or music passage as a full class or in small groups, through listening and score study

My classes use a variety of assessment tools with various grade weights.

Assessment Tools in Materials of Music III

activity	alone or in groups?	in or out of class?	formal or informal?	low, medium, high stakes?	connection to learning goals
analysis, composition, and performance assignments	both	in class	informal	none (not graded)	content mastery and fluency
analysis and composition assignments	both (submitted individually but may work in groups)	out of class	formal	low	content mastery and fluency; application of content to problems
timed quizzes	alone	in class	formal	low	content mastery and fluency; individual accountability
Writing for Analysis Assignments	alone	both	formal	medium	critical thinking, synthesis of content and application to new situations
midterm and final exams	alone	in class	formal	high	content mastery and fluency; some synthesis of content and application to new situations

What most music theory classes share is a tension between activities and goals that address mastery of content and improvement of musical literacy (that is, the ability to read, write, hear, and play musical concepts quickly and accurately), and activities that require students to use that content and literacy to solve a problem or defend an argument. Both activities are important, but, returning to my specific target course, I see this class as the place in the overall music theory sequence where my expectations of student learning changes. Mastery of content and basic musical literacy is now assumed to be more the responsibility of the student. I focus more on deepening student learning through critical thinking and application to musical literature from a range of genres.

It follows, then, that music analysis became my primary focus in this course redesign. Music analysis synthesizes both content and critical thinking, along with creativity when analysts report their findings in written documents or oral presentations. I also suspected, before beginning this project, that good music analysis could involve many of the skills that music

theory classes address: score study, performance, listening, and, to a lesser extent, composition.

Implementation

Pre-Work: What is an Expert Music Analysis?

I discovered that music analysis synthesizes numerous musical skills by using the Decoding the Disciplines framework. Developed by David Pace and Joan Middendorf and described on decodingthedisciplines.org, Decoding the Disciplines is "a process for increasing student learning by narrowing the gap between expert and novice thinking."

The full Decoding process is a seven-step framework to help teachers identify and address difficulties in student learning across a range of disciplines. Step 1, "define a bottleneck," encourages instructors to find a place in their course where students typically struggle: for me, this was music analysis.

The second step in the Decoding process involves inquiry into the behaviors conducted by experts in order to overcome that bottleneck. The investigator thinks deeply about the skills and strategies that s/he uses as an expert, often by participating in a "Decoding Interview" where I had a thirty-minute conversation with a colleague from another discipline about what it was that I, as an expert music analyst, did when I analyzed music. As a result of this conversation and subsequent reflection, I came to the following conclusions.

An expert music analyst, when presented with a piece of music, will typically do three activities:

- 1. listen to the piece*
- 2. perform the piece in some way: traditionally, by sitting at the piano and playing from a score*
- 3. compare what s/he hears in listening/playing with what s/he expects to hear (comparing the music with learned conventions)*

Through repeated passes through activities 1-3 above, the analyst will form theories about how this piece of music conforms to convention, or how it changes or challenges convention in some way. Then, the analyst returns to activities 1-3, but this time with an aim to find evidence to support her/his developing theories.

Next, the analyst will reflect on whether s/he thinks the theory is valid, and consider its strengths and weaknesses. This reflection will happen through the preparation of formal findings for presentation/publication (that is, through the activity of writing), and through further passes through activities 1-3.

Finally, the analyst will share her/his theory with other experts, and respond to feedback from those experts.

I learned that analysis involved all the musical skills that were goals of my course: listening, performance, score study, and composition. Music analysis also synthesizes both content and critical thinking, along with creativity through writing. In a sense, expert music analysis forces music theorists to bring their whole musical selves into the study of music: their listening ear, performing body, and critical mind. I wondered if my students were

using their whole musical selves in analysis, and if I was teaching them to do so. These two questions would form the basis of my CHRP project.

Revisions to In-Class Activities

I focused on four areas where I could redesign my course to better teach students an expert process of analysis in my course, two in-class and two out-of-class. My first in-class focus was on how I modeled the expert process of music analysis for students. Through analysis of my lecture notes in the fall 2015 iteration of the course I learned that although I sometimes mentioned or demonstrated listening and performing as part of the analysis process, I mostly emphasized looking. I rarely, if ever, mentioned revision of prior analytical work. In lectures later in the semester, I tried to include more activities that involved playing and listening, and adapted my language to emphasize hearing rather than seeing.

My second in-class focus was to adapt and introduce more activities that would allow students to practice expert processes in a low- or no-stakes environment. A sample from fall 2014 shows that I already do this in my teaching, but what is missing is my drawing student awareness to the activity as teaching a process; that is, making them aware of the processes they're using as ones that would be good to use again in future. In a 2015 activity, I gave students a preparatory assignment for the following class that was given a completion grade.

In the 2016 iteration of this class, I will increase student awareness to their own processes from day 1, to get a sense of the pulse of the class on the topic at the start of the semester. I will continue to informally point out the use of revision, listening, and pianos during in-class activities, and continue to use the preparatory assignment from 2015.

Revisions to Out-of-Class Activities

My first out-of-class focus was to change the standard template I use for short music analysis homework. Prior to this redesign, I might have written an analysis assignment like this:

Prepare a formal analysis of Beethoven's Sonatina in F Major, Op. Posthumous, second movement (p.99 in your anthology). Draw phrase structure diagrams and label phrase types as specifically as possible.

This assignment emphasizes the product of analysis (diagrams of phrase structure and labels of phrase types) but not the process. It also does not remind students to listen and play the piece; that is, to engage their whole musical selves.

At this point in my course, I was trying to understand what students did when they analyzed a piece, and so deliberately didn't prompt them to listen or play. However, there are more cues to unpack difficult moments and encourage reflection. In Fall 2016 I want to continue to refine my assignment design template to prompt students in a more step-by-step manner.

My second out-of-class focus was to modify the way I prepared students for the "Writing for Analysis" assignments. These assignments represent the highest-order thinking required of students in my course.

In the fall of 2015, I was fortunate to receive funding for a pilot project with Elon's Writing Center. I was paired with a student worker at the Writing Center, a Writing Center Fellow, to work on student writing in my course. We didn't tackle the Writing for Analysis assignments until after the first assignment (WA1) had already been given. With her help, I was able to redesign WA2 and WA3.

One difference that stands out to me between WA1 and WA2 is the way each assignment deals with the combination of music analysis and writing. In WA1, I broke the task into two parts, analysis and writing, which now seems like an artificial separation since as an expert, I often work my analytical ideas out through writing or speaking.

Another difference is the way each assignment teaches the analytical process. WA1 offers a single option (a chart) without specific instruction as to how to begin an analysis. In WA2 I give a list of concrete ways that students might analyze their chosen song, and includes expert processes (listening, playing, transcription, music writing, comparison of new piece with present knowledge).

Finally, the way I used class time between WA1 and WA2 changed. In WA1, we spent some class time together discussing the blues form and completing the chart in groups. I left them to complete their drafts on their own, gave them feedback on drafts by email, and then collected final versions.

For WA2, I added several new elements:

- delivered a 'think aloud' lecture where I demonstrated how to approach an analysis and develop a thesis statement for a specific song
- asked the Writing Center Fellow to deliver a presentation on how to give effective peer feedback
- asked students to write up a thesis statement and supporting evidence; students gave online peer feedback
- gave students feedback on a draft, via email
- met with Writing Center Consultant to give my overall impressions of drafts
- had students meet with Writing Center Consultant to revise draft
- students submitted final version on paper

In the fall 2016 iteration of this course, I will no longer have a Writing Center Consultant. I will keep the redesign of the assignment itself, but consider alternative methods of scaffolding the process for students.

Student Work

I looked at student work in three ways. I tested different methods for collecting data on student process of analyses, and then analyzed that data. I explored the potential link between use of expert process of analysis and higher quality musical analyses. And I looked at student performance on the Writing for Analysis assignments specifically.

Data on Student Process of Analysis

I found it difficult to collect data on student processes that often happened out of class. I started by asking students to self-report their analytical strategies using 'process reports'. Students were asked to write down everything they did to complete an analysis assignment, and to submit that report anonymously when they submitted their analysis.

Results were mixed. Students often forgot to complete a process report, and I often forgot to collect them. I also found their self-reporting was not always detailed or self-reflective enough for my purposes; like me prior to the Decoding the Disciplines expert interview, my students were usually not aware of the many strategies they were using to complete a given analytical task.

On the other hand, process reports did occasionally provide useful information. In process reports collected in fall 2015, I saw some evidence that students were using their whole musical selves (playing the melody at the piano, listening or attempting to listen) in analysis. I also noticed that students were focusing on what I considered to be lower-order analytical tasks that were more related to musical literacy, and that indicated a lack of mastery of concepts from prior semesters. My intuition that students were rusty after a summer away from the material was confirmed by the students themselves (although they didn't recognize that this was impacting their ability to analyze the music).

I modified my process report strategy by observing student processes of analysis in class, while they were working in groups or alone. This was more helpful, since I could notice elements that students ignored in their self-reporting, and since I could discuss the process with students as they were working, and thus use my observations as an opportunity for student learning.

For instance in fall 2015 I assigned groups of students analytical excerpts for homework. Not only were they to analyze their excerpt, but they were to report to the class on their strategies for analysis, and discuss alternative interpretations that were rejected. I took notes on these presentations.

Data on the Link Between Expert Process and Expert Results

Data on the link between expert processes and expert analysis was also difficult to obtain. The student presentations from fall 2015 suggested that there could be a link between "whole musical self" analytical process and expert results, since the group that used the most strategies (group 1) had the most successful analysis. But this also could have been because the group had three members rather than two, or because my note-taking was more accurate for this group than the others since they presented first.

I tried two additional strategies for data collection in a spring 2016 course that was the continuation of my fall 2015 course, and that had a similar design and learning outcomes. Strategy 1 was to collect data on a prose question related to a completed analysis. Strategy 2 was to specifically test for the impact of listening by comparing results on a completed analysis before and after listening.

In Strategy 1, the prompt asks students to just listen to a piece of music, and then to listen and look at a score. Given this prompting, I was happy to see that 5 of 8 students referred to these two experiences, suggesting that I successfully encouraged expert process. Analyzing the answers for content, I note that answers are generally more specific on this question than on other questions on the assignment, where there was no cue to listen. This question also saw more references to specific musical features than on previous questions. To me, this suggests that listening to a piece enriches the analytical statements that students make about it.

Strategy 2 was mostly unsuccessful in Fall 2015 since only 1 student remembered to complete the task, and that student's analysis didn't change significantly from pre-listening to post-listening. In Fall 2016 I hope to collect a larger data sample on this question, and to include a question asking students to reflect on the experience in order to draw awareness to the process and the value it might hold for analysis.

Data on Writing for Analysis Assignments

In Fall 2015 I revised the assignment process and design between WA1 and WAs 2 and 3. I will therefore compare WA1 (pre-revision) with WA2 and WA3 (post-revision).

One way of evaluating these might be simply to look at grades:

	Number of As	Number of Bs	Number of Cs	Number of Ds
WA 1	2	3	2	0
WA 2	4	2	0	0
WA 3	5	1	1	0

Even given the small sample size, I think these are shocking results. From 2 out of 7 A grades on the first assignment to 4 out of 7 A grades (and 2 B+ grades received only because a required draft was not submitted) to 5 out of 7 A grades on the last assignment is amazing. Some external factors that may have influenced the rise are a likely increase in student musical literacy and fluency over the semester, and the possibility that I became more willing to reward effort rather than results, as observed the amount of hard, meaningful work students put in to their assignments.

I have one sample of actual student work in 2015 from WA1 to WA2. In the analysis below, I evaluate the student's work using the categories from my original rubric.

WA1:	
thesis statement	doesn't address prompt (D or F)
evidence	broad points that don't support thesis (C)
content from music theory	discusses some musical details with limited technical vocabulary (C)
organization	clear but not compelling intro or conclusion (C)
mechanics	clear (B)
WA2:	
thesis statement	clear, original, addresses prompt (A)
evidence	lots of detailed evidence that supports argument (A)
content from music theory	detailed discussion of musical features with technical vocabulary (A)
organization	logical flow and exceptional conclusion (A)
mechanics	clear and complex (A)

This assignment also had an extra feature not in the rubric: a discussion of analytical ambiguity, and an evaluation of options. This is higher-order, even expert-level, thinking that I was pleasantly surprised to see.

To me, these results are a clear sign that the strategies I used in WA2 are ones that I should continue. I may not have access to a Writing Center Consultant in future, but I should investigate ways to maintain some of the benefits that working with a consultant provided me and my students.

Reflection

In my final iteration of the course in Fall 2016, I want to do three things:

1. think more about what constitutes a good analysis, potentially by looking at student work
2. continue to evaluate WA assignment, assessing student work with a new set of assignments
3. investigate whether grades are the best way to assess student work in WA: are there other strategies that I might use e.g. collecting and coding all assignments

This year I've had a realization about the importance of lecture in a classroom environment. I've flipped my class so that students have more practice opportunities with me present to give feedback. But lecture is still important as a means to model expert behaviour. so rather than using lecture as a way of just telling them information (which I don't like and have avoided in my teaching when I can), I'm now using and understanding lecture as a means to show them what an expert does, whether that's with analysis, or otherwise (eg. an expert knows how to write and resolve this chord properly).

I am reminded that expert processes of analysis also include mastery of content, and fluency in music reading and performance. Students cannot perform a piece if their piano skills are poor; they cannot discuss musically ambiguous passages if they cannot identify musical constructs by ear or with their eyes looking at a musical score. Thus, while this project emphasizes how to teach students about how experts in the discipline of music theory integrate musical skills from other disciplines of music research, it also reveals the importance of emphasizing the value of simple content mastery and increased musical literacy/fluency.

This project also clarified for me how my expectations shape student results, specifically in terms of setting appropriate learning goals. I need to remember that my learning goal for this class is not for students to become experts in using their whole musical selves in analysis. Instead, it's simply for students to be exposed to such a process, to practice it, and potentially to see results via evidence of deeper critical thinking, a larger number of 'good' analyses over the semester, and an overall sense that music theory and analysis are integrated, relevant parts of their musical education.