

# TUNE UP YOUR INSTRUCTION: TRANSFORM DISCIPLINE-BASED INSTRUCTION USING ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

This presentation is constructed with the following goals for participants in mind: to observe a creative learning strategy; to take away a model of active engagement for discipline-specific research instruction; to understand the model from the viewpoints of participant and facilitator; and to reflect on pedagogical goals and learning styles. After the first portion of the assessment is completed, content will follow parallel tracks alternating between explanation of content and participation in the active learning exercises. The remaining assessment questions are completed at the end. It is my intention to model the Introduction to Music Research sessions as closely as possible while providing participants with enough information to be able to adapt and incorporate some of these strategies and elements into teaching discipline-specific research skills.

## AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION: ASSESSMENT PART 1

Each participant has a copy of the evaluation form, and will take a couple of minutes to fill out the first part by writing down three personal expectations for this session. At this point, I will tell audience members not to mark anything in the boxes next to the expectations. We will address those at the end of the session. (The complete assessment tool can be found in Table 1 of the Appendix.)

## BACKGROUND

Making the transition from lecture-based instruction

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delivery to an active, learner-centered model provided an excellent opportunity to blend creative ideas and new teaching strategies. When the Luther College Music Department included library instruction as part of the curriculum plan in preparation for their most recent NASM accreditation, it was the perfect opportunity to take a fresh look at how research instruction was being delivered. Though we are a small liberal arts college, we have a vibrant music program that consistently graduates a high number of majors. The music curriculum committee targeted sophomore music theory (Theory III) as the course in which all music majors would receive an introduction to research resources and skills.

When I first began teaching research skills for the music department, I worked from a lecture-based model, and tried to incorporate an overview of everything into a one-shot experience for multiple sections of 20 or more students. This was done partly out of habit, and partly because I considered this to be my one and only chance to interact with the students until research for their senior papers (the capstone experience in each major). However, this model faced the usual challenges: the instructor grudgingly gave me time from class content, there was no assignment tied to the skills, and students glazed over from listening to a presentation without active engagement. Over the next two years, I tried several things as I tried to work towards more effective sessions. When the department offered me two class days instead of one, I rejoiced. I then incorporated my own (ungraded) assignment related to course content and developed a hands-on activity for students to explore uniform titles using music scores from the collection. A year later, a new theory instructor was hired, and the experience was reduced to one day instead of two. That year, I chose the best parts of what I had been doing, but still was not satisfied. It was time for a more significant change, one that would get students involved in the content, active in recognizing and building on existing

discipline-specific knowledge, and allow them to practice using these skills.

My goals for the students were simple: I wanted to help them recognize they had a foundation of musical knowledge on which to build; I wanted everyone to participate but feel comfortable doing so; and I wanted my session to challenge their expectations for learning about research. On the teaching side, I wanted to transform my role from one of lecturer to facilitator; provide structure but relinquish ultimate control of my classroom; and incorporate teaching that would appeal to multiple learning styles. I decided to keep two of the brainstorming activities from my previous work, and added a foreign language component; this met the foundation of musical knowledge goal. The core activity became a color-coded question card sequence, which met the participation goal. I built this activity on research questions that could be answered using the resources available on the library's music web page. Whether or not I met the goal of challenging expectations would be determined by student reactions to session content. My background in music performance allows me to demonstrate an authentic active teaching style that helps to foster open discussion during the sessions. Throughout the session, I move back and forth between the computer and the students, gesturing and making eye contact with them as I "perform" the elements of the class.

### **BRAINSTORMING ACTIVITY**

The first learner-centered activity works as an ice-breaker to get students talking, and is designed to build on existing subject-specific knowledge while introducing some of the specialized considerations related to music research. On the board, we brainstorm music identifiers (opus, number, catalog designation, key, publisher number, etc.); generic titles (sonata, cantata, prelude, requiem, etc.); and unique titles (*The Four Seasons*, *Hornsignal Symphony*, *Tosca*, etc.). Since foreign language skills often come into play with music research, I poll students about their language facility, which makes both a personal connection and demonstrates how skills from related disciplines may be of use. Using the example of Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*, I write the title on the board in different languages – starting with Russian – until someone can identify the piece.

### **AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION: BRAINSTORMING**

In order to explore the possibilities of brainstorming and generate ideas for other subject areas, I asked audience members what subject areas they provide instruction for. With the following prompts as inspiration (or backup!), we constructed some on-the-spot examples that could be used as part of an introduction to research session in different disciplines:

- language and literature: genres (e.g., poem, short story, essay, novel)
- biology, nursing, pre-med: differences between formal and common terminology

- history: terminology for events (e.g., Civil War vs. War of the Rebellion)

### **QUESTION CARD ACTIVITY**

This activity developed from my desire to get students involved while at the same time eliminating the risk element of participation. What would happen if students were provided with a question to ask, rather than having to think of something to ask? Would it change how students responded to the session? The positive response to both of these questions exceeded my hopes. I have found that this activity has transformed the student experience by giving them ownership of the content. On more than one occasion, students have broken into spontaneous applause at the end, and, last fall, they cheered when I told them there would be participation. Perhaps the most gratifying was the student who said: "I almost didn't come to class when I heard we were doing this today, but I'm so glad I did because it wasn't what I expected at all. I really learned a lot!"

The sequence includes an introduction to nine research sources (white); and four groups of research questions: answering basic reference questions (pink), locating materials related to the dissertation of a familiar faculty member (blue), researching compositions by J.S. Bach (yellow), and a potpourri covering music education, recording reviews, and journal articles (purple). The wildcards (salmon) are related to library services and tips for more effective searching. As I facilitate, students practice selecting and using the resources, evaluating search results, and revising search strategies. Once students see how the model works, they feel more comfortable asking their own questions, or making their own observations about search strategy or choice of research tool.

Though I considered information literacy a foundation for these sessions, in reality, it was three years before I intentionally tied the content to select learning outcomes from the first two standards of the Music Library Association's *Information Literacy Instructional Objectives for Undergraduate Music Students*. Since the session serves as an introduction to research in the discipline, I selected outcomes from five performance indicators taken from Standards One and Two (see Table 1), which focus on defining an information need and accessing information to fill the need. I initially selected the outcomes that fit what I was already doing, but in an effort to focus on research process rather than formats or tools, I took a second look at both my choice of outcomes and the sample research questions. This resulted in a new set of potpourri cards and revised wildcards that were more effectively aligned with the information literacy objectives.

**Table 1: Selected Information Literacy Performance Indicators and Outcomes**

**Music Library Association Information Literacy Instructional Objectives for Undergraduate Music Students**

**Standard One**

The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed.

**Performance Indicators:**

1. The information literate student defines and articulates the need for information.  
*Outcomes: c.1, e.1*
2. The information literate student identifies a variety of types and formats of potential sources for information.  
*Outcome: c.1*
4. The information literate student reevaluates the nature and extent of the information need.  
*Outcomes: a, b*

**Standard Two**

The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.

**Performance Indicators:**

2. The information literate student constructs and implements effectively-designed search strategies.  
*Outcomes: b, c.1, d*
4. The information literate student refines the search strategy if necessary.  
*Outcomes: a, b, c*

**THE CEPHALONIAN METHOD**

At LOEX 2009, in Albuquerque, NM, I attended a presentation (J. Weetman DaCosta and E. Dubicki, “How to illuminate your classroom with interactive learning techniques” May 2, 2009) that used the Cephalonian method to present instruction principles and discovered that my Introduction to Music Research structure utilized two of the Cephalonian elements – color and active engagement – both of which appeal to multiple learning styles. With inspiration from LOEX and further research, I streamlined the question cards to better focus on the process of research and added the other essential Cephalonian element to my sessions – music – to successfully revise my teaching for the music students.

**Music**

I decided to use music sparingly during my sessions, instead of throughout the class. Selections were chosen based on the mood I wanted to set, and all but one were from the classical music repertoire, and mostly unfamiliar to the students. As audience members entered the room, a jaunty Baroque selection played, while more reflective tracks by Grieg and Bach accompany the assessment activities. The theme from *Indiana Jones* served as exit music as I wished the students good luck on their research adventures. There was only one student who indicated that the music distracted her because she could not identify the piece.

**Color**

How I use color is slightly different than the original Cephalonian model, where students see the color of their question reflected in the content displayed on the screen. I

use color to group the questions together by topic and to help reinforce the game-like aspect of the activity.

**Active Engagement**

While I act as facilitator and navigate the web resources, students guide the session content as each one asks his or her question. Because we have established the expectation that everyone will be involved, participants take ownership of the content and feel more comfortable entering the conversation, which leads to additional questions and discussion. I do everything the students guide me to do, and this includes following resource choices or search strategies I know will not be effective. This creates a more authentic experience, where researchers need to be able to revise and reconsider the choices that are made. In these cases, I make sure to prompt students with additional questions, rather than providing direct solutions.

Prior to a session, I review my script, determine if any changes need to be made, and select cards based on the number of students in each section. After I introduce myself and explain the purpose and goals of the session, I distribute the randomly sorted question cards and explain the “rules” of the activity: do not reveal the content of the card to your neighbor, and you should have a different colored card than your neighbor. I always assume everyone will participate, so it is never presented as an option; as yet, nobody has refused to read a card. For an added bonus, I enthusiastically ask for volunteers to accept the wildcards – six to eight cards written about library services or research tips. These questions may be asked at any time during the session; it is up to each student to determine the appropriate context in which to ask his or her wildcard question.

## AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION: QUESTION CARD ACTIVITY

In order for participants to see the model in action, I distributed sample cards to volunteers. Using online resources from Luther College to answer the research questions, participants experienced elements of the Cephalonian model and had an opportunity to ask questions about the activity.

## AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION: ASSESSMENT PART #2

The six remaining assessment questions are provided on PowerPoint slides, with responses to be recorded on the assessment tool handed out at the beginning. Once participants have completed this part of the assessment, they are asked to revisit the learning expectations written at the beginning, and to check off all the items that were met during the presentation. I follow up on this by asking if there are any remaining questions.

## ASSESSMENT RESULTS FOR MUSIC

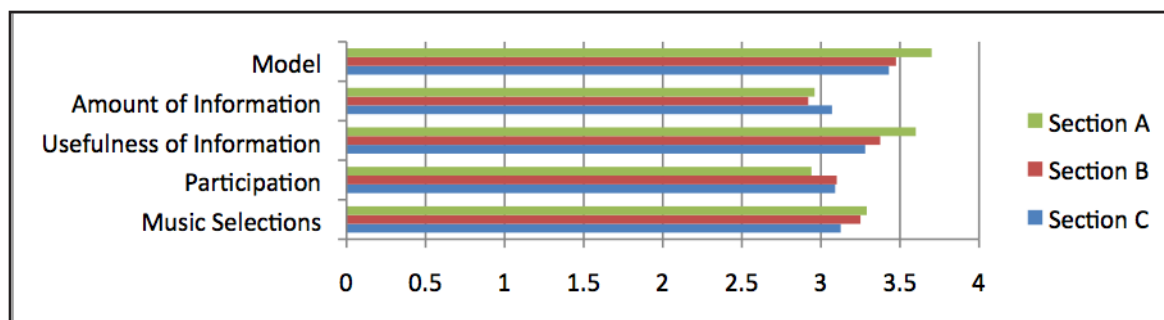
Students were asked to provide feedback on the presentation model, the amount of content, their own level of participation, and how useful the information will be in the future. Rather than evaluate my delivery of the content and knowledge of the material, I wanted them to focus on their role in the process, and how they plan to put their knowledge to use for coursework, private lessons, recital program notes and senior research. The graphs below show student feedback for the three sessions taught in Fall 2009.

I chose to reveal the questions only at the end, as I wanted them to remain engaged with the content rather than try to complete the assessment during class. A majority of students indicated their expectations for the session had been met. Several students did include a follow-up question on the assessment tool, but only two provided contact information that allowed me to respond with answers. Student learning expectations fell into two main categories, resources (78 responses) and research (44), followed by services (9), listening (4), translating/languages (3), and citations (1).

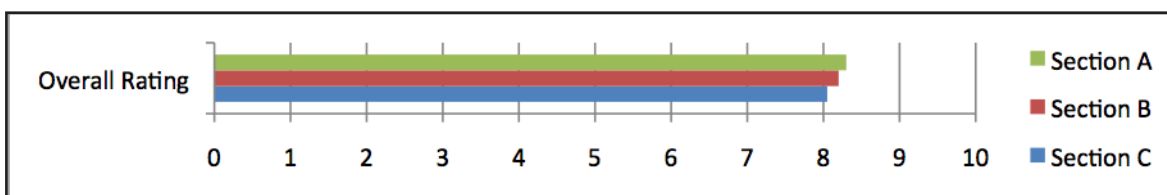
## CHALLENGES AND DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE

The obvious challenges remain: the activity is not tied to an assignment, and the sessions are often scheduled when the instructor is away. The assessment revealed two additional challenges: given the high level of student concern about senior research, I wonder if the instructor may have set expectations that I was not prepared to meet; also, non-majors feel their time has been wasted. As a result of feedback from other librarians, I will consider using clickers for the evaluation, and possibly incorporate a pre- and post-test that would directly assess student learning. I am most intrigued by the spontaneous connections students make during the sessions, such as connecting together elements of the brainstorming.

Graph 1: Aggregate Responses for Questions 4-8 (see Table 2 in Appendix)



Graph 2: Aggregate Response for Question 9 (see Table 2 in Appendix)



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Weetman DaCosta, J., & Dubicki, E. (2009, May). *How to illuminate your classroom with interactive learning techniques*. Session presented at the LOEX Annual Conference, Albuquerque, NM.
- Music Library Association. (2005). *MLA Information Literacy Instructional Objectives for Undergraduate Music Students*. MLA. Retrieved from [http://www.musiclibraryassoc.org/pdf/BI\\_MLA\\_Instructional\\_Objectives.pdf](http://www.musiclibraryassoc.org/pdf/BI_MLA_Instructional_Objectives.pdf)

## APPENDIX

**Table 1: Assessment Tool**

**I'd like your feedback on the Intro to Music Research session...**

What are you hoping to learn from your research instruction session today? Please write down **THREE** questions or expectations you have for this session. We'll use the check boxes during class, so don't worry about filling them in yet.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

If you have a specific question that you didn't get to ask during the session, please write it down, along with your name and email address, and I will contact you.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Which card(s) did you have for the session? (Please list by letter/number.)

\_\_\_\_\_

The text for these questions will be shown at the end of the session.

4.	4	3	2	1						
5.	4	3	2	1						
6.	4	3	2	1						
7.	4	3	2	1						
8.	4	3	3	1						
9.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Please write down any other comments you have about the session:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Table 2: Text for Assessment Questions 4-9**

4. What is your perception of the interactive model used for the session?  
4 = Liked it very much                      1 = Didn't like it at all

5. What is your perception of the amount of material covered in the session?  
4 = Too much                                      1 = Not enough

6. What is your perception of how useful this information will be for your music courses, private lessons, or research?  
4 = Very useful                                      1 = Not sure I will use

7. Please rank your perception of your own participation in the session.  
4 = I was excited to participate in this way.  
3 = I felt comfortable reading my card(s).  
2 = I felt uncomfortable reading my card(s).  
1 = I just wanted to listen, not participate.

8. Please rate your perception of the music used for the session.  
4 = Selections enhanced the session.  
3 = Selections set a good mood.  
2 = Selections were distracting.  
1 = Selections were not useful in the session.

9. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate the session overall?