

**Report on the Pedagogy Into Practice Conference**  
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In 2010, a group of music theorists met at the Gail Boyd De Stwolinski Center for Music Theory Pedagogy at the University of Oklahoma to discuss ways in which the scholarship and practice of music theory pedagogy could be disseminated to a wider audience. Several initiatives were set as goals for the center, including:

- The development of a [website](#) dedicated to music theory pedagogy (Launched in 2012)
- The creation of an [E-journal](#) (Launched in 2013)
- Open access for both the [print](#) and [E-journal](#) of *JMTP* (Launched in January of 2016)
- A successful national conference focused on music theory pedagogy

The final result of that conversation was realized at the Pedagogy into Practice Conference, held June 1-3, 2017 on the campus at Lee University. Steve Laitz, director of the Stwolinski Center and chair of music theory at the Juilliard School, appointed Elizabeth Marvin (Eastman School of Music) as the chair of the program committee and Jennifer Snodgrass (Appalachian State University) and Austin Patty (Lee University) as the co-coordinators. The program committee, listed below, included some of the most active scholars in the field of music theory pedagogy, including members of the editorial boards of both the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* and the *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy Online* and instructors at research institutions, conservatories, teaching institutions, and community colleges.

- Elizabeth Marvin, Eastman School of Music
- Patricia Burt, Harford Community College
- Steve Laitz, Juilliard School

- David Castro, St. Olaf College
- David Thurmaier, University of Missouri, Kansas City
- Rebecca Jemian, University of Louisville

The response to the call for submissions included 95 proposals, representing a variety of topics, including but not limited to, popular music and contemporary repertoire, aural skills, improvisation, learning theories, assessment, curriculum design, and technology applications. The entire program for the conference can be viewed at the [Music Theory Pedagogy Online Conference Page](#).

During the initial discussion about the conference, the coordinators and program committee felt strongly about inviting a keynote speaker from outside of the discipline. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is quickly becoming significantly important on university and college campuses, and we wanted a keynote that would address trends and challenges within pedagogy more generally. Ken Bain, author of *What the Best College Teachers Do*, was an obvious choice to deliver the opening keynote for this conference. Bain was able to quickly establish the dynamic of the conference as one of discussion and thought, and he challenged all in attendance to think about what it means to foster deep learning in our classrooms. He stated that students learn by doing and asked participants to think about ways we can “do” music theory rather than just talk about it. Bain continued to pose questions to the audience, after which attendees broke up into small discussion groups to talk through his questions. This “opening up” in discussion with other attendees established the environment of conversation that was so prevalent throughout the conference.

Throughout his keynote address, Bain encouraged those in attendance to think deeply about their own teaching in relation to how one can lead students to experience deep learning in individual classroom environments. He stated, “People are most likely to take a deep approach when they, the learner, are trying to answer questions or solve problems.” The notion of questioning, both in terms of encouraging students to ask questions and for faculty to question what they do everyday in the classroom, became a focal point for many of the presentations and discussions following the keynote address.

During the early planning stages of the conference, the program committee decided the poster session, and the discussions that followed the poster session, would be a highlighted event. In many of the traditional music societies, the poster session may be thought of as “sub-par scholarship;” however, the program committee felt strongly about accepting 25 posters in order to best represent a variety of ideas in both practical, hands-on teaching and pedagogical scholarship. Rebecca Jemian, session chair of the poster session, wanted a discussion to occur, and participants were assigned a number and broken up into discussion groups following the poster session. While the room quickly became crowded, I was personally excited to see the amount of conversation and sharing of ideas during and after the poster presentation. Contact information was exchanged, opportunities for future collaborations were discussed, and it seemed that all attendees were spending more time in conversation than after the typical conference paper. The program committee purposely did not have a parallel session so that all attendees could attend the poster session without having to choose between sessions. A

feedback survey indicated that 84% of respondents found the poster session effective or highly effective.

On a personal note, I have been involved in the scholarship of music theory pedagogy for the past twenty years. Not too long ago, pedagogy was simply not considered an appropriate or scholarly research area within the field of music theory, and I believed it to be my secondary area--not something I would explore deeply but something I loved reading about in general pedagogy journals. The response to this conference, the rise in submissions to the *JMTP*, and the discussions I overheard throughout the sessions seem to indicate a shift in the academy; perhaps we now realize that the study of music theory pedagogy is a valuable subset of the discipline and a scholarly one at that. In a conversation with Ken Bain following the conference, he stated to me that "it is only in the past 20 or 25 years that we have had this burst of literature (about pedagogy) and really only in the past 10 or 12 years." It is exciting to think that we, as music theorists, are now consistently adding to this wealth of scholarship and literature. It is up to us to continue the conversations initiated at this conference, to understand and question the motivations behind our curricula and pedagogical practice, and to consider manners in which we implement and integrate deep learning in both our classrooms and our scholarship.



***Participants at lunch presentation sponsored by Noteflight***

***Loretta Terrigno  
Music Theory Faculty, The Juilliard School***

The *Pedagogy Into Practice* conference was the long-awaited result of preparations that were initiated by Steven Laitz and others in 2010. To me, this conference provided evidence of the enduring passion, creativity, and collegiality found among teachers of music theory and aural skills throughout the United States and Canada today. While other contributing members of the editorial board have focused here on the organization of the conference—for instance, individual 20-minute papers, poster sessions, keynote sessions by Ken Bain and Anna Gawboy that described “deep learning” and “the art of listening,” as well as group discussions, demonstrations of computer programs to aid musical instruction, and lunches that offered free time for educators to debrief about the wide array of topics explored by the presenters—my

observations will focus instead on the open-mindedness that conference attendees seemed to show toward each other, and the sense of pedagogical vitality fostered by the conference activities.

It was perhaps only in Ken Bain's keynote lecture on "deep learning," in which he shared the idea that humans learn best when we are solving crucial—even beautiful—problems that are intrinsically valuable and meaningful to us, that I realized I was involved in a sort of "meta-classroom" at this conference. At *Pedagogy Into Practice*, I was surrounded by teachers with a range of titles: assistant professors, professors, lecturers, high school teachers, undergraduate and graduate students, teaching assistants, and teachers of private music lessons. Yet all were alike in their aim to engage in the "deep approach to their learning" described by Bain. By attempting to answer the question of *how* the human brain understands new musical concepts—to develop and critically evaluate their methods—the conference attendees were united in a common quest: seeking the most effective ways of imparting musical knowledge to their students. The more I immersed myself in new pedagogical ideas, the more I felt compelled to rethink my own strategies, to prevent them from succumbing to stagnation or inertia, and to develop new ways of engaging my own students.

I found it particularly inspiring that seasoned pedagogues at *Pedagogy Into Practice* showed as much willingness to learn from budding teachers as vice versa, especially during the poster sessions (where mingling observers talked freely with the presenters) and in the subsequent group discussions. (Each attendee carried a "passport" for which poster presenters supplied "stamps" as a reminder of visiting the

poster. Following the poster sessions, we convened in groups to discuss our experience. Thus the spirit of discussion and group work that guided the conference activities seemed to mirror tactics that engage students! ) A common goal—that of seeking *effective* pedagogical techniques—seemed to unite scholars with otherwise divergent research interests as well as teachers who would normally be separated by geographical distance or the different curricular aims at their institutions. For me, the conference unearthed a community of colleagues who I might not otherwise meet or share ideas with, and helped to shed light on the current state of music pedagogy in 1) undergraduate-, master's-, and PhD- level music curricula throughout the United States (some presenters were both PhD students and teaching assistants), as well as 2) the active community of K-12 music teachers and music teachers at community colleges.

The poster sessions, in which presenters lined the perimeter of two separate rooms while observers circulated in the middle, were particularly influential in fostering a free exchange of ideas, a characteristic of this conference that marked it as a particularly special gathering. The posters that I was able to see included the following topics:

- Strategies for using writing assignments in undergraduate music theory core classes.
- Fostering “malleable mindsets” in students through particular techniques of assessment and grading.
- Visual aids for teaching introductory topics in post-tonal theory.
- Activities for incorporating improvisation into aural skills classes.
- Introducing world music into beginning level aural skills and theory classes.
- Observations about how repertoire choices (for example, the classical canon, male vs. female composers) and polling the students’ musical interests can instill particular biases.
- A classification system for swung rhythms in selected time signatures and its application in aural skills classes for music business and technology majors.
- Demonstrations of software that enable at-home and in-class aural skills practice.

These posters were valuable in that an attendee could easily take away bite-sized pedagogical techniques from them for immediate incorporation into the classroom. And in many cases, the teaching *strategies* (rather than content) were foregrounded. These strategies could often be adapted to different types of classes despite potential curricular differences between the presenter's and the observer's institutions, students' levels of education, or proficiency with material. Each presenter was also able to answer questions in real time, while contact information on handouts offered the opportunity to stay in touch. To be sure, attendees' positive reactions to the poster sessions featured prominently in their responses to a post-conference survey, as 84% of those who responded noted that posters were an "effective" or "extremely effective" mode for sharing information.

Workshop-style afternoon sessions (45-minute papers) in which the audience actively participated, and 20-minute formal papers given by single and joint authors throughout each day, also shed light on a range of recurring pedagogical issues of special relevance to teachers of music theory and aural skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (see my list below), a time in which teachers might feel an increasing distance and qualitative differences between aspects of their own musical education and that of their students. While the list of topics below represents my own interpretation of issues throughout the conference, Anna Gawboy's keynote lecture also raised many of them, especially the notion that today's teachers cannot assume that students will automatically engage in active, informed listening unless they are taught how to do so in a meaningful way. To

my mind, the workshops and papers displayed each teacher's efforts to maintain the vitality and *relevance* of music theory and aural skills instruction in a wide range of curricula.

Recurring pedagogical issues that emerged from 45-minute workshops and 20-minute papers:

- How to incorporate historical music theory in today's classroom
- Variations among types of music-theory notation systems (for example, figured bass and Roman numerals versus the Nashville Number System)
- How to negotiate different emphases on the classical-music canon versus world music and recent popular genres, as well as music by male versus female composers, in the classroom and (more broadly) curricula.
- How current streaming services (like Spotify and iTunes) and the widely-varying musical interests and lifestyles of students affect music theory pedagogy today.

Finally, I offer a brief remark about future conferences, which the post-conference survey suggests would be well-attended by those who were at *Pedagogy Into Practice* and by colleagues who will likely join them during the next iteration. While there was some discrepancy about which of the conference activities were *most* valuable to attendees, the overwhelming call for continuing an open, spirited dialogue that characterized this event rang loud and clear. (Even Ken Bain allowed us to verbalize our reflections to each other during the keynote lecture!) *Pedagogy Into Practice* seemed to unleash a flood of desire held by today's music theory teachers to connect, to share, and even to commiserate about a profession that can all too easily become a lonely pursuit, owing to the reality of our geographical isolation from one another. *Pedagogy Into Practice* has served as a beacon to educators who are eager to perpetuate the vitality of music theory, the "deep approach to learning," and ever more creative ways of imparting

(and seeking) knowledge, thereby inspiring our students—however potentially different from us they may be in today’s age—to do the same.



### ***Poster Presentation Attendees***

***Greg McCandless***  
***Assistant Professor of Music Theory, Appalachian State University***

The *Pedagogy into Practice* conference provided participants with a variety of valuable takeaways, as evidenced by the post-conference survey that was submitted by over 70 of the 130 attendees. Instructors found new pieces to use when teaching certain concepts, new strategies for incorporating technology into their classrooms, and even new friends with whom to collaborate. These are all positive results, though they are hardly unique to the meeting at Lee University this June. What was special about this

conference, though, was the near-constant sentiment of excitement that pervaded its sessions.

The attendees' enthusiasm may be in part attributable to the fact that the conference was held in a beautiful venue during the early summer's most agreeable weather. However, I truly believe that there was something particularly exciting and jubilant about the manner in which the posters, workshops, papers, and keynotes were delivered, and it is related to a collective surrender to the new and uncertain. Participants appeared united in possessing an earnest desire to try new things in their classrooms despite any reservations regarding their effectiveness, coupled with a willingness to critically evaluate their efforts. Moreover, this conference emphasized sharing over didactic explaining, with an implicit understanding that, despite keynote speaker Ken Bain's book title, there is no "best" teacher, no "best" curriculum, no "best" pedagogy. The result of this kind of openness, collegiality, and collaboration was a truly invigorating event.

Notably, each of the unique aspects of the conference as a whole—sharing as opposed to explaining, embracing the new, critically evaluating one's own views—were on display during Anna Gawboy's keynote, "The Art of Listening." Gawboy began by noting that today's students "listen" to a wider variety of music—for a substantially greater amount of time—than previous generations due to increased access via iTunes, Spotify, etc. However, she argued that students tend not to engage in the types of active listening (focused listening, participatory listening, responsive listening) that are commonly required in theory and aural skills courses. Therefore, Gawboy posited that a

chief aim of today's theory and aural skills instructor is to help students "learn to listen" in active ways (e.g., shifting focus between musical elements within a texture, tracking how a specific element may develop over time, remembering and audiating previously heard sounds, dictating music using notation, etc.) so that they may "listen to learn" about music during their coursework and throughout their lives.

To promote these "listening-to-learn skills" in Theory I, Gawboy created a new type of assessment composed of an analytical interview, a more traditional final exam, and a capstone project. The analytical interview was described as a 5–7 minute oral examination focusing on musical structures within student-selected repertoire, which allowed each individual to transfer knowledge learned in class to a better understanding of his/her favorite style. The second piece of the assessment was a short (15-minute) written exam that addressed the primary concepts and analytical techniques of the course as a whole. Perhaps the most time consuming portion of the assessment—for both student and instructor—was the "style composition" project, which involved an original composition scored for a small ensemble as well as a written reflection essay. The original compositions were free in some aspects and limited in others, however, in order to promote the learning outcomes of the specific course—as well as foster the ability to compositionally reimagine existing musical materials. To this end, students were required to adhere to the form of a movement from Mozart's *String Quartet No. 1 in G Major*, K. 80, as well as utilize at least two thematic ideas drawn from a larger "scrapbook" of melodic material that had been collected by the class (presumably throughout the semester). I must admit that these limitations struck me as curious, as

they seemed to be very restricting in the context of a composition that purported to be stylistically open. Nonetheless, the project as a whole did appear to inject more engagement, hands-on learning, creativity, and higher-order thinking skills into the Theory I course, which can be quite difficult to accomplish.

A highlight of Gawboy's keynote was the honest reflection on the implementation of this assessment. While she did find evidence of concept and skill synthesis, creative thinking, and problem solving, she also acknowledged the instructional difficulties created by the project (e.g., increased time spent on grading that was far less clear-cut than with a traditional exam) as well as a general polarizing effect it had on the class: some students were more engaged and successful, while others were simply more anxious and challenged beyond their limits. While her thoughtful evaluation of the assessment was certainly less than a ringing endorsement, it reinforced the valuable themes of conference as a whole: sharing ideas, attempting new pedagogical techniques, and critically examining their effectiveness.

Another memorable aspect of the keynote was Gawboy's recognition of a former student who has since gone on to enjoy a successful career in the music industry, in part *despite* the compositional restrictions placed on him during his undergraduate experience, which did not allow his talent to develop through core coursework. Several professors with years of experience teaching undergraduate theory shared similarly regretful tales during the valuable post-keynote workshop, which featured lively small-group discussions focused on key issues faced by today's theory instructors including student engagement, curriculum outcome assessment, and the relevance of

the discipline within contemporary society. Stories of lost opportunities with students like those shared by Gawboy and others reinforce the need within our discipline to promote diversity, innovation, and creativity in curricula while maintaining rigor, depth, and a valuable historical perspective. Going forward, it is my hope to see regular iterations of the *Pedagogy into Practice* conference, so that we can continue to share innovative solutions with one another as our universities and student populations continue to diversify and specialize—even if the implementations of these solutions do not turn out exactly as planned.



***Workshop on Melodic Dictation with Dr. Gary S. Karpinski***

***Patricia Burt***  
***Assistant Professor of Music at Harford Community College***

In his keynote address at the *Pedagogy into Practice* conference, Ken Bain defined three kinds of learning strategies: the surface approach, the strategic approach, and the deep approach. In the surface approach students simply attempt to survive

academically. Strategic learners engage with the material in a limited way and only to the degree necessary for them to achieve high scores. The deep learner, on the other hand, will seek to understand concepts underlying the facts and procedures learned in a course, uncover larger connections, and formulate new questions. The deep approach to learning, unlike the other two approaches, results in a more permanent change in thinking because it breaks apart the mental models habitually used by the learner to make sense of the world around him. In the presentations at the *Pedagogy into Practice* conference, the various techniques being shared had this one goal in common: to foster the deep learning Bain was talking about in the music theory and aural skills classroom. Upon reflecting on my experience at the conference, I realized that conference itself, through its unique combination of formats, and through the spirit of openness and inclusivity expressed by the participants, was modeling for those in attendance how to create an environment where deep learning can take place.

I would argue that the typical academic conference is structured in a way that, unfortunately, encourages a strategic or even surface approach to both presenting and learning. So often I find myself sitting in a room where a presenter is reading aloud, at top speed, a paper on a highly specialized topic that only tenuously connects to my own practice in the discipline. The paper, which feels rather like it wants to be a 50-page journal article to be studied at a desk, expands uncontrollably, like sealant foam, across the 20-minute time limit and into the brief question and answer period, much to the dismay of the session chair who is desperately attempting to give the cutoff cue. A third of the room is already hastily making their way to the door, apologetically bumping into

the nameless colleagues seated around them as they race to the next session, while one listener in the audience, rather than asking a question in earnest, uses the final three minutes of the session as an opportunity to promote his own work. More than once I have sat through sessions where, in her final breath, the presenter apologizes for her paper, because she knows that listening to speed reading is not an ideal way for an audience to engage thoughtfully with any topic. Meanwhile, as the majority of academics speed past one another in isolation along the main highway of session rooms, off in a distant corner of the hotel, a lone academic finds refuge in an empty room of posters that will go largely unread. I sometimes leave these conferences with an empty feeling that the main purpose was not to share ideas, but simply to gain another line on a CV.

In contrast, the *Pedagogy into Practice* conference was designed in such a way that participants had multiple opportunities to engage in meaningful conversation about the ideas being presented. In Bain's keynote address, participants were asked to remember a time when they engaged in deep learning and to think about what motivated them. They were then given the opportunity to share with someone sitting nearby. In the afternoon of the first day, 2.5 hours were dedicated to the poster session and no competing presentations were scheduled. Participants were given a "passport" with a page for each poster where they could take notes and get a sticker from the author. This passport system encouraged participants to interact with the authors, and out of these interactions, group discussions began to form around the posters. At one point, I found myself in front of Philip Duker's poster on rebuilding an aural skills curriculum, singing an ostinato bass line with a number of my colleagues, while he

improvised a melody as a demonstration of one of his classroom exercises. One of my undergraduate students who attended the conference had a lively conversation about meter classification in pop and rock music with presenter, Trevor deClercq. At the end of the poster session, participants broke into discussion groups to talk about the posters and these conversations naturally turned to issues on the minds of those sitting around the table. The quality and breadth of the posters, the high attendance, and the built-in opportunity for discussion made this the most robust poster session I've attended. On the final day of the conference Anna Gawboy hosted a workshop where she divided the participants into groups where we worked on solutions to one of four questions:

- How do we engage students intellectually, musically, and creatively?
- What are the theory skills students really need for their progress as musicians?
- How do we teach the essential skills given the resources available to us?
- How do we communicate music theory's relevance to contemporary practice in a culture that devalues both the arts and intellectual activity?

This session was like a mini think-tank for some of the big questions we face as educators of music theory and, in the end, we offered some answers and formulated a number of additional questions.

In Bain's keynote, he also stressed that a deep approach to learning is more likely when a person is presented with a problem he or she finds personally meaningful, intriguing, or beautiful. Most of the problems to which the presenters were offering solutions were problems I encounter regularly in the classroom. I was particularly pleased by the strong offering of presentations on techniques in the aural skills classroom. Timothy Chenette shared methods for improving musical memory and in his talk we imitated a melody he was singing at various temporal intervals to form a canon.

In a demonstration of improvisation in aural skills classes, Jeffrey Lovell played videos of individual students improvising melodies with particular characteristics such as using only the tones of the tonic triad or including leaps to “ti” and “re” while the rest of his class sang an ostinato bass line. In a workshop, Gary Karpinski shared some of his methods for assessing and evaluating melodic dictation. David Geary and Robert Komaniecki explained their technique for teaching sight reading of post-tonal music using interval distances measured in half steps. In many of the sessions, presenters shared both strengths and drawbacks to their pedagogical techniques, and this allowed for thoughtful conversation in the question and answer period.

The spirit of inclusivity was another remarkable aspect of this conference. At registration, I noticed the nametags were missing the usual line for affiliated institution. Typically, when I’m interacting with a new colleague for the first time, we each glance at the other’s nametag and use the institutional affiliation as a starting place for conversation. The drawback is that the affiliation begins to limit both the conversation as well as how we perceive each other. At *Pedagogy into Practice*, without any identifying information other than a name, my initial conversations with new colleagues necessarily dug a little deeper, and usually centered around a pedagogy issue with which we’d just been wrestling. My two undergraduate students were welcomed by so many at the conference. In the breakout groups at Anna Gawboy’s workshop, my colleagues encouraged them to share their thoughts on how to engage students intellectually, musically, and creatively. A couple of weeks after the conference, I asked my student, Jacob Weinstein, what some of his big takeaways were. Having felt inspired by the

energy and the collaborative nature of the conference, he concluded that the level of engagement of the students naturally mirror the level of engagement of the professor. He said the conference also clarified for him the student piece of the student-teacher relationship, which, at its best, would exhibit more of a team dynamic than he had previously considered. My student also picked up on the ways in which the *Pedagogy into Practice* conference, while providing a forum to discuss best teaching practices, was also modeling them. I look forward to implementing some new ideas I picked up at the conference into my own curriculum next year, and I especially look forward to attending the next conference.