

# Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

## Music Composition for Facilitating Social-Emotional Learning

### Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

Through learning about, creating, and performing *graphic scores* and *atonal compositions*, students explore the initial stages of music literacy while also developing personal growth skills, such as self-awareness and conflict management. The instructor designed these composition activities based on social-emotional learning competencies. The desired outcome is for students to apply art concepts to the musical mind and to understand different perspectives through the interpretation of music, opening up new ways of thinking about various topics. Using groups for these activities, and having the students work together on the creation process, builds a safe environment so that the students feel welcomed and comfortable. This course is not affiliated with a music degree, so students who have limited experience working with and understanding standard musical notation can enroll and benefit from the content.

### *Graphic Scores*

This activity uses graphic scores to not only demonstrate how a musical piece is structured and develops over time, but it also gives students the freedom to realize musical potential. Graphic scores allow for more creative engagement and output, wherein two performances may sound vastly different despite adhering to a common set of

rules. In facilitating this activity, instructors can use differentiation to challenge students who are more experienced while stimulating less confident students.

To prepare for this activity, students spend some time learning about visual art and music; they study graphic scores and explore individual aural interpretations of visual elements. Students listen to an advanced graphic score primarily composed of simple lines and texture and performed by an ensemble of various instruments—such as the example offered in a YouTube video (Craig, 2007).<sup>\*</sup> Then, students view a graphic score projected on the board in the classroom that incorporates similar lines and texture but adds color and more defined shapes. By engaging in dialogue with classmates and the instructor, students discover how to interpret and perform what they see. For example, a graphic score might include a red line—it is up to the performer of the red line to determine what it means, how to express that specific red line, and how it will be performed. Once the class understands the concept of a graphic score and has practiced interpreting examples, the students are randomly placed into groups to create and interpret their own colored graphic score using colored pencils or crayons.

Upon completion of their graphic scores, each group performs their interpretation and original composition using basic body percussion and simple vocalization. Students describe how each element of

visual art relates to an element of music. Following the performance, the instructor leads a discussion with each group individually. The guided discussion gives the groups the opportunity to explain their work. The activity ends with a class discussion on personal interpretations, experiences or context that influenced their performances, and correlations to professional works of music and visual art. The large discussion allows students to evaluate a piece as a whole and understand how their opinions differ or share similarities. The group-based format of this project tends to engender a support network among peers; for students who have difficulty expressing themselves, the resulting support gives them a part in the process and engages them in the activity.

### *Atonal Compositions*

For the second activity, atonal composition, the instructor will need a keyboard labeled with one octave. The students work in groups to compose a 12-tone musical composition. With the use of only 12 notes in some kind of pattern, students apply dynamics, tempo markings, and instrumentation to create their piece. Often the students think all the compositions will sound the same, but they quickly recognize this is never the case. Each group performs their piece, followed by a class discussion during which students compare and contrast the similarities and differences of each one-octave arrangement.

\*Craig, D. (2007, May 28). *Ligeti - Artikulation* [Video file]. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71hNl\\_skTZQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71hNl_skTZQ)