

## TEACHING COMPOSITION IN A FLIPPED CLASSROOM

Martin Iddon and Scott McLaughlin

In 2019 the present authors, along with our colleague Mic Spencer, began work on a project funded by the Leeds Institute for Teaching Excellence, designed to look at the ways in which we taught composition at the University of Leeds and how we might change them. Mic has focused on postgraduate teaching, and we have considered the earliest parts of the undergraduate curriculum, particularly the first two years of study, when the largest numbers of students with the least experience of the study of composition at tertiary level might be in a classroom (50 or so, in our case).

To be clear, we are not discussing specialist programmes of study in musical composition either at undergraduate or postgraduate level, nor are we considering the sort of composition teaching undertaken in one-to-one (or even small-group) tutorial mode. Nor are we discussing more advanced composers, who already have a sense of themselves as artists and have begun to develop what is sometimes described as a ‘composer’s voice’.<sup>1</sup> We are concerned less with ‘voice’ – bound up, as it is, with particular structurations of value and power within the canon of Western music – and more with encouraging students to follow the example of Dolly Parton: ‘find out who you are and do it on purpose’.

Our concern is with the delivery of composition teaching in the earlier stages of an undergraduate programme of study, within sessions that have traditionally been designated ‘lectures’. These sessions are part of a generalist programme of study for students taking a degree in Music, rather than in Musical Composition.

We are considering, therefore, students whose experience of composition is perhaps limited to following briefs such as these, drawn from the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations board (OCR) for A Level assessment in June 2020.<sup>2</sup>

### **Area of Study 1: Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven**

Compose a slow movement of a sonata or concerto, for example an adagio or andante. You may write for any instrumental forces, following classical instrumental conventions, using appropriate accompaniment where necessary. The piece will be performed at a concert in Vienna to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Beethoven.

<sup>1</sup> See Edward T. Cone, *The Composer’s Voice* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974) and also, in a more critical vein, Claire Taylor-Jay, ‘The Composer’s Voice? Compositional Style and Criteria of Value in Weill, Krenek and Stravinsky’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 134, no. 1 (2009), pp. 85–111.

<sup>2</sup> In the UK, the A Level is one of the principal school-leaving qualifications, used as an entry standard for university programmes.

### Area of Study 3: Developments in Instrumental Jazz, 1910 to the present day

Compose an instrumental piece which takes its influence from Miles Davis and will be performed at a party to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the launch of 'The BBC Light Programme' (the forerunner of BBC Radio 2) on 25th July 1945. You should write for between three and six parts (no voices) which may be drawn from electric and acoustic instruments.

### Area of Study 5: Programme Music, 1820–1910

Compose a programmatic piece which depicts either a canal or railway journey in any part of Europe, through one of the major transport routes built during the nineteenth century, for example the Manchester Ship Canal or the Orient Express. Your piece should be written for instruments appropriate to the area of study and must have at least six different instrumental parts. You can write for an ensemble, chamber orchestra or symphony orchestra. Your piece will be performed at the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester on the 1st August 2020.<sup>3</sup>

Our work began from a sense that the world of composition has undergone a marked shift: young composers are increasingly concerned with gender, 'race', and ability, questioning the centrality of received ideas of craft or aesthetic value, seeing no reason to eschew the 'popular' and explicitly questioning how their work might connect to a wider social sphere. They are less concerned with ideas of 'high art', or composing in some sort of autonomous, hermetic sphere or in being labelled 'composers' at all. If we were right in recognising this sort of movement, it was important, we felt, to reflect it in our approach to teaching.

We also felt that our experience of and engagement with composition in a professional sense was at odds with briefs like those above, geared towards reproduction of a model, of demonstrating the 'mastery' of a pre-existing model. When we started our project, composition teaching at Leeds was, as in many other institutions, still quite similar to what we experienced as undergraduate and postgraduate composers: the exploration of a range of technical approaches from a group of post-war composers, typically cis, white men. In the first two years of the Leeds programme this teaching was largely delivered in lecture style, albeit in a discursive mode.

We wanted to ensure that students thought both about *how* to do things and *why* they might do them (or, perhaps, decide not to). Another of our decisions – to try to provide a broad set of the musical contexts in which composers of new music have worked over the past 50 years – meant a continuing centrality for the voices of cis, white and male composers, but we also wanted space for the sorts of critique that younger composers might make of such musics.

Presenting as truthful a contextual history of new music as was possible meant underpinning it with questions about why those within and without new music are increasingly critical of its normative presumptions. We sought to engage, for example, with the sorts of masculinity figured by the new scomplexity, the ways in which ideas about nature in spectral approaches might reproduce colonial and colonising stereotypes and the ways certain experimental modes of thought might be bound up with the ideology of whiteness. It was also important to implicate ourselves, as cis, white men, in our teaching practice.

<sup>3</sup> OCR, 'Composing Briefs for June 2020', [www.ocr.org.uk/Images/553264-composing-briefs-for-june-2020.pdf](http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/553264-composing-briefs-for-june-2020.pdf) (accessed 19 January 2022).

The specific topics we have chosen – the way in which we frame what new music *has been* and the sorts of histories composers engage with when they start to think professionally about that world – are, however, less significant than the benefits of the underpinning approach. In its simplest terms we wanted to bring the benefits of flipped classrooms to composition teaching, delivering ‘lecture’ content in advance of more discursive classroom sessions. It’s worth noting too that our decision to use a wide range of asynchronous resources to deliver traditional lecture content was taken before the pandemic began but took on a very different significance in a world where in-person teaching was impossible.

## I

Criticism of the lecture is long-standing. In *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*, first published in 1992, Paul Ramsden notes that it ‘is a highly teacher-centred form of instruction’ that, in at least its most traditional form, ‘represents a perspective on teaching taken from the point of view of the teacher as the source of undistorted information. The mass of students are passive recipients of the wisdom of a single speaker.’<sup>4</sup> Not that Ramsden despairs entirely of the expository lecture; a ‘good lecture’, he writes

is meticulously planned. It is designed to engage the audience’s interest. It stimulates their thinking and their desire to find out more about the subject, explains phenomena at the audience’s level, restricts its material to one or two main points, and uses many concrete examples. Its deliverer shows respect for and sensitivity to the audience and is deeply concerned with how to reach them and share knowledge with them.<sup>5</sup>

John Biggs and Catherine Tang also argue that the lecture can promote rich, deep learning but that often it affords passive note-taking and the memorising of information rather than an active engagement with ideas that promotes deep learning and active problem solving.<sup>6</sup> A final point made by Ramsden – that ‘the effective lecturer reflectively learns from the experience of learning’ – resonates with Biggs and Tang’s observation that if a lecturer wants students to ‘succeed’, the idea that students might be to blame for failure to engage appropriately with the course material is unsustainable.<sup>7</sup>

Biggs and Tang relate the story of a brilliant, compelling lecturer, Dr Fox, later revealed to have been a professional actor, whose subject expertise was drawn from a single article in the *Reader’s Digest*. From this they educe a number of provocative positions, including the idea that academics might learn something about delivering lecture

<sup>4</sup> Paul Ramsden, *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 108, 156.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>6</sup> John Biggs and Catherine Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning in Higher Education* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2011), pp. 5–7. The idea that ‘active’ and student-centred approaches lead to deep learning and promote richer engagement with content has been verified on numerous occasions across diverse disciplines, including, for instance, in Ference Marton and Roger Säljö, ‘On Qualitative Differences in Learning. I – Outcome and Process’, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 46, no. 1 (1976), pp. 4–11; Michael Prince, ‘Does Active Learning Work? A Review of the Research’, *Journal of Engineering Education*, 93, no. 3 (2004), pp. 223–31; Marlies Baeten, Eva Kyndt, Katrien Struyven and Filip Dochy, ‘Using Student-centred Learning Environments to Stimulate Deep Approaches to Learning: Factors Encouraging or Discouraging Their Effectiveness’, *Educational Research Review*, 5, no. 3 (2010), pp. 243–60; and Adam Butt, ‘Student Views on the Use of a Flipped Classroom Approach: Evidence from Australia’, *Business Education & Accreditation*, 6, no. 1 (2014), pp. 33–43.

<sup>7</sup> Biggs and Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning*, pp. 38–39.

material from actors (or, indeed, that that element of the job might be outsourced to professionals), and that '[t]here must be better ways of teaching large classes than lecturing'.<sup>8</sup> In this, they recall Donald A. Bligh's insistence, made in the 1972 edition of his *What's the Use of Lectures?*, that the lecture 'may be used appropriately to convey information; but it cannot be used effectively on its own to promote thought or to change and develop attitudes, without variations in the usual lecture techniques'.<sup>9</sup> Bligh also contends, as do Biggs and Tang, that student attention in lectures tends to drop off quite sharply around 15 minutes into a session, requiring a change in activity to re-engage, while a period of student-led consolidation enhances and concretises recall.<sup>10</sup> Middendorf and Kalish describe these as 'change-up' activities, deliberate breaks introduced into sessions to re-energise attention to content and to 'give students opportunities in class to practice with the concepts you want them to learn'.<sup>11</sup>

In the preface to the fifth edition of *What's the Use of Lectures?*, Bligh remarks: '[l]ike musical composition... lecturing is an art. Skill is acquired by practice rather than by reading books. Yet just as the budding composer may wish to study forms of composition known to have been successful, but later disregard them, so new lecturers may think it worthwhile to consider the findings of research into lecturing before developing their own style.'<sup>12</sup> The link Bligh makes to composers highlights how the 'sage on the stage' mode of lecturing lends the lecturer the same authority accorded to 'model' composers in the mould implied by the OCR composition briefs, where Beethoven or Miles Davis figure as producers of undisputed truth rather than of things that might be useful within a developing, personal artistic practice.<sup>13</sup>

The central position of the lecturer as a neutral, honest broker of information is just one element that is flipped in the flipped classroom. There is no shortage of precedents, but the flipped classroom has become a mainstream approach over the past ten years or so, particularly following its implementation by Bergman and Sams, in the first instance as a way of ensuring that students who had missed a class could catch up on its content.<sup>14</sup> Bergman and Sams recorded (and annotated) classroom sessions and posted them online. The resulting videos were watched by students who had missed the

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> Donald A. Bligh, *What's the Use of Lectures?*, 5th edition (Exeter: Intellect, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Biggs and Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning*, p. 137. It is worth adding that examinations of 'the problem with lectures' often ignore mundane but significant considerations which have an impact upon student engagement. Michael Hitchens and Raymond Lister 'identified poor timetabling of lectures and associated classes as a factor in low lecture attendance', concluding 'that any university seeking to improve attendance at lectures should look as much to improving its timetabling practices as it does to improving its individual lecturers.' ('A Focus Group Study of Student Attitudes to Lectures', *Proceedings of the Eleventh Australasian Conference on Computing Education*, 95 (2009), p. 100).

<sup>11</sup> Joan Middendorf and Alan Kalish, 'The 'Change-Up' in Lectures', *National Teaching and Learning Forum*, 5/2, (1996), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Bligh, *What's the Use of Lectures?*, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> This might parallel structurations of academic power writ large, recalling Bourdieu's note that 'academic power is founded principally on control of the instruments of reproduction [our italics] of the professorial body'. Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988 [1984]), p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> Precedents can be found, for instance, in Eric Mazur, *Peer Instruction: A User's Manual* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1997); Alison King, 'From the Sage on the Stage to the Guide on the Side', *College Teaching*, 41, no. 1 (1993), pp. 30–35; and Maureen J. Lage, Glenn J. Platt and Michael Treglia, 'Inverting the Classroom: A Gateway to Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment', *Journal of Economic Education*, 31, no. 1 (2000), pp. 30–43.

class, but were also watched, and re-watched, by students who had been in the class.<sup>15</sup>

Recorded lectures have often been no more than live lectures captured in video, to be re-watched, asynchronously, after the event. Such captures are a record of what has already happened, more or less in line with Bergman and Sams' initial, contingent approach. Nonetheless, in an examination of recorded lectures in the early days of their use, Panther, Mosse and Wright confirmed that the most significant element of a live lecture continued to be 'the interaction both with their lecturer and peers', not least because of 'the opportunity to ask questions and immediately clarify their understanding'.<sup>16</sup>

Students felt they were better able to retain information they had actively engaged with in this way<sup>17</sup> and so this did not inhibit students' attendance at 'live' lectures. Recordings 'reinforced rather than replaced the face-to-face event', as Davis, Connolly and Linfield previously insisted.<sup>18</sup> Students deployed recorded lectures, by contrast, 'for clarification or revision of the content, as preparation for class, and as a replacement for a lecture missed due to scheduling or travel difficulties', but particularly valued 'the possibility to move around within the material; to pause and rewind or review aspects of the lecture at the student's own pace'.<sup>19</sup> In other words, implicit within the recording of lectures for pragmatic purposes is the flipped classroom 'proper', in which

the teacher 'delivers' lectures before class in the form of pre-recorded videos, and spends class time engaging students in learning activities that involve collaboration and interaction. Passive learning activities such as unidirectional lectures are pushed to outside classroom hours, to be replaced with active learning activities in class.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, those pre-class activities don't have to be pre-recorded lectures. Others might include readings, podcasts or listening exercises, or a combination of any or all of these, but the principle is always that

activities normally conducted in the classroom... become home activities, and activities normally constituting homework become classroom activities... Since classroom time is not used to transmit knowledge to students by means of lectures, the teacher is able to engage with students by means of other learning activities such as discussion, solving problems proposed by the students, hands-on activities, and guidance.<sup>21</sup>

More passive learning occurs before classroom sessions that involve active approaches to learning, which might otherwise have followed the delivery of 'content' (see Figure 1), although this is not to suggest that 'traditional' lectures are devoid of active elements or that flipped classrooms do not involve some delivery of content to be passively absorbed.

<sup>15</sup> Bill Tucker, 'The Flipped Classroom', *Education Next*, Winter (2012), p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara C. Panther, Jennifer A. Mosse and Wendy Wright, 'Recorded Lectures Don't Replace the "Real Thing": What the Students Say', *Proceedings of the Australian Conference on Science and Mathematics Education*, University of Melbourne, 28–30 September 2011, p. 129. <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/IISME/article/view/4820>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>18</sup> Simon Davis, Anthea Connolly and Edmund Linfield, 'Lecture Capture: Making the Most of Face-to-face Learning', *Engineering Education*, 4, no. 2, (2009), p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Panther, Mosse and Wright, 'Recorded Lectures', p. 131.

<sup>20</sup> Heng Ngee Mok, 'Teaching Tip: The Flipped Classroom', *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 25, no. 1 (2014), p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Gökçe Akçayır and Murat Akçayır, 'The Flipped Classroom: A Review of Its Advantages and Challenges', *Computers & Education*, 126 (2018), p. 334.

	TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM	FLIPPED CLASSROOM
PRE- CLASSROOM		Lectures
CLASSROOM	Lectures	Active learning activities
POST- CLASSROOM	Active learning activities	




Figure 1:  
Schematic comparison of traditional  
and flipped classrooms.<sup>32</sup>

Akçayır and Akçayır's review of the literature on flipped classrooms found some recurrent results. Above all, most studies reported that flipped classrooms improved learning in a broad sense, with improvements both in satisfaction and engagement with learning.<sup>22</sup> These observations mirror those of Mok that 'students were more inclined to take ownership for their learning because the availability of the video lectures empowered them to do so'.<sup>23</sup> Another trend in the studies examined by Akçayır and Akçayır was the significance of flexible learning.<sup>24</sup> As Mok notes, his '[s]tudents loved the idea of being able to repeat the video clips as many times as needed. . . viewing the videos at home "saved time" so that more could be done in class. In fact, some. . . were glad that they were "forced" to come to class prepared', and 'weaker but diligent students had the option to prepare for class by re-watching the videos until they were convinced that they had understood the content. . . students. . . had the opportunity to come to class as prepared as their stronger counterparts and were hence more confident of their ability'.<sup>25</sup> This recalls Biggs and Tang's observation that, regardless of teaching strategies, '[i]n the end, the student must *always* do the structuring – it's what the student does that's important'.<sup>26</sup>

## II

Our flipped classroom included resources to be engaged with prior to in-person sessions: our video lectures, which replaced material we might previously have taught in the classroom, as well as scores, recordings, readings and, on one occasion, the instruction that students should undertake Pauline Oliveros' 'Native', from her *Sonic Meditations* (1974), for themselves. We alternated between sessions focused on a particular topic in theory and the same topic in practice. A question-and-answer session delivered by a visiting performer, also preceded and supported by an introductory video, focused on writing for their instrument and extended beyond the session itself.

Over the course of our project we have created videos that consider a range of approaches to composition from the new music of the past 50 years or so, including musique concrète instrumentale, new

<sup>22</sup> Akçayır and Akçayır, 'The Flipped Classroom', p. 339.

<sup>23</sup> Mok, 'Teaching Tip', p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Akçayır and Akçayır, 'The Flipped Classroom', p. 339.

<sup>25</sup> Mok, 'Teaching Tip', p. 9. Positive impacts on students who might be, in other contexts, regarded as less academically successful have been noted, too, by Jalal Nouri. 'The Flipped Classroom: For Active, Effective and Increased Learning – Especially for Low Achievers', *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 13, no. 1 (2016), pp. 1–10.

<sup>26</sup> Biggs and Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning*, p. 68.



complexity, Spectralism, experimentalism, minimalism (in both North American and European guises), neo-romanticism and the new simplicity. A video contextualising music by composers who are more or less aligned with each of these approaches is paired with one outlining more practical, composerly activity to be undertaken in response. These are designed to enable and empower students to have and articulate critical relationships to them; we want students to be aware of the sorts of thing that composers have done, not to replicate them.

Our interests here are with the usefulness of our pedagogical approach rather than the specific musico-historical contexts we sketch, which doubtless reflect our own personal and partial understandings of the compositional worlds with which students might later engage. The contextual videos often show relationships and resonances between more and less familiar musics. In the case of minimalism, for instance, that has involved setting Robert Fink's well-known juxtaposition of Donna Summer's 'Love to Love You Baby' (1977) and Steve Reich's *Music for Eighteen Musicians* (1974–76) alongside a further relationship between Reich's piece and Tangerine Dream's score for *Risky Business* (1983).<sup>27</sup> We note the temporal proximity of Terry Riley's *You're No Good* (1968), a remix of the Harvey Averde Dozen's 'You're No Good' (1967), to the advent of versioning and dub in Jamaican reggae, and minimalism's use of looping to Kool Herc's development of the break.<sup>28</sup> Julius Eastman's vocals on Dinosaur L's 'Go Bang' (1981), as remixed by house pioneer François Kevorkian, demonstrate how New York's experimental music and disco scenes ran together for a time; Jill Kroesen, who played 'Isolde' in Robert Ashley's *Perfect Lives* (1983), also appears on the album that features 'Go Bang' and was a No Wave artist in her own right; and David Byrne, whose physical and vocal performance on the version of 'Once in a Lifetime' (1981) preserved within Talking Heads' film *Stop Making Sense* (1984), seems not just to recall but to be almost unthinkable without the model of Ashley.<sup>29</sup> Less expected links can be made too: Jeff Triggs' madcap 'Brian Ferneyhough's Disco Bonanza' may not wholly compellingly fuse Ferneyhough with Tony Manero but does reveal the ways in which his Second String Quartet can, at least in the Arditti Quartet's standard recording of it, be heard to groove when juxtaposed with a four-on-the-floor beat.<sup>30</sup>

Theory lectures also aim to provide historical context alongside detailed portraits of the work of specific composers, drawing students into particular conceptual worlds. A set of questions follows, to be prepared in advance of classroom discussion (see Figure 2).

The practical sessions also have a video lecture, a walk-through of techniques highlighted in the previous week's theoretical session. This connects to exercises that the students complete before class, involving more composerly tasks – the generation of strands of 'complex' rhythms, or loops which can be subjected to phase shifting – and a

<sup>27</sup> Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 47–61.

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, Lloyd Bradley, *Bass Culture: When Reggae Was King* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 141 and especially 308–35.

<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Ashley had hoped Byrne might take the narrator's role in *Perfect Lives*. See Nicolas Zurbrugg, 'Robert Ashley', in *Art, Performance, Media: 31 Interviews*, ed. Nicolas Zurbrugg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 35.

<sup>30</sup> Jeff Triggs, 'Brian Ferneyhough's Disco Bonanza', 7 February 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScxXYjgf3PU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScxXYjgf3PU) (accessed 4 March 2022).

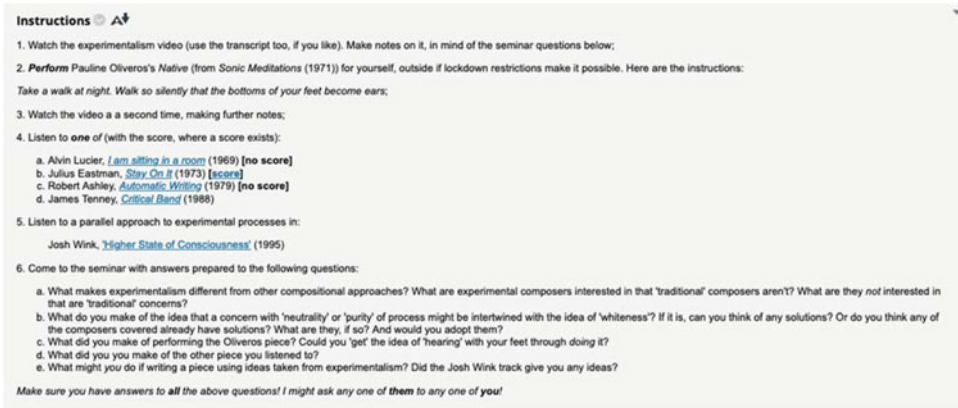


Figure 2:  
School of Music, University of Leeds,  
'experimentalism' instructions.

broader range of practical activities, such as spectral listening exercises, making use of their own instrument or environment.

The video prepared by our visiting musician asks students to think, not in abstract terms but about the human performer, about that individual's expertise and their labour. This leads to a question-and-answer session where we flip the responsibility for asking questions from us to the students. This is an opportunity to move beyond the generic 'how do you write for this instrument?' to the specific 'how do I write for this instrument?'

Student responses to our video lectures described them as 'almost cinematic' or 'like Netflix'. These responses may be over-generous in terms of the production quality available to us but they are a reminder that the encounter with media as a means of discovery is a commonplace for the vast majority of our students.

We started our work before there was a distinction of note to be made between whether a cold was a rhinovirus or a coronavirus, but its value was heightened by the move to online teaching. Some of our second-year students, who had experienced a sort of 'draft' version of our approach in their first year, noted that the provision of substantial, rich material to be engaged with in advance of teaching sessions meant that they felt comparatively secure in composition, that it was the aspect of their studies least affected by the pandemic.

Student response, gathered via three feedback sessions as well as our standard module questionnaire, was overwhelmingly positive. Students agreed that videos allowed them to go at a pace that suited them, to view and re-view; they could watch a part of the video on one day and another part later; they could pause to make notes. Students regularly framed their positive experiences of the flipped classroom with negative comments about traditional lectures: that they move too fast or that it's too easy to miss something while taking notes. One student explained that when live classroom sessions were recorded they attended the session and used the recorded version for notetaking.

The responses below echo what students said to us in discussion:

I liked the fact that the lectures were recorded ahead of the scheduled seminar sessions. I found being able to pause, rewind, pause again, rewind again and generally being able to take my time with the content really helpful as I find live lectures easy to zone out of and difficult to keep up with. Whereas if I zoned out with the video I could just come back to it at another time.



The structure of the learning – having pre-recorded lectures and then a seminar for discussion – worked really well, and was a better way of learning than having an hour long live lecture.

The module was particularly fun and engaging, so much in the content as in how passionate the teaching staff seemed to be about what they were teaching. The resources provided each week were interesting and well developed upon in the lecture sessions. You really feel like you are talking to people that know what they are talking about.

This last comment addresses the concern sometimes expressed that in preparing 'lecture content' for asynchronous consumption we might be 'doing ourselves out of a job'. On the contrary, the students confirm that it *amplifies* the centrality and importance of our expertise, particularly because a classroom session devoted to 'matters arising' is necessarily exposing of us as pedagogues.

Our inexperience with online teaching led us to decide that we would prefer to teach fewer students at a time, even if that reduced the amount of time we spent with them, teaching 12 students for half an hour rather than 24 for an hour (or almost 50 for two hours). In-person feedback from students repeatedly assured us that they felt this was the best of the 'solutions' to teaching in the pandemic that they had experienced and that they would like this mode of teaching to continue even when the follow-up seminars could take place in person. However, they also argued that half an hour was insufficient to get into the meat of the compositional questions:

Maybe this is because everything was online this year, but it would have been nice to have more than half an hour talk sessions with the lecturers.

It's only half an hour? Perhaps half an hour could be discussion and the other half could be teaching from the seminar leader/lecturer?

More teaching in lessons would be helpful rather than just discussions and leaving us to do the homework to learn the topic. That teaching is still really important for us to fully understand what we are supposed to be learning.

The sheer pace of the half-hour sessions meant there was insufficient space for the summarising of key ideas by staff members that allows students to consolidate their work. For in-person teaching in the current academic year we returned to larger class sizes but with an hour-long session that allows for more substantial and substantive discussion, if sometimes at the expense of the sharp focus that condensed teaching provided.

Although the sample size is small, a return to in-person teaching in the current year affords a point of comparison, and student responses are notably consistent. One student mentioned that delivering a single topic over two weeks, first as theory then as a practical, was especially useful: in doing the practical tasks they already had an understanding of the material from the previous week. Another student commented: 'I actually quite liked how it's been done, especially kind of doing the same topic for like, a couple of weeks, but doing it in different ways. And then kind of talking about it afterwards, and kind of fleshing out anything that we didn't understand.'

The response to the videos prepared by performers was similarly positive. Student comment focused on the performers' expertise and depth of knowledge, alongside the value of access to information about how their instruments worked and how to start working with them. A small number of students with little to no experience of the instrument in question found the volume of information overwhelming, but this was not felt by all of those with relatively slight knowledge. Two students, who knew one instrument particularly

well, felt that a great deal of the information was already familiar. Most responses were between these two poles, however, exemplified by one student comment: 'I feel like I'm gonna go back and watch it several times. Because there's a lot there. And it's, there's a lot of really useful stuff.' This emphasises the significance of the question-and-answer session, because it enables the needs and interests of individual students but from a position where the groundwork is already done.

These sessions also highlighted the person playing the instrument, providing students with insights into working with a professional musician, and this was reinforced by positive student comments about the rapport between professional musicians and lecturers. Students started to see the performer as a real person, not an abstract instrument name in a score, or a sound in some software.

There were comments about the encounter with unfamiliar sounds and techniques: one student outlined how a discussion of a clarinetist's need to breathe opened up territory they had never considered, which was germane to their final submission. Above all, students seemed relieved to discover that musicians were approachable, supportive and kind. The interaction, especially in the question-and-answer format, motivated them to take risks:

Yeah, it was quite encouraging, like, it does make me feel kind of more motivated to be a bit more free with the composition and not worry too much about like, yeah, like how easy it's going to be to play and stuff, because I know for like GCSE and A levels I was really worried about how playable it was and stuff and obviously, it has to be playable. But it is reassuring to know that she's willing to sort of, you know, she's not going to be mad or anything, if it's really like, weird or maybe slightly difficult to play.

### III

It is clear that our work is unfinished: there are many changes to make in future years. Although student response was positive, we all felt that too much classroom time was devoted to answering questions focused on knowledge and not enough to questions focused on creativity. In Mok's implementation of flipped learning, he used multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank questions, filled in before classroom sessions, to check learning and assess where any confusion or misunderstanding might lie in the taught content.<sup>31</sup> This is a strategy we intend to deploy, to clarify content for students more rapidly and precisely, enabling us to spend more time on questions of how and why (or why not) particular approaches might be (ab)used by them in their own developing creative practices.

We are relieved to have returned to in-person teaching, but this project – begun before the pandemic – necessitated a wider change in thinking about how the asynchronous resources already used in flipped classrooms might be more generally useful. We were lucky to have found ourselves ahead of the curve but we have no expectations or plans that a 'return to normal' will mean a return to 'stand and deliver' lecturing. We expect to retain our flipped classroom across all three parts of our teaching – theoretical, practical and instrumental – spending more time in classrooms talking with, rather than to, students. The students are nearly all positive about their engaging with pre-classroom materials, and our own experience is that students have engaged with them in a way that is not always the case in other

<sup>31</sup> Mok, 'Teaching Tip', p. 8.

modes of teaching. We have asked more of students – an hour of pre-class video content and sometimes an hour or more of listening and score reading, as well as preparing answers to questions – and they have responded. The hybrid elements of our teaching have had demonstrable impact on students' engagement with material and teaching and have made it increasingly possible to move on from questions about the 'relevance' of particular musical approaches to questions of how students might use these approaches to realise their own artistic and musical goals.