

**CREATAHOLIC**

**RATIONALE AND INTENTIONS  
FOR A "BRIDGING THE GAP"  
ONLINE MUSICIANSHIP COURSE**



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YORK UNIVERSITY

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BY

DONNA BOUCHER

TORONTO, ONTARIO  
MARCH, 2013

“The summer workshop occurred closer to home. In August 2005, I was leading a discussion at the institution where I teach – Brandon University, Canada – on school/university/community partnerships. I began by asking school music teachers: ‘What skills do you hope your students will acquire?’ The responses were far-reaching and pertained to working together, building confidence, increasing self-esteem, cultivating personal responsibility to a group and so forth. **After several minutes, I was struck that not one teacher had mentioned specifically *musical knowledge or skills.***” (Carruthers, 2008, 129)

As a tutorial leader in a first year musicianship course at York University I have witnessed a myriad of students who arrive at university with widely varied backgrounds in musicianship training. Very few students, in my experience, were well rounded in the basics of applied theory, ear training, sight singing, and dictation. Depending on their educational background, some students demonstrated strengths in some areas, but rarely all, which led me to ask, “why is this happening?”

Students arrive at university with different educational backgrounds that can be generally divided into High School Music and Conservatory training. In a study of 107 first year musicianship students at York University, conducted in April 2011, the following findings were realized.

Theory backgrounds varied from no training to the Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) ARCT level. Table One shows that 24% of the students said they had no theory background, 37% of the students had high school theory, 46% of the students had at least RCM Advanced Rudiments, while less than 1% reported having theory training above RCM Basic Harmony, Private Theory or College Theory.

Four students reported having completed the ARCT Diploma offered by the Royal Conservatory of Music. If this was the Performance ARCT then these four students received no education beyond the grade ten level for ear training. 11 students out of 107 reported being at the grade 10 level which would not have prepared them adequately for first year musicianship

dictations and transcriptions. The 15 reported cases of Grade 10 and ARCT Diploma levels of study were sufficiently prepared for the applied theory component of first year musicianship. Backgrounds in musicianship skills will also be dependent on whether students completed the keyboard harmony courses or the written harmony courses as the keyboard harmony courses require additional ear training and improvisational abilities.

Table 1. Theory Background Indicators

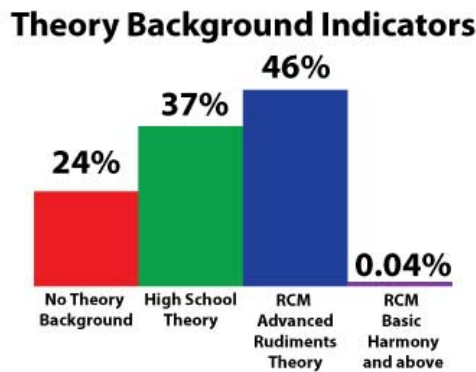
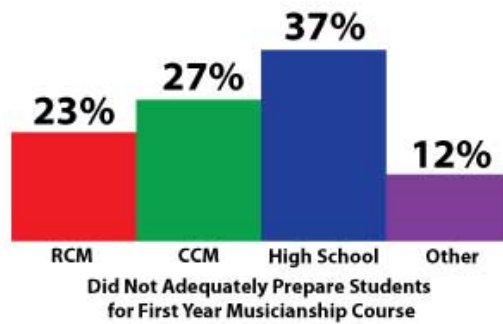


Table two illustrates the self-rated level of preparedness for the first year musicianship course showing that 37% of students did not feel adequately prepared by high school theory and less than 30% felt that the RCM and CCM prepared them adequately for the first year musicianship course.

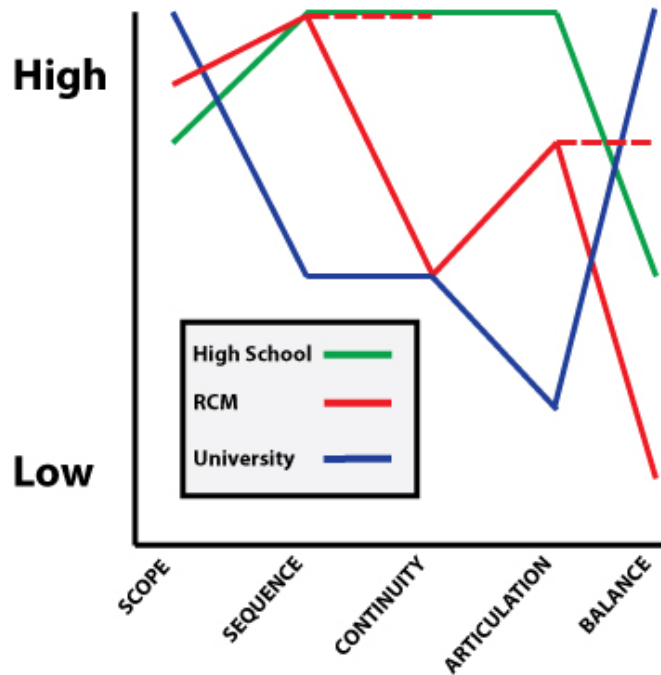
Table 2. Self-Rated Level of Preparedness for First Year Musicianship Course



Of the 107 students surveyed, 70% said they had no prior experience with transcriptions and 30% of students said that the transcriptions were the hardest part of the course, yet this made up 50% of available marks in the 2010 course. The RCM theory curriculum does not include any transcription or dictation exercises. The RCM practical curriculum includes an ear training component for intervals, chords, melody playbacks and rhythm playbacks, but does not bridge completely to first year musicianship demands for transcriptions and dictations.

Henson (2001, 199) describes five features which can be used to measure the effectiveness of different curriculum designs. These characteristics were used to examine the curriculum qualities of RCM, Ontario High Schools, and York University (Table 3).

Table 3. Curriculum Design Qualities



The RCM program scores high on Scope and Sequence because they offer a “graded theory system” that “assesses essential tools in a student’s musical development” (RCM Theory Syllabus 2009,10). Curriculum cohesion on the vertical scale indicates that RCM courses are aligned with a sequential set of skills and requirements (table 3) resulting in smoothness of the curriculum over time. Continuity, however, is affected by a students’ ability to complete all of the examinations within a timely manner. Students who take the required examinations in a different order such as Intermediate Harmony prior to Counterpoint or vica versa will find different disruptive patterns in the continuity of the curriculum. Also, students have up to five years to complete their theory requirements and as such, there may be a large span of time between the completion of each level affecting the student’s ability to retain what they have learned. If students completed each level in succession without any interruption in time, the continuity score would be raised (shown with dotted line on Table 3).

Articulation describes the flow of the curriculum in scope, sequence and continuity and therefore this grade is awarded based on an average of the three. The RCM does not offer a “well-rounded” program of study as they offer only four main theoretical subjects shown in Table 4. However, if the entire RCM program, practical and theoretical are taken into account, it is apparent that they offer a balanced curriculum with focus on many different instruments, genres, world music, musicianship, theory, and pedagogy (shown with dotted line on Table 3).

Table 4. RCM Theoretical Subjects

Rudiments	Preparatory Rudiments Basic Rudiments Intermediate Rudiments Advanced Rudiments
Harmony and Counterpoint	Introductory Harmony Basic Harmony/Basic Keyboard Harmony Intermediate Harmony/Intermediate Keyboard Harmony Counterpoint Advanced Harmony/Advanced Keyboard Harmony
Analysis	Analysis
History	History 1: Overview History 2: Middle Ages to Classical History 3: 19 <sup>th</sup> Century to Present

Based on an examination of the Ontario Ministry of Education Arts Curriculum, it is cohesive with a sequential set of skills and requirements. The “Overall Expectations” and “Specific Expectations” of each grade in the document flow smoothly from one level to another. Continuity and smoothness through the horizontal axis is therefore apparent and the curriculum shows good scope. The curriculum provides good articulation over both horizontal and vertical dimensions. The curriculum document also shows a well developed sense of balance as students are introduced to musicianship, world music genres, practical and theoretical skills.

The York University Music Handbook for undergraduate students states that “All students majoring in music complete a sequence of foundation courses which equips them with

essential concepts and practical skills in ear training, sight singing, rhythm, theory, and awareness of the social, cultural, and historical contexts of music.” These foundation courses (table 5), based on the curriculum guidelines, offer scope, sequence, continuity, articulation, and balance. Sequence, continuity, articulation and balance do not necessarily continue beyond the foundation courses because after the completion of these courses students are able to select from a plethora of courses within the music program resulting in student derived continuity based on their chosen path.

Table 5. York University Foundation Courses

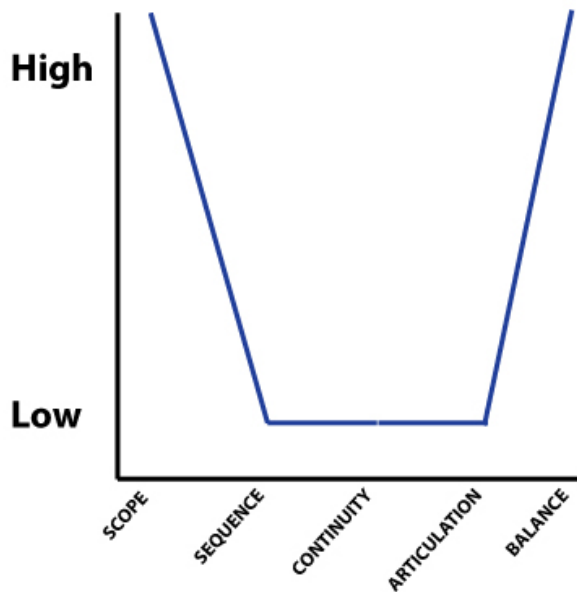
<p><b>FA/MUSI 1000 6.00; Workshop in Musicianship</b> An intensive course designed to develop musical sensitivity, imagination, and practical skills, through a variety of individual exercises in singing, playing, composing, and listening to develop perception and control of the elements of music.</p> <p><b>FA/MUSI 1200 9.00; Music and Cultures I</b> The first term introduces students to concepts underlying music as a whole, with emphasis upon the general cultivation of listening skills and upon the aural recognition of particular kinds of musical materials. Topics include the effects of sound, acoustics, rhythm and metre, melody, harmony, texture, and musical form. The second term examines a selection of genres and forms in European and North American musics, with particular attention to basic techniques of analysis.</p> <p><b>FA/MUSI 2200 6.00; Music and Cultures II</b> A continuation of FA/MUSI 1200 9.0, oriented to historical developments and social context of specific repertoires including Western Art Music. The course will involve intensive repertoire study, aural perception, analysis and score reading in addition to developing skills in writing about music and its place in the historical/cultural continuum.</p> <p><b>FA/MUSI 2201 3.00; Counterpoint (16<sup>th</sup> Century)</b> Studies to master the traditional pedagogy of species counterpoint while studying examples of the Renaissance vocal polyphonic style from which it is derived. Correlated work in vocal, aural and keyboard skills is a major component of the course.</p> <p><b>FA/MUSI 2202 3.00; Harmony</b> Studies the traditional art of selecting and connecting chords in four voices. Idioms which draw on the formulae of this texture in freer or abstract presentations are also considered, as these are the materials of classical music which are most nearly adopted in jazz, popular, and some folk music styles.</p>
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Table 6 shows what happens when we examine the curriculum design qualities of the three different curricula together? Scope is high because of the breadth of courses offered by the three curricula. The order of topics over time, or sequence, is low because there is little continuity between the final courses of high school and the RCM and the beginning courses of



the university. This is also true of continuity. Because articulation is a combination of scope and sequence, it is scored in the middle. Balance, the well-roundedness of the programs together is high because of the myriad of courses available in all of the programs.

Table 6. Curriculum Design Qualities of the 3 Programs Combined



Where we observe a break-down of all curricula is in alignment. Curriculum alignment describes the planned curriculum, taught curriculum and the tested curriculum (Henson 2001, 211). Although the curriculum documents show each program to have good alignment, when the progression from high school to university or RCM to university is examined, there is a definite misalignment present. This is what the findings of my study of 107 first year students showed.

One way to build a bridge between high school, RCM and university is to offer an online bridging course that focuses on basic rudiments and ear training. The course I have built uses the Moodle Online Learning Platform and therefore allows flexibility to students both in timing and subject matter. Because the course is offered online, students can spend as much or as little time,

at their own convenience, on subjects that they feel they need additional training. The course is heavily loaded in theory rudiments and harmony with additional modules that could be added that focus on an introduction to counterpoint and analysis. The course would, in the future, also contain a large variety of ear training exercises geared to train students from the beginning in dictation and transcription exercises. If this course was closely aligned to the foundation courses offered to first and second year students, course directors would find that the vast difference in background knowledge of students would be largely diminished. By decreasing the range of different levels of knowledge of first year students, this would allow course directors and tutorial leaders to focus on the new materials without having to worry about creating a foundational base of knowledge because students would be encouraged to complete the online bridging course.

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