

Jazz, Constructionism & Music Composition

Building Cultural Competencies in a Global Classroom Through the Performing Arts

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Introduction

The purpose of this pedagogical research project was to examine:

- methodologies for collaborative online teaching of the performing arts
- strategies for developing content, course design, and partnership sustainability

Since 2013 the faculty members Lenora Hammonds¹, Mageshen Naidoo², and Turid Nørlund Christensen³ have cooperated on the design, development and execution of the international COIL course "Composing, Arranging and Songwriting in a Global Network".

Course Contents

- The core of this course was based on students' working in teams, writing music and lyrics in globally networked learning environments (GNLEs).
- Students were guided through the composition process on two levels - cognitive and practical
 - in addition to learning traditional compositional techniques.
- Lateral thinking assignments were privileged to encourage student creativity as opposed to prescriptive standards of knowledge mastery.
- The partner institutions' three unique approaches to Jazz offered a common denominator, and a platform for exploration and examination.
- The goal was for the students to identify and apply learning in project-based approaches.

Course Design

- The planning and design of the course was geared towards student-centered activities, the use of technological resources, team building activities, and both group and individual assignments.
- The shared Live Classroom was established weekly through video teleconference and the web based learning platform LORE.com. (figure 1).
- The general course activities emerged as the instructors resolved challenging logistics of working with three partner institutions with vastly different organizational structures.

Methods

Using Skype and Google Drive the educational theories in use have been discussed by the instructors, followed by qualitative analysis of the empiric material (video recordings from the shared Live Classroom and student feedback).

Publication

A chapter in the book "Globally Networked Teaching in the Humanities - Theories and Practices" elaborating the research findings has been published (figure 2).

The chapter covers these areas:

- Theoretical: Constructionism, Creativity Theory, Project Based Learning
- Disciplinary: Music, Performing and Composition
- Methodological: Strategies and techniques teachers use to bring about the desired learning from students in a globally networked learning environments (GNLEs).
- Pedagogical: Performing arts pedagogies used: Composition, Guitar, Jazz
- Cultural: Intersecting of Music and cultures of USA, Denmark and South Africa

A few course activities have been selected to elucidate best practices for the performing arts in a GNLE.

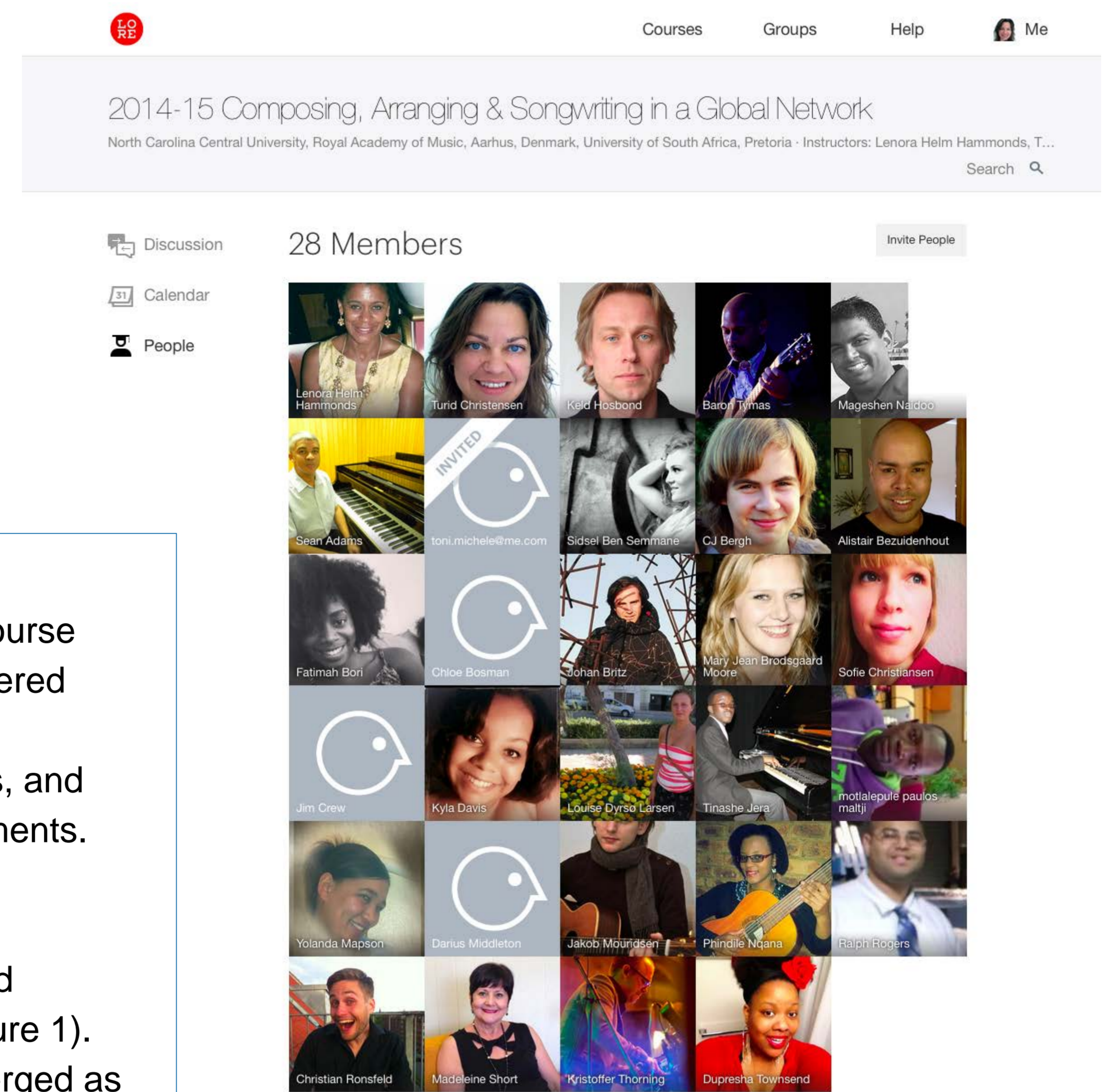


Figure 1: Instructors and students in the global class room as seen on LORE.com

Through the web based learning platform LORE.com students could:

- access the video recorded classes and assignments
- upload assignments and all forms of digital media
- engage in dialogue with their classmates on a discussion thread or in private/group messages

Findings

Methodologies for collaborative online teaching

- The Live Classroom transmissions motivated students to be present in class.
- The informal web based student-to-student discussions allowed students to develop relationships and to facilitate the ownership of content knowledge creation for the course.

Strategies for developing content/course design

- Open directions (opposed to specific dictates) elicited a higher return of creative surprise, and a deeper engagement in compositional projects.
- Creativity skills can help the students when navigating in a globalized, contingent world. Students transferred their achieved lateral thinking skills and techniques, and applied them to challenges in other classes and when making life decisions.

Conclusion

Through the GNLE students and instructors have gained a virtual study/work abroad experience and built professional networks with the potential for future cooperation and exchanges. The research project has transformed and qualified the tacit knowledge from the COIL eLearning courses through the theoretical perspectives and qualitative analyses and elucidated best practices.

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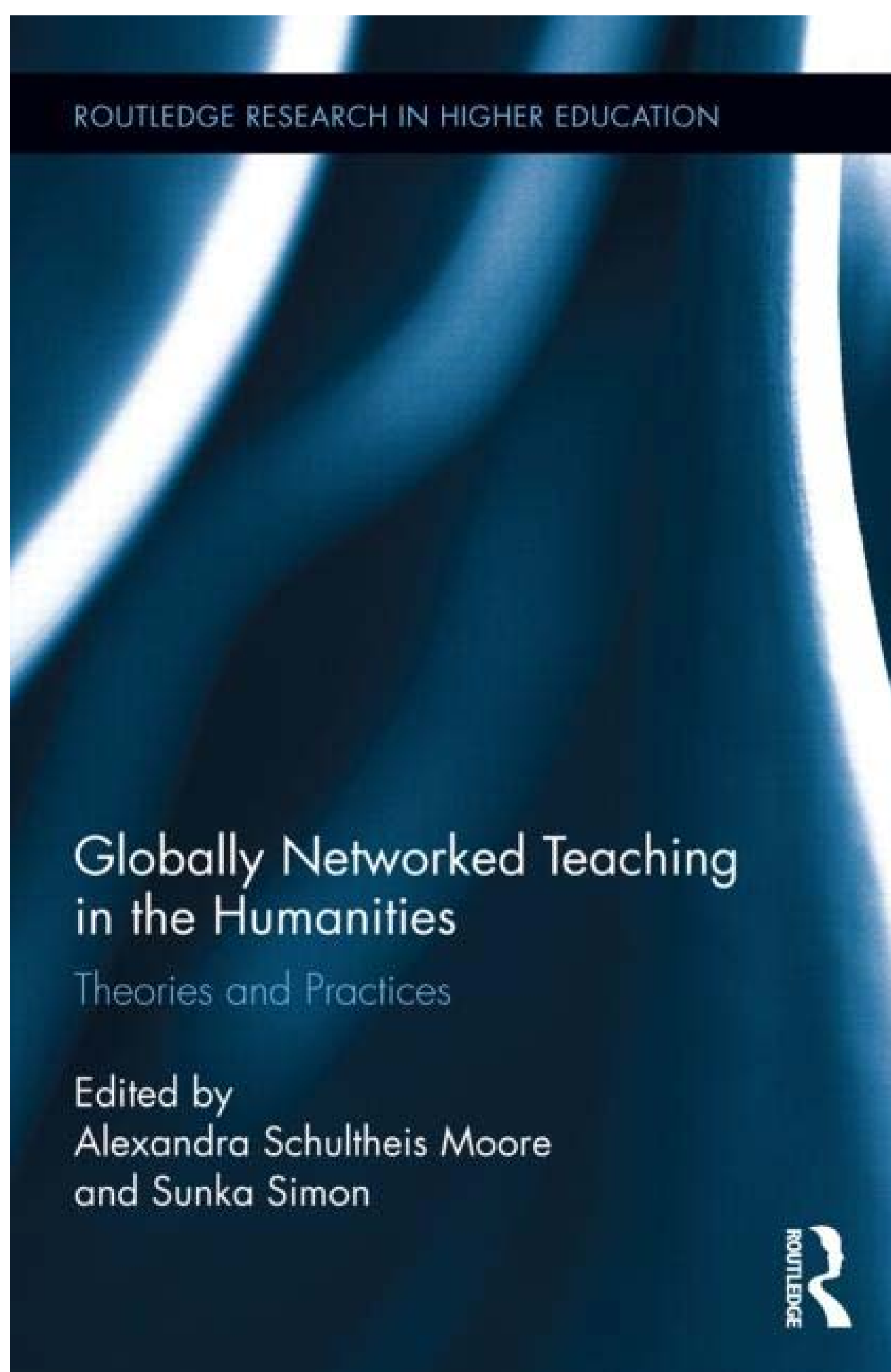


Figure 2: The research findings have been published in "Globally Networked Teaching in the Humanities - Theories and Practices", chapter 16: "Jazz, Constructionism, and Music Composition: Building Cultural Competencies in a Global Classroom Through the Performing Arts", by L. H. Hammonds, T. N. Christensen et al., Routledge (2015)

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