

Assessment Practices of the 21st Century String Classroom

Mr. John-Rine Zabanal and Dr. Charles Laux

Why do we have to have assessments?

- To show that students are learning.
- Principals require teachers to collect data of students growth.
- It could be used as a motivator to improve student performance.
- It could further 'legitimize' music as a 'real' subject.

Assessment Types (Goolsby, 1999)

- **Placement:** Auditions, challenges, and seating. All aimed at determine student's abilities compared to their peers.
- **Summative:** Concerts, festivals, music performance assessment, recitals, solo and ensemble, etc. The final performance, or the final product of the culminating project.
- **Diagnostic:** Used to determine where learning difficulties exist. Most ensemble music teachers already have this mastered. The director listens to the ensemble perform, processes visual and aural feedback from the students, identifies any problems the performance, and provides the student solutions to correct it.
- **Formative:** This is what most music teachers struggle with the most. It is the regular monitoring of students to make sure that learning is taking place. It is the collection of data showing that students are learning and processing new material.
 - Ensemble teachers often make the erroneous assumption that if no errors are identified during rehearsal, then students are learning. Without formative assessment, we have no way of knowing if the students are simply learning our parameters for tolerance of mistakes, or if they are learning something about music.

NAfME Guidelines for assessment (NAfME, n.d.)

- Given the importance of assessment in public education, music educators have an interest in supporting approaches to assessment that are standards-based, practical, and serve to help school music programs provide the best possible experiences to all students.
- Document and explain to colleagues, administrators, and the public what assessment practices you are using.
- Take a serious interest in assessment tools that evaluate individual student learning in music.
- Collaborate with other music education colleagues to develop uniform assessments that can be used in your school
- Report on the results of your assessments to parents through all available and appropriate means including student achievement reports, school concerts, and PTA meetings.

Additional resources available at www.orchestrateacher.net.

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ASTA Standards for Successful School String/Orchestra Teaching (2015) on assessment:

- II.H: As an educator demonstrates effective methods of assessing and evaluating student achievement.
- II.K: As an educator demonstrates knowledge, application, and assessment of comprehensive, sequential K–12 curricula with focus on string and orchestral teaching.
- III.A.3: As a performer demonstrates effective, on-going professional self-assessment.

Self-Assessment and Evaluation

- Teaching students how to evaluate their own work has been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement of math, reading, and writing skills (Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Rolheiser, 2002; Ross, Rolheiser, & Hogaboam-Gray, 1999).
- Previous research on self-evaluation in music performance suggests that instrumentalists, from middle school through college, appear to be inadequate at evaluating their own performances (Bergee, 1993, 1997; Hewitt, 2002, 2005).
- It is important that students learn how to self-assess! They should be able to know what sounds good and what does not sound good. Most of their practice time is spent outside class time.
- *Our goal is to help students to become independent musicians.*
- Practice summaries/logs, journal entries, exit slips, self-evaluation forms, etc.

Peer-Assessment

- A powerful and effective strategy! It keeps students engaged by reducing down time. It can be an activity that ranges from 10 seconds to 10 minutes.
- **First to Five:** A 0-5 point rating systems, ask students how a section was performed.
- **Thumb Scale:** Thumbs up, sideways, or down.
- **Evaluation sheets:** Record students perform a run through, have them evaluate it based on a rubric immediately afterwards. This is typically done after concerts, but why not as preparation for a concert?

Grading Performances, how to make the subjective objective.

- **RUBRICS!** It helps clarify the strengths and weaknesses.
- Use a detailed rubric, it helps the students (and parents) better understand their grade.
- Provides the student with formative feedback that allows them to improve on the future.
- It allows you to quickly grade students by circling rubric criteria instead of writing it down.

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Where do I find rubrics?

- Method books, online resources, other teachers!
- If you make your own, you could add or remove weight on certain performance elements (intonation, posture, bow control, etc).
- Provide rubric examples.

Recording Performance Assessments

- Unlike written work (which occurs in most other classes), performances ‘vanishes’ after it is completed. Recording a performance will provide the necessary evidence of student work. The student, teacher, and parents could refer back to the recorded performance is needed.
- Recordings could be audio online or visual-audio.
- Record in class, during rehearsal; record outside of class, during rehearsal; record outside of class, at home.

Video Assessments

- Captures student performance both visually or aurally.
- **Build a digital portfolio.** If teacher/students keeps videos over the duration of taking orchestra, anyone viewing the video can see student growth. It could record progress from beginning strings all the way through high school.
- Great to show students their progress if they feel like they’re not progressing.
- Great to show administrators and parent conferences.

Record during rehearsal

- Have a class set of cameras, or you could borrow from the school library.
- Students could be sent to the practice room, hallway, or other location.
- You could send students by small groups, or by stand, during rehearsal time.
- Tell students that they can only record ONCE, otherwise they will spend too much time.

Recording at home

- Most students have smartphones with a camera. Set up an online submission infrastructure and students can record on their own time at home.
- No class time is spent on formative assessment.
- Students can record as many times as they want, then submit their best recording. Students are self-assessing and they are practicing.
- If students do not have a smartphone or internet access, provide time during the school day for them to record their assessment for you.

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How to assign performances?

- Will quizzes be assigned on an ‘as-needed basis’ or will they be planned in advanced?
- **Typical as-needed assignments:**
 - Assign a whole piece, and an excerpt will be announced on test day.
 - Assign a part of a piece, and an excerpt will be announced on test day.
 - Assign a specific excerpt to be due.
- **Pre-emptive planning:** Teacher study the score of each piece and identify tricky spots. The teacher will assign 4-8 excerpts to be assessed for each instrumental part with spaced out deadlines (once a week or so). Rubric should also be attached to assignments so they can view teacher expectations. The students will have the option to submit the quiz online all at once or all by the deadline. Either way, students are practicing teacher-identified difficult passages. Students will know the teacher’s expectations in advanced.

Online video submission

- See if your school currently has the infrastructure to have students upload videos. Canvas, Blackboard, Score, StudentVUE/ParentVUE, Schoology, Google Classroom. These products typically have apps students can download on their phones.
- If the school district provides students with an online email account, experiment with other platforms such as Google Drive and OneDrive.

Other Applications

- **Essential Elements Interactive:** Interactive music studio allows students to record and instantly compare multiple takes. Students must then compare which take is best before submission. “Practice until you get it.”
- **Coach’s Eye:** Inexpensive app for mobile devices. Designed for use in athletics. Great tool for string player assessment, it can capture performance and teacher can record commentary.

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