



Title: Assessment: An Emerging Critical Issue for All Music Educators

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Assessment: An Emerging Critical Issue For All Music Educators

By Elza Daugherty, Editor, *TQ*

Assessment related to student learning has always been important to the caring, dedicated educator, as well as to other individuals who have vested interests in the quality of the graduates of America's schools, e.g. parents, employers. Today, attention to assessment is becoming intensified, emerging as a critical matter for all educators, including music educators. While many influences no doubt contribute to the attention being directed to assessment, the primary impetus may be the standards movement in education that has evolved throughout the past three presidencies of the United States. In that legislatures and/or state boards of education in many states have accepted the standards movement as a way to improve the quality of education for students in their respective public schools and since Americans appear to hold healthy pragmatic convictions, we may assume that these agencies will expect educators to document student progress in relation to standards adopted by their respective states to justify time, effort, and funding given to the standards project and schooling. Since music is being included in the standards of many states, it is the good fortune of music educators that our profession includes experts who have long voiced the importance of stating goals and who have been engaged in addressing the challenges involved in assessing student learning in relation to goals.

The intent of *TQ* in this issue is to contribute to the growing dialogue on assessment in music education. Authors included in this issue have credentials in the field of mea-

surement and evaluation, and they share their expertise and insights by addressing a spectrum of ideas related to assessment as it is currently emerging.

Richard Colwell speculates as to reasons for the current interest in assessment by music educators. In doing so, he provides a brief historical setting for the study of achievement and aptitude, and he offers recommendations the profession should consider as next steps.

By defining key terms used in today's discussions of assessment, Rudolf Radocy clarifies the topic. I would characterize his view as one that is balanced: he recognizes the subjective nature of music as an art, as well as the objective characteristics of music; he explores the concept of subjectivity in relation to measurement, while recognizing the usefulness of selected psychometric traditions.

Peter Webster and Maud Hickey address the issue of assessing creative thinking in music ability. They offer a discussion of the challenges involved in using subjective judgments as part of the assessment process related to children's compositions. In the heart of their article, the authors report their findings in establishing inter-judge reliability for rating scales developed from their previous research and the work they found in research of others. Since one of the national standards is development of student compositional skills and understandings, the work of Webster and Hickey may be of interest to the professional who is examining and reflecting on music content standards and their ramifications for assessment.

Using insights gained from being involved in the process of bringing music once again into the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), Brent Sandene lists and describes the steps involved in conducting large-scale assessments. He addresses issues involved in such projects and highlights pitfalls to avoid. He also provides practical suggestions that may be useful to the music educator or administrator who is charged with undertaking a large-scale assessment project within the school district or state.

George Duerkson indicates that ongoing assessments used in music education, such as ratings of ensembles at festivals and contests and the public's evaluation of appearances by school ensembles, are not used systematically to assess what students know and can do musically. Toward improvement in assessment efforts, the author examines school

improvement models and highlights the ways and means such models may be useful to music educators in the current focus on assessment. He examines holistic and analytic techniques as part of his discussion on the use of multiple assessments of student progress. He concludes with ideas for applications of the school improvement models to assessment in music education.

The current political and educational climates provide a rich opportunity for music educators to consider issues involved in assessment of student learning. What the profession does with the opportunity at hand remains to be seen, however. For music educators who choose to enter the assessment dialogue, the ideas presented in this issue of *TQ* may well be useful in shaping further discussion.



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