

## **Assessment and Feedback Practices of Secondary Music Teachers: A Descriptive Case Study**

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### **Abstract**

*Assessment and feedback practices constitute a key component in the educational process; however, little research exists for the assessment and feedback practices of secondary music teachers. Using qualitative methods including observational data, document analysis, and in-depth, semi-structured interviews, this descriptive case study explored the assessment practices of five music teachers in one high school. Using the work of Marzano as a theoretical underpinning, the research focused on teacher perceptions and beliefs about assessment as well as the differences in musical media. The case study further highlights previous research by Hale and Green on musical assessments by addressing individual teacher's beliefs. The findings suggest that each of the five teachers had a specific style of teaching and assessing that addressed musical elements; however, there was an internal consistency in the musical elements addressed by each teacher.*

**Keywords:** Music, Assessment, Feedback, Music Education, Observational Data, Rehearsal

## **Introduction**

The current Every Student Succeeds Act continues to call school accountability and assessment to the forefront of discussions of United States education. While reading and mathematical abilities have received specific attention, academics in all academic fields have felt a great sense of urgency to provide means for assessment and accountability. This includes fine art programs, such as school music programs. As more states adopt a required fine art credit for high school graduation, fine arts classes and teachers would be well-served to adopt a greater sense of accountability to ensure that students achieve proficiency in their specific domain.

Immediate and constructive feedback provides an opportunity for students to self-correct, providing them authentic information in their progress toward achieving performance goals (Marzano, 2007). Marzano (2003) suggested that for feedback to be effective it must be timely, specific, and individualized for each student. The secondary music classroom is an ideal setting to provide each of these elements to students.

## **Review of Literature**

This study explored the assessment and feedback practices of a group of music teachers. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) called for bi-annual assessment in reading and math, and allowed for other assessments in areas such as the arts. Scheider (2005) suggested that nationally, music teachers must advocate for the design and uses of such assessments. Even in states that do not participate in NAEP testing, music teachers still must establish educational goals for their students and have a system in place to monitor their progress (TEA, n.d.). A formative assessment model allows music teachers to provide immediate feedback on specific goals.

Music teachers frequently balance individual and group/ensemble assessments (Hale & Green, 2009; Wesolowski, 2012). The assessment of students in band, choir and orchestra varies greatly from teacher to teacher. Assessment criteria may include musical elements such as performance ability and written knowledge, as well as non-musical related criteria such as attitude, attendance, and recording weekly practice time. In addition, different types of assessment may occur in a particular field. Goolsby (1999) identified and defined four types of assessment as placement, summative, diagnostic, and formative and further defines each in the following way:

Placement assessment includes auditions, challenges, and seating assignments, all aimed at determining a student's abilities in order to properly place the student within a program. Summative assessment includes concerts, festivals, recitals, and other events where the final "product" of the group's learning is publicly demonstrated and evaluated. The other two types of assessment are usually integrated more closely with day-to-day instruction. Diagnostic assessment is used to determine where learning difficulties exist...formative assessment is concerned with the regular monitoring of students to make sure that learning is taking place. (p. 31)

Hale and Green (2009) also noted the importance of a daily diagnostic approach and providing on-going feedback throughout rehearsals. They note a need for very specific feedback that addressed exact needs.

In contrast, Russell and Austin's (2010) study explored the actual assessment and grading policies in use by band, choir and orchestra teachers within the southwestern region of the United States. Through this survey, the authors reported that while music classes remained part of the calculation of grade point averaging and musical credit accrued toward graduation requirements, administrators offered little guidance on assessment requirements.

Without a national standard guiding assessment in music, as in math or reading, administrators often chose to focus more attention on those classes tested by state or federal mandates. This often lead to music teachers developing their own system of assessment, based

on previous experience, the mentorship of more experienced teachers, and the personal beliefs of the director. Wesolowski (2012) suggested a clear set of guidelines, and a rubric system in assessing music performance. This system allows for greater objectivity in assessing students (Hale & Green, 2009).

Beyond individual philosophies of assessment, Russell and Austin (2010) found that the lack of pre-service training, time restraints, large class sizes, and a shortage of resources play a large part in the inconsistencies in music teacher grading policies. Furthermore, they discovered several teachers incorporated non-musical activities into grading systems. Specifically, “Attendance and attitude were the most common grading criteria employed by instrumental and choral music teachers” and “non-achievement criteria such as attendance, attitude, effort, and participation may be given more overall weight in the grading process than achievement criteria” (p. 39). Simons (2014) also found that the pressure of meeting assessment criteria has led to some music teachers using assessments based on non-musical items, such as attendance, behavior, or attitude.

Finally, the music teacher’s area of specialization, whether vocal or instrumental, may also influence grading policies and beliefs. This lack of consistency poses many concerns for music teachers not only in accurately portraying students’ musical achievements, but also in the awarding of credits, grade point averages, and class rankings.

An element missing in most assessment models is the students’ own perception of their abilities and performance. This element of self-assessment appears in the literature of analysis of assessment practices (Burrack, 2002; Hale & Green, 2009). Acknowledging the importance of technical ability, Burrack (2002) challenged music teachers to consider “higher-order thinking skills, such as problem solving and creative thinking. Self and group assessments can serve as

vehicles for enhancing musical understanding, aesthetic sensitivity, and critical-listening skills” (p. 27). Hale and Green (2009) concurred, postulating that self-assessment should be the ultimate aim in education. This self-assessment approach not only validates a student’s perceptions of his or her own musical ability, it may serve as a motivating factor.

Schmidt’s (2005) study on motivation in band students implied that 20% of variance in musical achievement was linked to motivational factors, although factors such as ability, age, and effort may play a part in the motivation of students. While individual motivational factors may vary from student to student, the student participants surveyed indicated that commitment to the band program and a sense of personal success was a factor relating to their own motivation. Less emphasis was placed on personal ego and competition, suggesting that intrinsic motivation may be the greater factor in students’ perception of band involvement. Although Schmidt’s study provided a useful framework from which to explore motivation, one key factor remained unexplored--what are the music teacher’s perceptions of motivation? A teacher who has a strong sense of ego and competitive drive may influence his or her students to share this feeling. Likewise, a teacher who promotes a sense of personal accomplishment as a priority may influence student perceptions as well.

MacLeod and Napoles (2012) looked at both positive and negative feedback in music rehearsals. Feedback itself is an important tool for student learning, and is often considered part of the teaching processes. However, the manner in which the feedback is delivered is an important consideration, as positive and negative feedback influence student attitudes toward music. When undergraduate music majors viewed episodes of teaching, that were designed to show positive and negative feedback, students perceived the positive feedback as a more effective teaching method than negative feedback. Duke and Henninger (1998) looked at the

effects of feedback on music students. They discovered that music students often maintained positive feelings toward music, regardless of positive or negative feedback, if their level of success in musical performance increased.

### **Identification of Research Problem**

Though large amounts of research are available on the topic of assessment (Burrack, 2002; Hale & Green, 2009; Marzano, 2003; 2007), the body of literature on the subject of fine arts assessment, specifically secondary music performance-based classrooms, does not always agree. This may be a result of each state having separate educational policies, and thus any research or guidelines for musical assessment may not be applicable in other states. Even within the same state, individual district assessment policies often differ.

Most of the available music assessment research utilized quantitative methods, such as surveys to measure assessment practices of teachers (e.g., Burrack, 2002; Goolsby, 1999; Russell & Austin, 2010). Moreover, the established research does not address the internal thought processes of teachers throughout the assessment process. In this case study, through the combination of classroom observations and follow up interviews with teachers at one high school, a more robust picture of assessment and feedback of those music teachers was developed to address four primary research questions:

1. What forms of assessment are used by music teachers in this school?
2. Do each of the musical disciplines have a model of assessment that they follow?
3. What types of feedback are provided to students in music classes?
4. What similarities and differences exist in assessment between different musical classes (Band, Choir and Orchestra) in this school?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Marzano (2007) defined the two major categories of assessment as formative and summative. Formative assessment occurs, as students are learning material or skills, while summative assessments are administered at the end of a major unit of study. Of the two forms, Marzano indicates a belief that formative assessment “might be one of the more powerful weapons in a teacher’s arsenal” and that “the frequency of assessments is related to student academic achievement” (p. 13). In the case of performance-based classes, such as a musical one, constant formative assessment and diagnostic testing offered more opportunities for students to receive specific and timely feedback, a concept that Marzano (2003) identified as one of the major goals for improving achievement.

This study sought to examine the assessment practices of music teachers at one north Texas high school, to determine similarities in assessment practices across the different musical disciplines. Further, the study compared teacher feedback to students in terms of frequency and types to compare the practices of music teachers. Interviews with music teachers provided greater insight into the assessment and feedback beliefs of the teachers and how those beliefs translate into teacher actions.

### **Methodology**

This study utilized a combination of qualitative techniques for gathering data. Yin (2016) noted five features of qualitative research. I summarize them as follows: (a) Studying the meaning of people’s lives under real-world roles; (b) Representing the views and perspectives of the people (participants) in a study; (c) Explicitly attending to and accounting for real-world contextual conditions; (d) Contributing insights into existing or new concepts that may help to explain social behavior and thinking; and (e) Acknowledging the potential relevance of multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on single source alone.

Music rehearsal observations provided the majority of teacher feedback data, while teacher interviews and document analysis of teacher grading and policy/procedure manuals were used to explore the assessment practices and beliefs of teachers. The qualitative framework provided the best opportunity to explore the meaning behind teachers' choices of assessment. The use of a descriptive case study approach presented more potential advantages and insights about the grading practice of these secondary music teachers. Additionally, this allowed the researchers to understand the teachers' perceptions of assessment in their classrooms while incorporating the complex data of the teacher's actual student assessments (Yin, 2003). The nature of the data sources made the qualitative approach a far more natural selection than a quantitative approach.

### **Setting**

The study site was a large high school in a suburban district in north Texas, with 2,065 students enrolled grades 9-12. The campus is one of three high schools in district and is the district's oldest high school. Student racial composition at the time of the study consisted of 62% White, 21% Hispanic, 14% African American, and 1% Pacific Islander, with 25% Low SES (Socioeconomic Status). Enrollment in music classes included 155 students in band, 165 in choir, and 75 in orchestra.

### **Participants**

All participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study. Additionally, university institutional review and campus review approved this study. The participants consisted of current music teachers at the study site. Out of the possible six teachers, five elected to participate in the study. The teachers at the campus represent the fields of band, choir, and orchestra, and with a wide a range of teaching experience from two to 23 years experience. Of

the potential participants of the study, three were male and three were female. Gender, race/ethnicity, and age were not an exclusionary factor in study participation. This small sample was a sample of convenience that allowed for observations both during class time, and in their before/after school rehearsals with great ease. Table 1 provides additional information of the informants.

Table 1

*Participant Experience and Education Level*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Education Level</b>
Orchestra	11 years Orchestra/5 years band 7 years MS/4 years HS	Bachelor of Music Ed
Choir	20 years 6 years MS/2 Years HS/12 Elementary	Bachelor of Music Ed
Band 1	15 Years Band/8 years head Director All at HS	Bachelor of Music Performance Masters of Music Performance Teacher Certification Added
Band 2	12 Years Band 5 Years MS/ 7 Years HS	Bachelor of Music Ed
Band 3	2 Years HS (Certified)/9 Years Freelance (HS, MS, Collegiate and Jazz band)	Bachelor of Music Ed Masters of Music Performance

**Data Collection Procedures**

The primary source of data collection was observations of secondary band, choir and orchestra classes at the study site. Each of the directors were rehearsing their ensemble for upcoming concerts or competitions. One of the authors observed four of the five teachers for two complete 50-minute class periods. The fifth teacher was the percussion specialist who did not

teach a specific class in the spring semester during which the study was conducted. The researcher observed this teacher once in an after-school rehearsal for approximately 50 minutes. During the rehearsal observations, the researchers noted frequency and types of assessments and any feedback, verbal or non-verbal, provided to students. These notes were later tabulated and then coded as themes in teacher feedback practices. The observations data guided the subsequent interview questions. Interviews with each of the participants lasted approximately 25 minutes and explored each teacher's philosophical approaches to assessment and feedback, and each teacher's own history with assessment as students or performers and as teachers. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, for later analysis and coding.

The interviews provided the opportunity for a more in-depth understanding of the internal thought processes teachers make when assessing students and how they provide feedback. While the specific observations created certain interview questions, depending on the situation, other structured interview questions provided for comparisons between the different teachers and individual students.

The structured interview protocol for the teachers included:

1. Do you use a rubric?
2. Does individual growth in each student play a part in assessment?
3. How did you develop this system of assessment?
4. Do assessments change depending on circumstance?
5. How do you track student progress from one assessment to the next?

The final aspect of data collection involved document analysis of the music teacher's grade books and grading policies outlined in classroom handbooks. This showed how music teachers classify their own assessments, as well as frequency and types of assessments. The

district requires all classes to have at least three formal (summative) assessments and ten formative (daily) grades, including all fine art classes. Additional information from grade book analysis provided information on: (a) if assessments are planned, (b) the extent students are made aware of the assessments, (c) how many assessments are given in a grading period, (d) are multiple types of assessments used and, (e) what percentage of assessments are formative and what are summative. Handbooks provided information on procedures and grading of formal and informal assessments, including that most teachers used a mastery model based on multiple retests.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis included multiple methods. The coding of observations allowed the researchers to form assumptions on the effectiveness of various assessments. Throughout observations, notes were taken on the types of feedback provided to students. The feedback included both full ensemble comments as well as individual comments. These notes were then coded into themes that were shared with the teachers, as well as their frequency of use. These codes provided information on frequency of different types of assessment. Further, these data provided an opportunity to member check and open a dialogue with each teacher.

Coding based on the teacher interviews showed another level of teacher perceptions, and these were aligned with the classroom practices. Reviewing interviews showed alignment with the perception of teachers to the reality of the assessment practices in their classroom. Themes about the assessment procedures became more evident by comparing the observation to the interviews. Codes that appear in both interviews and observations became major source material for developing themes based on teacher perceptions. The final piece of data was the teacher grade book. By comparing the grades in the grade book to interview questions, the researchers

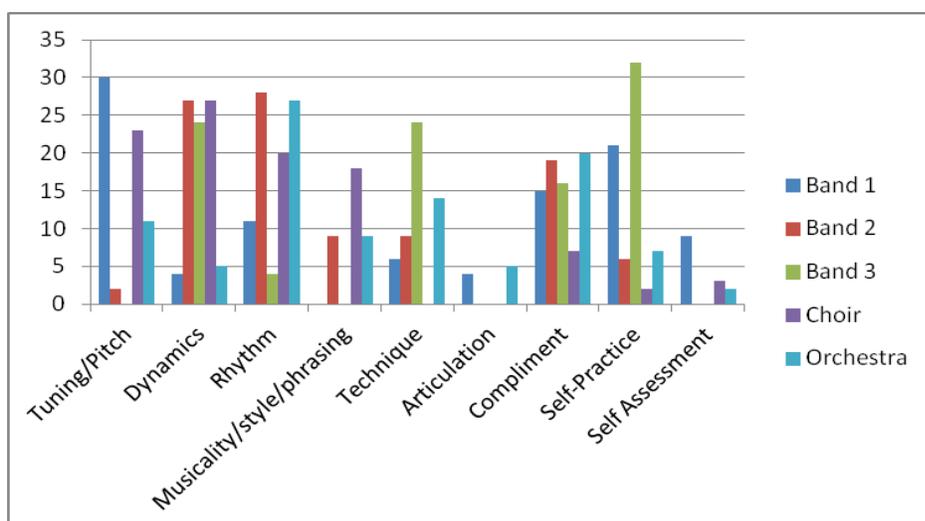
ascertained congruence between the teachers' espoused beliefs about assessment and their actual practice in the classroom. Further, grade book analysis showed pre-planning of assessments. If assessments were listed in the grade book at the beginning of the marking period, this indicated that assessments were planned in advanced, rather than those simply added the day of the assessment.

Guion (2002) described this use of the three sources of data as methodological triangulation. Use of triangulation further assures validity in data collection and analysis. Further validity was provided by sharing the results for each teacher with that teacher for final approval and to provide the opportunity for participants to member check the data. Yin (2003) noted that in descriptive case studies quantitative data, such as the frequency of assessment and feedback of music teachers, can be useful in providing context when complex data sources are uncovered. The frequency of feedback was used as part of individual teacher interviews, to gather the meaning behind their assessment choices.

### **Findings**

In analyzing and interpreting the data collected, we identified specific types of feedback to students common across the different musical mediums. These categories included tuning/pitch, dynamics, rhythm, musicality (including phrasing, style, and balance), technique, and articulation. In addition, three other categories emerged in the analysis. These included comments on how to correct issues (identified as Self-Practice), asking students to self-assess, and positive statements on issues that have gone well (identified as Compliments). As the research questions dealt with the types of assessments/feedback that music teachers used, and the differences and similarities between the different musical media, we began with a simple tally of these coded categories to compare the groups, as seen in Figure 1. This figure also shows the

specific breakdown of the different types of feedback given to students by each individual teacher, in comparison to the total number of feedback statements observed.



*Figure 1. Total of Assessment/Feedback Observed.*

Based solely on the information displayed in the Figure 1, certain assumptions about the feedback styles of each teacher can be made, such as instrumental teachers place a greater emphasis on rhythm, or that the choral teacher corrected more musicality elements. However, these assumptions are based solely on a limited number of observations. Different musical elements may become more important at different times throughout the various musical media. Teachers were observed in different phases of rehearsal. For example, the choir teacher was observed teaching new music to the class, whereas the orchestra teacher was observed at the dress rehearsal for a concert. Often in musical rehearsals, many of the technical and rhythmic elements are addressed and corrected at the beginning of learning a new piece of music, while more specific musical elements are addressed as the students' progress.

Observational data revealed several patterns in the types of feedback and assessment comments made by the teachers. The highest number of observed feedback statements in two

observations was 93 from Band 2, while orchestra had 44. Band 3 was only observed one time, with 25 feedback statements. Each teacher appeared to focus on certain areas in providing feedback. Assessment comments to specific music elements varied by each discipline as well. Table 2 shows the breakdown of each teacher to specific musical elements. Band 1 and Choir offered a high number of comments directed to the tuning of students. Dynamics were addressed most by Band 2 and Choir. The Orchestra, Choir and Band 2 teachers offered more comments addressing rhythm. Band 3 provided the most feedback in the areas of dynamics and technique.

Table 2

*Feedback to Specific Music Elements*

	<b>Band 1</b>	<b>Band 2</b>	<b>Band 3</b>	<b>Choir</b>	<b>Orchestra</b>
<b>Tuning/Pitch</b>	16	2	n/a	21	5
<b>Dynamics</b>	2	25	6	25	2
<b>Rhythm</b>	6	26	1	19	12
<b>Musicality/Style/Phrasing</b>	n/a	8	n/a	16	4
<b>Technique</b>	3	8	6	n/a	6
<b>Articulation</b>	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	2
<b>Total</b>	29	69	13	81	31

Other feedback statements included compliments and positive assessments of musical performance, provided techniques for the students to improve their work at home, or asked the students to self-asses their performance.

Even though all teachers offered complimentary feedback, two of the band teachers provided the most comments related to students working to self-correct problems. Field observations supported with the band/orchestra interviews, where each director spoke directly to this idea as a basic philosophical choice in assessing students. As one band instructor commented, “I try to also give kids a way to make it better, through my feedback... not just this

was what was wrong, make it better. It's this is what was wrong, this is the way to fix it" (Band 1). The instrumental music teachers placed a greater amount of rehearsal comments on self-practice, but this may be related to the differences between instrumental and choral music. The choir teacher's interview indicated this belief:

Choir is a very personal thing... instrumental music is a totally different discipline than vocal... in choir you can't hide behind an instrument...the voice is way more personal... it's a very group oriented activity... I mean you sing in choirs, it's a group effort... I tell kids this is the only place that it's ok to cheat. (Choir)

The choir instructor's remarks possibly indicate a belief that the majority of corrective practices in large ensemble choir music must be done in the large group, rather than at home in individual practice.

Document analysis of teacher grade books revealed that the instrumental teachers posted a greater number of grades specifically related to pass offs. The teachers described pass offs as an opportunity for students to perform a musical excerpt. Each individual director had different approaches to using pass offs. The orchestra teacher focused on individual pass offs, to measure levels of proficiency, while the band directors used both individual and group pass offs.

Although no specific pass offs were observed or recorded for this project, instrumental directors mentioned several times their importance in their classrooms:

"Orchestra" I need you to remember to take care of pass offs. I handed back cards today. Red indicates I have some concerns about your music, Pink, I have your pass off, but have not listened, and blue pretty good, but there is still a little more to fix.  
 "Band 2" You know we could just do individual pass offs, but it doesn't help you get the overall picture... we can't have 45 individuals at UIL (University Interscholastic League); we have to be a group... Lots of people haven't gone back and re-done the first pass off.

Music teachers often create handbooks or syllabi that explain grading expectations. Analysis of the various group handbooks provides a clear set of expectations for pass off procedures and the acceptable level of performance. Specifically, in the orchestra handbook, the teacher addresses

the topics of intonation, rhythm, maintaining tempo, and body position, including posture and bow use. These orchestra pass offs must be video recorded and provided to the teacher each week. Over the course of the weekend, the teacher graded each, and provided the multi-colored feedback cards, with specific feedback on the back of each card. The orchestra teacher noted the importance of relevant and immediate feedback and had devised the above-mentioned color coding system that expressed feedback.

The band directors utilized a group and individual pass off system, both of which had to be done live, not recorded. In this system, the directors used a mastery learning concept, where students showed either complete mastery (100) or not (0). Any pass off not mastered, was entered in the grade book as a zero, but could be redone any number of times until mastery was shown. Individual pass offs involved technical exercises, such as scale patterns. Group pass offs were used with the current literature being rehearsed. The band directors felt that this allowed them to observe both individual playing, as well as group ensemble skills. The expectation for group pass offs was that students would play in groups of four, but they could not play with any other person that was playing their specific part. In short, a first and second clarinet could play together, but not two second clarinets.

In individual teacher interviews, references to differences in the musical medium appeared as related specifically to research question 2:

“Choir” Instrumental music is a totally different discipline than vocal...  
“Orchestra” It’s just as consistent as I need it to be... she (Choir) doesn’t teach counting like how I like it... like a band director... I teach it like, you know... because I’m from West Texas (State University), we use the Eastman System (of counting), and we pat our foot, and internalize the beat...and we count a lot [Emphasis]... but I teach like a band director.

The observational evidence of feedback statements, seen in earlier in Table 2, showed a variety in the types of comments made by teachers in each medium.

## Discussion

The data was reviewed in light of the four guiding research questions. This provided the opportunity to group common or competing elements around each topic area. Further, data from the multiple data sources could be triangulated. The following discussion will look at each of the guiding questions.

### 1. What forms of assessment are used by music teachers in this school?

In all five of the participants, the music teachers offered both formal and informal assessments. Though no formal assessments, such as pass offs, were observed, teacher interviews and grade book analysis confirmed the presences of formal (summative) assessments. Informal (formative) assessments occurred throughout the observed rehearsals, both to individuals and to the ensemble. Every corrective comment made by the teachers served as a form of assessment. These assessment and feedback statements provided immediate opportunities for correcting musical elements on the parts of the students. Many times, students were given feedback, and allowed to repeat the musical passage to check for improvement or mastery. This approach aligned with Hale and Green's (2009) model of Assess as you Go.

### 2. Does each of the musical disciplines have a model of assessment that they follow?

Each teacher had very specific feedback and assessment styles that he or she followed. While at least some of musical elements listed in Table 2 were addressed by all teachers, there were differences in their specific areas of focus. The data suggest that even the three band directors had different elements that they focused on more than their fellow teachers. It may be that there are differences not only in the musical disciplines, but also in each teacher.

The orchestra teacher stated that she was a former band director and teaches "like a band director" sometimes. What do other orchestra teachers do differently who do not have a band

background? This will take additional observations. This same orchestra teacher also addressed her perceptions of the differences in the way band and orchestra students learn:

I try to do the same leadership skills...you know, but you just have to do it differently... you can't be as cut-dry (Hand slapping) ... they are not going to take that abuse...I mean flat out... string kids are not going to take it they are not going to drop and give you ten (push-ups) ... they would look at you like "are you kidding me?"

The orchestra teacher suggested different teaching styles work with different students, and implied that they to completely changed their feedback style with different musical ensembles.

### 3. What types of feedback are provided to students in music classes?

All of the instrumental teachers provided some form of individual pass off system that provided direct feedback to students. The orchestra teacher specifically returned a copy of the sheet music, with specific areas marked to be addressed. The choral teacher used a group pass off method that provided group feedback, with some individual comments. While band pass offs were not observed, the interview provided some insight to specific practices, including a mastery learning approach, where students show complete mastery or not, but were allowed to redo any pass off for the full grade. Feedback was both verbal and in written formats so students could redo any pass off. In general, the pass off grades was recorded in the teacher grade books, but could be re-done for higher grades. Both Goolsby (1999) and Hale and Green (2009) noted that this type of diagnostic type of assessment offers specific feedback to students, and can greatly improve individual performance.

### 4. What similarities and differences exist in assessment between different musical classes (Band, Choir and Orchestra) in this school?

In both observations and through interviews, there were differences where each director focused their attention. Although it may be said that all music teachers spend a portion of their

time correcting volume (dynamic) issues, Band 2 and Choir had the highest number of dynamic responses. Likewise, it would be unfair to say that orchestra teachers spend the most time addressing rhythmic concerns; specifically, when one observation was of the orchestra looking at a new piece of music for the first time. A key factor in the observed rehearsals lay in where the ensemble was in relationship to the music performance, such as sight-reading versus performance ready. As the orchestra was in a dress rehearsal for one of the observations, and sight reading new music for the other, this difference likely had some influence in the type of feedback being provided.

Additionally, each director made positive comments to students about elements performed well. These were identified as compliment in the above figures. It would be difficult to make a clear generalization that one director is more complimentary than others, due to the time of the different observations. Three of the observations were the final rehearsal before a performance. If a director felt the pressure to make the most of every available minute to provide specific feedback, they may have spent less time on elements they considered performance ready. Several non-verbal feedback gestures, such as thumbs-up or a nod served to encourage students, even at those rehearsals where time was precious. Concerning complimenting students, these seemed to fall into sub-categories: during performance (nod, thump-up or saying good/better) without stopping group, summary statements at the end of a piece/section of music, and immediately after a corrective feedback statement (“try this” or “better”).

One of the key findings of Marzano (2007) was that the “frequency of assessments is related to student achievement” (p. 13). Each of the teachers in the study reported frequent assessments of student performance in both a formal setting such as pass offs and informally through daily rehearsal techniques. This also supports Marzano’s (2003) claim that student

achievement is increased in classrooms with effective feedback. He further claimed the two most important factors of feedback are timeliness and specific. Each teacher was observed providing very specific and direct feedback to ensembles and individual students, in real time. The nature of a music rehearsal allows for immediate feedback.

### **Future Research**

It became clear that these initial findings provided useful information on the assessment practices of musical teachers involved. Further research based on weekly observations and more teacher participants would greatly increase the available data in generating more patterns that reflect assessment activity in music classrooms. Another aspect to further study would be looking at the assessment practices of middle school and collegiate music teachers. This comparison between the different age groups may provide additional insight into the phenomena. Finally, a focused study that compared like groups (such as orchestra to orchestra) at the same phase in the rehearsal sequence may provide a more specific approach of each of the musical mediums. This would allow for more direct comparisons without the differences in rehearsal sequence and literature.

These cases provide a glimpse at the differences in five different teachers and their assessment and feedback styles. However, other methodological approaches may provide additional information. Prior research had conducted large scale survey research (Russell and Austin, 2010; Simons, 2014). One approach that could give additional insight might include a mixed method approach. Further study, with a larger number of participants and a weekly observation schedule, may provide greater information, and provide various assessment models in these musical genres. Finally, consideration should be given to the study of music students' perceptions of the feedback they receive from their instructors.

## **Conclusion**

This research provided insight into the assessment processes of five different music teachers at one high school. Whether teachers conduct informal assessments by providing corrective statements during rehearsals, or use of a more formal pass off system, depends greatly on the teacher and their own style of teaching. However, the findings align with the conception framework for assessment and feedback, provided by Marzano (2003; 2007). These music teachers often use timely and very specific feedback with their students, and some of their feedback and assessment practices could be of value to other music teachers.

This study identified some common assessment and feedback practices in a single school's music teachers. Often secondary music teachers maintain schedules that do not allow them to observe other music teachers' instruction, thus missing collaborative opportunities found within other academic disciplines in the school setting. Combining assessment strategies from band, choir, and orchestra may provide a variety of assessment models that may be useful to all musical disciplines and can serve to improve the achievement level of young musicians, as well as learning opportunities for future music educators.

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