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## Lost in Translation: Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge Applied to Music Standards

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### Abstract

*One of the common realities of music education is that its teachers work as professional musicians whose administrators usually have little or no training in music education. As such, music educators must commonly defend the academic rigor of music instruction using terminology and concepts that are more commonly used and accepted by those outside the music education career field. The purpose of this study was to analyze the verbs in the National Standards for Music Education and the NCCAS Core Arts Standards, and generate inventories of music verbs ranked in the style of Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge. This process endeavored to establish clear and direct connections between Bloom's and Webb's instructional vocabulary and music instruction, establish criteria to evaluate the academic rigor of music instruction, and thereby empower music educators to more effectively communicate music learning objectives to administrators who are not music educators. To develop research questions, we inquired the extent verbs in instructional objectives from the 1994 National Music Standards and the 2014 Core Arts standards aligned with verbs in Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge, and examined the positive and negative implications of applying Bloom's Taxonomy (Cognitive Domain) and Webb's Depth of Knowledge to music instruction. Results indicated that while there are many direct applications of Webb and Bloom to music instruction, there may also be some areas of incongruence when presenting music pedagogy through these contexts.*

**Keywords:** Music Standards, Taxonomy, Teaching and Learning, Bloom's Taxonomy, Webb's Depth of Knowledge

## **Introduction**

One of the common realities of music education is that its teachers live and work as professional musicians in settings where their supervisors have little or no training in music education. As such, music educators commonly find themselves in positions where they must defend the academic rigor of music instruction using terminology and concepts that are more commonly used and accepted by those outside the music education career field. In situations like these, it is possible that the pedagogical techniques of music instruction become lost in translation when couched in the instructional vocabulary of non-music classroom content areas (i.e. the tested subjects), or when presented through musical terms to administrators who are not music educators.

As a point of clarity, music educators do receive training in pedagogy, but there are differences in the theories supporting music instruction and classroom instruction, and consequently, gaps in the training process between music educators and classroom teachers. And while educational learning theories are applicable to music, there are circumstances where it is difficult to translate music content and instruction through the language of these theories.

### **Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge**

Among the more common theories driving classroom instruction in many campuses are Bloom's Taxonomy (1956; Anderson, Krathwohl, Airasian, Cruikshank, Mayer, Pintrich, Raths, & Wittrock, 2001), and Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) (Webb, 1997; 2002). While these theories developed as separate entities and during different decades, and while there are distinctions between them that will be delineated later in this paper, these theories suggested that instruction was driven by the use of measurable verbs and objectives, and that the level of instruction was determined by the complexity of the verbs used in the lesson objective.

In 1956, Benjamin Bloom and colleagues developed a hierarchy, or taxonomy of learning objectives from simplest to most complex. The taxonomy for the cognitive domain has since become one of the most widely used systems of writing instructional objectives that move students beyond basic learning (knowledge and comprehension) to deeper levels of learning, commonly referred to as Higher Order Thinking Skills. The levels of the 1956 taxonomy in order from lowest to highest include *Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation*. In 2001, Anderson et al. (2001) revised the 1956 taxonomy to reflect 21<sup>st</sup> century educational theory. The primary modifications included changing the nouns to verbs, and inverting the top two levels of learning. The levels of the 2001 taxonomy in order from lowest to highest are *Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create*.

In 1997, Norman Webb developed a similar model of categorized instructional vocabulary that uses four levels rather than six, and presented the levels as “nominative” rather than hierarchical (Hess, 2015). In the DOK model, the focus was more on how deeply the students interact with content rather than the level of complexity in which they have learned it. Mainly, in Bloom’s Taxonomy, students progressed from level one to level six as they became more familiar and competent with content. In Webb’s DOK, however, students may simultaneously interact with all four levels of learning.

While these theories have directed instruction in math, sciences, and other classroom areas for some time now, their impact has just begun to be felt in music education. Since these theories have only recently been applied to music, many music educators may have not been taught how to scrutinize music instruction through these contexts. Nevertheless, recent educational initiatives and innovations have heightened music teachers’ awareness of the need to

support music education through terminology such as Bloom and Webb that has not typically been applied to music.

### **Impetus for Arts Assessment**

No Child Left Behind (2001) became a catalyst for accountability and standardized assessment in school systems across the country in 2001 (Gerrity, 2009). Since that time, assessment measures that were previously reserved for classroom subjects have worked their way into the curricula for music, art, and other subjects that initially seemed immune from certain types of evaluation (Garrett, 2013; Hanna, 2007; Russell & Austin, 2010; Standerfer & Hunter, 2010). Since assessment in the arts is becoming more commonplace, music educators may find it necessary to describe arts curricula through instructional and assessment vocabulary that has usually been reserved for classroom content.

Furthermore, if schools are increasingly held accountable for student growth in music, school administrators may become more interested and involved in the quality of music instruction in their schools. This may benefit music education by equalizing the amount of instructional time and availability of curricular resources where inequities may currently exist. In addition, administrators may attempt to standardize instruction and lesson planning across the curriculum more and more as accountability measures in the arts begin to mirror those in other subjects. As a result, arts educators may feel more compelled now than in prior years to state instructional objectives through measurable terms (Standerfer & Hunter, 2010), for example, those proposed by Bloom and Webb.

Next, the recently adopted “Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015” (ESSA) more clearly defines music as a core academic subject. In truth, if the arts are to be viewed as a core curricular subject, arts educators should be able to teach and evaluate arts content through terms and

techniques that are consistent across all content areas. However there are certain elements of the arts that always have been and always will be difficult to quantify, and therefore may not be taught or assessed like other subjects in the curriculum. This long-standing debate presents the question of the extent to which certain instructional vocabulary that is common in the classroom, such as that of Bloom and Webb, may be suitable for use in arts education.

Similarly, the Core Arts Standards (NCCAS, 2014) considerably altered the instructional vocabulary, concepts, and content for music standards to align with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)(2010) and the growing emphasis on creative problem solving in the CCSS. In this regard, there was already a sentiment among some music educators that music planning and instruction may not directly correlate to other academic subjects (Standerfer, 2011), and may therefore be invalid applications of some vocabulary proposed by Bloom and Webb. It may be argued that classroom lesson planning models are too differentiated for effective use in music. Similarly, instructional methods may differ too drastically between music and other subjects for implementation in music classes and ensemble rehearsals (Standerfer & Hunter, 2010). In addition, not too many school administrators are trained music educators, and therefore may not understand the vocabulary, terminology, and sequencing of music instruction. As a result, music educators may feel compelled to manipulate music instruction to include instructional verbiage that is more common in other areas, such as the vocabulary of Webb and Bloom.

In both Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's DOK, educators and researchers have identified instructional verbs, usually stated as "the student will..." that are categorized under each of the level headings. As an example of lower-level learning, a teacher might write, "the student will recall" or "the student will identify" (verbs that fall under the headings of knowledge and

remember). For higher-level learning, however, a teacher might write “the student will explain [or] interpret,” or other verbs that imply a more extensive cognitive process than simple recall.

In recent years, education in America has shifted from an emphasis on competence and knowledge acquisition to creative problem solving and higher order thinking skills (Garrett, 2013). As a result, educators have begun to focus more extensively on the deeper levels of learning than in previous years. Administrators and educators have also become more aware of the curricular implications of instructional vocabulary and may feel more compelled to present instructional objectives in a manner that reveals the content’s academic rigor.

### **Research Questions**

Arguably, neither the 1994 Music Standards (MENC, 1994), nor the 2014 Core Arts Standards (NCCAS, 2014) were written to align directly with Bloom’s Taxonomy or Webb’s DOK. Nor were Bloom and Webb concerned with music instruction when their respective taxonomies were designed, so there may be inherent issues when applying Bloom and Webb to music. Regardless, if music education is to exist as a core-curricular subject in an academic environment that expects instructional verbiage to align with Bloom and Webb, it is prudent to analyze the music standards through these lenses, and equip music educators with the abilities to translate music education verbiage to administrators and policy makers who may more readily comprehend standard instructional vocabulary.

Therefore, we set-out to answer the following questions, and ultimately generate a list of verbs, extracted from the music standards, and ranked in the format of Bloom’s Taxonomy and

Webb's Depth of Knowledge:

1. To what extent do the verbs in instructional objectives from the 1994 National Music Standards and the 2014 Core Arts standards align with verbs in Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge?
2. What are the positive and negative implications of applying Bloom's Taxonomy (Cognitive Domain) to music instruction?
3. What are the positive and negative implications of applying Webb's DOK to music instruction?

As a few points of clarification, at the time of this writing, while the 1994 Music Standards are no longer in effect at the national level, there are some states, Georgia and Indiana among others, whose state standards are based on the 1994 vocabulary. Therefore, this article includes both the 1994 and the 2014 Standards. Second, our research focused solely on the taxonomy of the cognitive domain, and did not address the psychomotor or affective aspects of Bloom's theories.

### **Review of Literature**

Although there is extensive research on instructional vocabulary and the implementation of Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's DOK in classroom content areas, there is little written on the subject of music standards and instructional verbiage (Bell, 2003). Hanna (2007) delineated implications of the 2001 version of Bloom's Taxonomy to music, and Hess (2015) compared Webb's DOK with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), but neither study thoroughly analyzed the suitability applying Bloom's Taxonomy or Webb's DOK to music instruction. Likewise, Standerfer and Hunter (2010) and Bell (2003) analyzed various aspects of music instruction but did not do so from the standpoint of Bloom's Taxonomy or Webb's DOK. Kruse,

Oare and Norman (2008) analyzed the research agenda of published research articles following the dissemination of the 1994 Standards over a 10-year period, but, like most other studies, did not correlate music standards to Bloom or Webb. As music educators continue to advocate for equality with other subjects in the curriculum it is valuable to analyze the instructional vocabulary of music standards, and to view music education through the lens of holistic educational practice.

### **Method**

As a general overview of our process, we began by extracting the verbs from each Content and Achievement Standard of the 1994 music standards, and from each Anchor Standard and sub-Standard of the new National Core Arts Standards in Music (2014). Whenever verbs seemed to lose their meaning out of the context of the standard, we pulled sentence fragments rather than individual verbs. We then compared the list of music verbs to the Webb's DOK Alignment Tool (2002), and an inventory of verbs ranked according to Bloom's Taxonomy (1956). Through this process, we were able to generate four tables presenting music verbs in the format of Bloom's Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge. The 1994 Standards are presented in Table 1 (Bloom's Taxonomy) and Table 2 (Webb's DOK), and the 2014 Core Arts Standards are presented in Table 3 (Bloom's Taxonomy) and Table 4 (Webb's DOK). Our purpose was not to disassociate music instruction from the original taxonomies proposed by Bloom or Webb, or to differentiate music instruction from common models of instruction or assessment. Instead, the purpose was to align music instructional vocabulary more directly with Bloom and Webb, and to provide a model by which music educators might validate music's instructional rigor to administrators who may not fully comprehend music pedagogy.

## Results

The research process yielded four verb inventories presented as tables below. Table 1 lists verbs extracted from the 1994 Standards, presented in the format of Bloom's Taxonomy. Table 2 lists the same verbs, but presented in the 4 levels of Webb's DOK. Table 3 catalogs verbs extracted from the 2014 Core Arts Standards, presented in the format of Bloom's Taxonomy. Table 4 lists the 2014 verbs in the format of Webb's DOK.

Table 1

*1994 National Music Standards in Bloom's Taxonomy Format*

<u>Remember</u>	<u>Understand</u>	<u>Apply</u>	<u>Analyze</u>	<u>Evaluate</u>	<u>Create</u>
Choose	Classify	Apply	Analyze	Create	Assemble
Create	Demonstrate	Demonstrate	Compare	Demonstrate	Change
Define	Discuss	Determine	Contrast	Evaluate	Compose
Demonstrate	Explain	Develop	Develop	Maintain	Construct
Discuss	Follow	Examine	Devise		Create
Exhibit	Identify	Experience	Differentiate		Disassemble
Identify	Imitate	Experiment	Distinguish		Develop
Interpret	Investigate	Identify	Evaluate		Discuss
Label	Listen	Improvise	Examine		Play Inst.
List	Play Inst.	Notate	Explore		Sing
Name	Reproduce	Perform	Respond		Transpose
Perform	Understand	Play Inst.			
Present		Produce			
Read		Read			
Recognize		Select			
Report		Sing			
Select		Speak			
		Use			

Table 2

*1994 National Music Standards in Webb's DOK Format*

<u>Level 1</u>	<u>Level 2</u>	<u>Level 3</u>	<u>Level 4</u>
Choose	Assemble	Change	Analyze
Define	Disassemble	Compose	Apply
Describe	Classify	Construct	Compose
Discuss	Compare	Determine	Create
Imitate	Contrast	Develop	Determine
Label	Compose	Devise	Produce
List	Demonstrate	Differentiate	
Maintain	Describe	Evaluate	
Name	Distinguish	Experiment	
Notate	Exhibit	Explain	
Recognize	Experience	Improvise	
Report	Explore	Investigate	
Reproduce	Follow	Respond	
Select	Identify	Transpose	
Speak	Improvise		
Understand	Interpret		
Use	Listen		
	Perform		
	Play Instruments		
	Present		
	Produce		
	Read		
	Sing		

Table 3

*2014 Core Arts Standards in Bloom's Taxonomy Format*

<u>Remember</u>	<u>Understand</u>	<u>Apply</u>	<u>Analyze</u>	<u>Evaluate</u>	<u>Create</u>
Convey	Classify	Apply	Analyze	Address	Compose
Demonstrate	Describe	Assemble	Categorize	Apprise	Construct
Demonstrate	Discuss	Choose	Compare	Arrange	Create
Document	Explain	Develop	Contrast	Cite	Generate
Express Intent	Sight-read	Experience	Explore	Connect	Improve
Identify		Improvise	Listen	Critique	Perform
Inform		Share	Rehearse	Critique	Refine
Label		Show		Determine	
List				Develop	
Organize				Draw conclusion	
Present				Evaluate	
Read				Explain	
Select				Express Intent	
Tabulate				Interpret	
Tell				Investigate	
				Justify	
				Reflect	
				Relate	
				Summarize	
				Support	

Table 4

*2014 Core Arts Standards in Webb's DOK Format*

<u>Level 1</u>	<u>Level 2</u>	<u>Level 3</u>	<u>Level 4</u>
Address	Apply	Apprise	Analyze
Classify	Arrange	Assemble	Compose
Convey	Categorize	Cite	Connect
Demonstrate	Choose	Construct	Create
Document	Compare	Develop	Critique
Express Intent	Contrast	Discuss	Evaluate
Identify	Describe	Draw conclusion	Generate
Interpret	Determine	Explain	Improve
Label	Experience	Explore	Improvise
List	Express Intent	Implement	Perform
State	Listen	Inform	
Tabulate	Read	Investigate	
Tell	Rehearse	Justify	
	Relate	Organize	
	Select	Present	
	Show	Refine	
	Sight-read	Reflect	
		Summarize	
		Support	

### Discussion

The process of analyzing music verbs through the contexts of Bloom and Webb provided insight into the questions that drove our research. First, it may be interpreted by those who do not understand the complexities of music that performing (a skill) – more so the development of performance abilities (or skills) – would not typically rank high on Bloom's Taxonomy or Webb's DOK. It may be easy to think of musical performance as *producing* a sound, *employing* contrast in dynamics or phrasing, or *demonstrating* a melody, all of which are level three verbs on Bloom's Taxonomy. In addition, while this may be a truism in the initial phases of learning music, particularly in rote teaching, it is not as evident as levels of musicianship increase. In this instance, the instruction verb may not define rigor, but more so by the manner in which one teaches a lesson (Isbell, 2012). It is our opinion that in reality, performance is among the more

visible aspects of music instruction: to develop musicians, not in the sense of professional performers, but students who can think creatively through music and demonstrate that creativity through some means of performance. It is the outgrowth or outpouring, or the physical, tangible evidence of internal, unseen, intangible development and understanding. The goal of performance, then, is to generate musicians who can *create* their own phrasing, *justify* musical decisions and, in some cases, *compose* their own music; all of which are Bloom's levels five and six. Therefore, this may indicate that the actual performance of music, whether through singing or playing instruments, may occur at higher levels of learning than connecting music to other subjects through discussion or academic assignments.

In similar reasoning, there may be some aspects of music instruction wherein Bloom's or Webb's verbiage may not have the same direct application to music instruction when compared to other subject areas. In creative writing, for instance, a definitive goal is to teach students to move beyond reading and interpreting the works of others to creating one's own work (Thompkins, 1982). To achieve this goal, instruction must reach level six of Bloom's Taxonomy. Although there is no unifying goal of music education, most pedagogical approaches favor performance (or the re-creation of music) over composition (the creation of music). In other words, students more frequently learn to perform pre-written music versus learn to create their own music (Lehman, 2008). Where students do learn to compose their own music, it is typically in specialized classes devoted to theory and composition, or in jazz ensembles that emphasize improvisation more frequently than in large vocal and instrumental ensembles. In this circumstance, one may assume that music instruction rarely, if ever reaches level six (*create*) of Bloom's Taxonomy. Instead, music instruction in performing ensembles may focus intently on *reproducing* someone else's music (a level one skill). However, in this instance, *create* may not

necessarily imply *compose* or *generate* (level six verbs), but more so to *synthesize* information that enables performers to *devise* their own interpretation of the previously-written music (both level six verbs). As stated earlier, performance is much more than musical recreation. The process of performing a work of music entails critical thinking, spontaneous decision making and many other skills that fall under the higher levels of Bloom's and Webb's diagrams (Garrett, 2013). While this may be common knowledge to musicians, those without musical training may not be fully aware of the academic rigor of performance and may therefore need additional information in lesson plans, or assessment portfolios.

Even with ample justification, there is another possible misapplication of Bloom and Webb in this scenario. Although Bloom et al. did create taxonomies for cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, the most common application of Bloom's Taxonomies to music instruction is the cognitive domain. It has been applied to music both informally through music educators' use of Bloom's verbiage to describe music instruction, and formally through research (Hanna, 2007). However, a primary issue remains that music instruction is only partly cognitive in nature. More accurately music is part cognition (knowing), part skill (doing), and part aesthetic (feeling) (Hanna, 2007; Reimer, 2003). Although the application of Bloom's Taxonomy to music may not be erroneous or invalid, it may not be the most suitable application regarding the aspects of music that may be defined as affective, psychomotor, or purely musical. As such, future research could extend the application of Bloom's Taxonomy to music to include an analysis of the affective and the psychomotor domains as they pertain to music instruction. In the meantime, music teachers may also need to advocate the importance of these domains to holistic music instruction to those who may not be aware.

Along similar lines, it is difficult at best to discuss issues related to pedagogy without also addressing issues of philosophy: What is defined as affective? Is creativity the most common goal of music education? Is performance the most suitable vehicle for demonstrating musical growth? The point of this discussion is not to argue philosophy, or to allow philosophical rhetoric to derail or devalue the current discussion; the point is to address the implications, whether philosophical, pedagogical, political, or otherwise stated, of applying Bloom and Webb to music and scrutinizing music through Bloom and Webb vocabulary.

Next, through the process of our research, we noted that there are several verbs in the music standards that are unique to music and, while they may not directly appear on Bloom or Webb, are similar in principle and in application to verbs that do exist on either chart. As a specific example, students in art class *make* or *design* new works of art; science students *construct*, *test*, and *validate* new theories; and English students *create* new stories or new interpretations of old ones, while music students *improvise*. While all of the previously used words appear on Bloom's Taxonomy, *improvise* does not. Regardless, musicians understand that improvisation utilizes the same processes as *construct*, *create*, *imagine*, and many other words that do appear in level six of Bloom's Taxonomy; and therefore the intent of the verb *improvise* is similar, if not identical to these synonyms. As such, it is the duty of the music educator to translate the academic rigor of music-based verbs to administrators or policy makers who may not understand the academic implications of musical endeavors.

Finally, if assessment is becoming commonplace in music education, as indicated in prior research (Garrett, 2013; Hanna, 2007; Russell & Austin, 2010; Standerfer & Hunter, 2010), future studies could continue to evaluate the use of instructional vocabulary from Bloom, Webb, or other pedagogical approaches as it pertains to music assessment. This is especially vital in the

aspects of music education that are subjective or unassessable. Specifically, the implementation of suitable instructional verbs, defined as assessable verbs, in music education could more closely align music instruction with other areas of education and increase validity of music assessment. Specifically the tables presented in this paper may serve as suitable evidence to present music verbs aligned with levels outlined by Bloom and Webb, especially when relaying the process of music instruction to administrators with little or no music background.

As a final caveat regarding the tables, just as in the original application of Bloom and Webb, instructional verbs lose their meaning and impact when taken out of context. As this applies herein, we provide the appropriate context of each verb by returning to the original standard and utilizing the verb in its original statement. When music teachers apply this method, they will be better equipped to support and defend various levels of academic or musical rigor.

### **Conclusion**

As the arts pedagogy and assessment pendulum swings, and as music educators continue to advocate for music's rightful place alongside other curricular content areas, ongoing research in music instruction and instructional vocabulary is recommended. Through this process, we may discover that arts assessment and alignment of instructional vocabulary are necessary to a strong advocacy platform. In contrast, we may discover that certain misapplications of assessment or instructional verbiage may weaken music curricula or advocacy efforts. In the meantime, ongoing research in this area may serve to translate the academic and musical rigor of music instruction into a vocabulary that is more common among classroom educators, and may therefore be more readily accepted and understood by all administrators and policy makers.

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