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*It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.*

# Outcomes Assessment: A Process For Improving Music Teacher Education

By Joe B. Buttram

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**O**utcomes assessment, defined generally, is a process used for the evaluation of the productivity of educational programs. This process may be applied to all aspects of an educational institution, and the outcomes of interest may be many and varied. When applied to academic programs, however, the outcome of interest is student learning. In this case, the process is sometimes referred to as "academic assessment."

Some sources date the current outcomes assessment movement from the early 1980s, and developments have occurred rapidly since that time.<sup>1</sup> The impetus for development has been both internal and external. In some cases, school systems and institutions of higher education have adopted this approach for the purpose of institutional improvement; in other cases, state agencies have mandated this evaluative procedure for accountability purposes.<sup>2,3</sup> For whatever reason, based on the flood of recent literature on the subject, outcomes assessment appears to be a pervasive

movement that educators throughout our system of education must be prepared to meet.

Outcomes assessment efforts in higher education have become formalized and inclusive, incorporating almost all aspects of the operation of the institution.<sup>4,5</sup> To a great extent, early academic efforts in assessment have been concerned with general education. Often, these efforts take the form of standardized tests for assessing basic skills and for general purposes of access, placement, and remediation.<sup>6</sup> To a lesser degree, efforts have been made to apply this approach to "content areas," including some aspects of the college music major program—performance, music history, and music theory.<sup>7</sup>

Assessment in some form or other is not new to music educators and has been ongoing for some time.<sup>8,9,10,11</sup> What appears to distinguish outcomes assessment from these prior efforts, however, is the emphasis on four structural components:

- evaluation of performance in context;
- self-assessment by music education students;
- active faculty involvement; and
- feedback for curricular improvement.

These particular aspects of an outcomes as-

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assessment program, as addressed in this article, appear to be particularly adaptable to the improvement of music teacher preparation.

## **Outcomes Assessment and Music Teacher Training**

In the initial stages of development of a program of outcomes assessment, the music unit should consider the methods of evaluation that are already present. These may include:

- 1) admission or placement assessments such as auditions, theory screening tests, student interviews and written statements;
- 2) assessment or retention, such as course grades, jury examinations, varied competency requirements, recitals, and so on;
- 3) final evaluation requirements immediately prior to graduation; and
- 4) follow-up studies of graduates.<sup>12</sup>

The collection of such data is most useful and provides a context for the outcomes assessment components described below.

### **Step 1. Evaluation of Performance in Context**

It is important to recognize that learning is not so much the accumulation of course credits and competencies, but the "actual ability to perform...or...the demonstrations of the use and application of knowledge."<sup>13</sup> It seems doubtful that many will regard this idea as new or take issue with it. But what may be important is not the newness or acceptability of the idea, but the fact that it is not necessary to spend a lot of time (at least initially) in revising or completely redoing the curriculum to produce what is "hoped" to be the model teacher. Rather, performance in the teaching situation becomes the starting point for assessment, and specific improvements can be made from that point in the context of the present program.

Given the need to evaluate performance in context, it is important to identify or provide opportunities to assess strengths and weaknesses of the future teacher under actual teaching or comparable conditions. Some possibilities include laboratory or rehearsal experiences, simulated practice-teaching experiences, observation and teacher-aid assignments, student teaching, and the initial years of actual teaching. The adoption of the "intern year" by some states provides an extended opportunity for formal and systematic

assessment involving mentor/colleagues, faculty mentors from the music unit, and school administrators. Another approach being considered consists of a follow-up period totaling four years: one intern year, and three years of close association between the new teacher and a college or university music faculty/mentor.<sup>14</sup>

### **Step 2. Self-Assessment By Students**

Music education majors are likely to be aware of their shortcomings and strengths while actively teaching. Thus, guided by observations and questioning, they can provide valuable information about their needs for additional information and skills. Such information is readily seen by the student as "relevant," and therefore effective remediation is enhanced. The ability to "self-assess" in this manner and to seek further learning is a most important general outcome in the training of the future professional. In the stages of early training, however, students may know that they are having problems but may not know precisely why. Therefore, in the development of the student's ability to self-assess, systematic observations of the student "in action" by faculty members, supervisors, mentors, or other capable observers are very important. Faculty who take a caring attitude with students and who are keen observers are most likely to provide legitimate data on which decisions for the improvement of music teacher education can be made.<sup>15</sup>

Some practical questions can be considered at this point. Certainly, a program must develop reliable procedures for making such reports and observations, both for students and faculty. What resources will be needed to accomplish this? Where will the faculty get the time, and how can the data be managed? These concerns are very practical and must be acknowledged and dealt with effectively. A partial answer may be the "assessment portfolio."<sup>16</sup> With this approach, the student is charged with the responsibility of keeping a detailed record of progress (in the portfolio) throughout undergraduate study and the early years of teaching, noting achievements and difficulties, strengths and weaknesses. Given careful attention and planning of the content and organization of the portfolio by the faculty, and reasonable

direction by the academic advisor, students can fulfill this responsibility.

### **Step 3. Active Faculty Involvement**

A third critical feature includes the active involvement of the faculty in the assessment process. For best results, this requires a "team effort" involving a sizable portion of the faculty of the entire music unit—a formidable challenge. Faculty may resist any approach that appears to be imposed on them, or they simply may be unable to function effectively in a new process. Considerable persuasion and orientation to the process, as well as retraining, may be required. Also, faculty represent a wide array of divergent perspectives and interests which may need to be "compromised" in order to work effectively in a new context. Some hypothetical illustrations of possible faculty concerns seem appropriate at this point (see box at right).

While these remarks are intended with some levity, they also may reflect unspoken truths that undoubtedly are the source of many difficulties encountered by efforts similar to outcomes assessment. Indeed, it is no small challenge to move needed individuals into a mutually supportive position that will promote (or even allow) success. Faculty and others, however, must be persuaded of their important role in a potentially successful process. And, very likely, such persuasion will be more successful in cases of music units with primary

Let us assume that music education faculty would be the first to recognize the efficacy of a new assessment process and be eager to participate. Realistically, some of these faculty may consider music education to be "their turf," contend that what has worked well for them in the past will continue to work, and otherwise resist the process, noting that "this new fad will also pass." Some music theory faculty may respond quite well to the idea of requests from music education for special emphasis on particular problems, while others may think the real answer lies in revising the theory program to reflect a "horizontal rather than vertical approach," or a "creative rather than pedestrian" program. Music history faculty may suggest the addition of new courses in the undergraduate sequence, asking, "How can one do justice to 2000 years of history in the short time allotted, anyway?" Ensemble conductors, anxious to take advantage of possible curricular changes, may be certain that the proper response to outcomes assessment concerns is additional time spent in ensemble and/or "live conducting/performance situations." Performance faculty may be the least likely to involve themselves in any such development and will likely continue to espouse and defend the traditional one-to-one instruction. Thus, various faculty or "factions" among the music faculty may have special interests or agendas to accomplish through (or to protect from) academic assessment. The orchestration of these individual perspectives in such a manner as to make outcomes assessment an effective program may be, indeed, a formidable challenge.

Close communication and cooperation between the music unit and the teacher education department is called for; but on some campuses this is considered basic heresy. Music and other administrators, upon considering the various views of the faculty, the immense change that may be misunderstood, and the resources that will be required, may find support of this effort difficult at best.



or major commitment to music education and with a total faculty committed to this mission. In any case, faculty trained in outcomes assessment are essential to the fulfillment of the fourth step in the process, using feedback from this process for improving the curriculum.

#### **Step 4. Feedback for Curriculum Improvement**

There is no more recognizable and familiar feature of outcomes assessment than the corrective feedback loop; simply assessing student performance as described will not result in program improvement. What is necessary is to devise a systematic means of improvement of curricula as a major goal of the outcomes assessment process. Ideally, this process will involve the entire music unit. Following assessment of outcomes, curriculum improvement should consist of determining needed adjustments, setting priorities, judging the feasibility of adjustments, and implementing change.

#### **A Case Study: Outcomes Assessment**

The following is a brief account of the application of these ideas to a program in outcomes assessment now in process at the School of Music of Ball State University. First, information was gathered from student teachers and from those in the intern year (Steps 1 and 2 combined). Primarily, the information received focused on problems encountered in teaching and observations about the need for additional information and skills. Concerns expressed by students indicated a lack of sufficient preparation in the following categories:

- General: classroom discipline, organizational skills, classroom and rehearsal management;
- Musical: score reading, aural skills, piano skills;
- Pedagogical: methods, materials, instrumental and vocal techniques, sequencing of studies; and
- Administrative areas: organizational skills, fund raising, relating to upper administration and some faculty.

Generally, the students interviewed were very interested in the evaluative process and in their participation in improving their

university's undergraduate music teacher education curriculum.

Second, individuals who served as observers of these as well as other student teachers were consulted (Step 3). Faculty providing such observations included those supervising student teaching, ensemble conductors observing students during student teaching and during the intern year, and faculty teaching conducting and laboratory participation courses. Supervising teachers, mentors, and administrators in the public schools were also consulted.

There was strong consistency between observations made by the faculty and by the students. Although problems varied, two areas of concern were frequently identified: classroom management and rehearsal techniques. These two important areas of music teacher preparation were then presented to the entire school of music faculty. Discussion centered on how to correct the problems and get feedback for curricular improvement (Step 4) of the evaluative process.

#### **Classroom Management**

This general heading included management of large general music classes, class planning and organization, motivating students, creating a positive classroom environment, and solving discipline problems. First, the current music teacher education curriculum was examined. Faculty noted that preparation in classroom management was contained in several courses in the professional education sequence. Both students and music education faculty, however, were concerned that much of the information seemed "theory-based," too general in nature, and lacking in applicability to actual music teaching situations. Music education faculty agreed to further analyze the content provided in the professional education sequence, determine opportunities for transfer and reinforcement of these ideas in the music classroom, and create opportunities to "practice" these techniques in realistic situations. Also, pre-student teaching seminars and seminars during student teaching were revised to focus on classroom management.

Early and continuous coordination with faculty providing the professional education sequence was emphasized, including greater

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care in the placement of students and faculty assigned for observation of student teachers. Student-teaching supervisors, cooperating teachers, and collegial and faculty mentors were made more aware of the students' needs for assistance in classroom management and stood ready to assist student teachers and first-year interns. Finally, special workshops and summer seminars on classroom management were offered during the new teachers' formative years.

### **Rehearsal Techniques**

In this category, evaluation indicated that new teachers needed more training in score reading, aural skills, instrumental and vocal techniques, podium authority and physical skills, and general rehearsal organization and management.

Opportunities for program improvement were apparent to faculty in several areas. More attention should be given to development of aural skills in music theory, particularly those skills that transfer to teaching situations. Development of the ability to “hear” what is on the score is a skill that must be approached specifically. Some faculty believed that much can be accomplished in music theory in developing rhythmic and physical skills needed for conducting. Opportunities for use and development of these skills can be systematically provided, then, in conducting and laboratory courses. Faculty concluded that increased opportunity to practice conducting under “real” conditions would be implemented. Finally, the readily available technology, offering feedback to students learning all aspects of conducting, are to be incorporated into the conducting course sequence.

Not surprisingly, students were found to be an important source of suggestions for improvement of the music teacher education curriculum. Having identified deficiencies, many can pinpoint ways in which these deficiencies might be rectified. Also, student organizations are eager to invite and sponsor

current student teachers and new teachers to address the issues. Best yet, students gradually become more proficient in self-assessment and enthusiastic about improving themselves. And perhaps this is the “lesson within the lesson” of outcomes assessment.

### **Summary and Observations**

Outcomes assessment is a process of evaluation and improvement of educational programs. The most distinguishing characteristic of this process is the emphasis on productivity or outcomes—in this case, student learning. Growing numbers of colleges and universities are adopting this process as a means for accountability and to “make their case” for financial support. In some instances, universities have included outcomes assessment as part of the university goal statement and objectives.

One of the most promising aspects in the development of this evaluative approach has been the shift of emphasis away from accountability and toward a conscious process of institutional improvement. And institutions may develop programs that are congruent with institutional philosophy and character and that suit particular needs. Ideally, the need for both accountability and institutional improvement will be met by the same effort.

In a similar manner, academic departments seek to develop assessment programs to meet academic needs and the needs unique to the particular discipline. Schools or departments of music should note the inclusive nature of the process and that the effort will not involve reinventing the wheel or total reform. Rather, both established programs and curricula as well as ongoing evaluation efforts may be incorporated into the new process. Generally, the process begins with evaluation of current outcomes and continues with program improvements based on these data, with further evaluation and improvements as the efforts continue.

Relative to music teacher education, four features appear to be most promising: Evaluation of performance in context, self-assessment by students, active faculty involvement, and feedback for curriculum improvement. Again, in addition to these features, the program should take advantage of evaluation procedures which may be ongoing already.

Evaluation of the student's ability to perform in context is the fundamental basis of outcomes assessment. What is important is not only what the student knows, but what the student can do. The ability to perform in context combines content (knowledge) and process (pedagogy) and provides an opportunity to evaluate the ultimate outcome, i.e., effective music teaching. Such judgments of ability require collaborative participation of the student and the faculty member, as well as other individuals in a position to assess ability.

Involvement of the music education major in the evaluation process not only provides data concerning outcomes but promotes growth in self-assessment. This goal also is at the heart of the process. Learning to self-assess turns students into active participants and is inherently motivating and stimulating. Also, it should be recognized that ultimate accountability for the program is to the students and, accordingly, their feedback should be taken most seriously. A notable feature is the use of the portfolio, an approach that has rich possibilities for involving students and providing excellent records for external review.

Faculty provide the single most important resource for the assessment effort. In the case of assessment in music education, it is important that faculty throughout the music unit be convinced of the utility of this approach and both endorse and sustain its use. Serendipitously, this approach offers to the faculty an opportunity to focus on just what it is that they do as teachers and to elevate the importance of what is done in the classroom among their many other responsibilities.

Finally, documenting outcomes is not enough. Feedback leading to program improvement must occur. Feedback is generally of two kinds: feedback to the individual student, which may be used to promote development and ongoing self-assessment; and feedback to the program, which results in

curricular revision and strengthening. Though some feedback will result in immediate changes that simply "make sense" to both students and faculty, other feedback may require more deliberate and experimental work in order to bring about change.

During research for this article and discussion with colleagues, several observations have occurred that merit comment. First, many colleagues note that they already seem to be doing assessment. Is this a new approach or a repetition of past efforts? Clearly, much of what is involved has been ongoing for some time. New aspects, however, include the heavy emphasis on outcomes and the adoption of the portfolio for students' self-assessment. Certainly, what is a real improvement over past systems is the inclusive and well-organized nature of the process.

Another observation is that the great emphasis placed on outcomes may represent too much of a "cash-register mentality." Will all decisions based on outcomes result in the loss of traditional experiences that are unique and fulfilling but may not necessarily be reflected in measurable outcomes? Taking the idea to the extreme, this seems likely; but a more moderate approach will avoid this pitfall.

A major concern among colleagues is the extent of support for the program. We should expect the university itself to be engaged in such a program and provide internal support for the academic units in their efforts. Ideally, support should include faculty release time, staff support, student assistance, and adequate operating budget support. Funding of grant proposals both internal and external to the university appears to be a most promising source of support for beginning and enhancing such efforts, but such support exists only for a relatively short period of time, and a long-range commitment is needed. As noted earlier, in the minds of many faculty and others, outcomes assessment may be suspect and regarded as the latest fad or another paper workload imposed by the state or the administration. Ongoing support will do much to alleviate this concern and to avoid the pitfall of bogging down in the mass of information and activity that, unattended, will result in a less than effective program.

Finally, it appears that outcomes assessment is a successful means of evaluation and improvement of educational programs. For music education, the process appears to be particularly advantageous and one which can incorporate practices that currently exist and are effective. And if some assessment program seems inevitable, it is much more wise for music educators to design a process to suit their own purposes, and that of music itself, rather than to have a less desirable system of accountability imposed on the music unit from an external source.

Finally, approached systematically and persistently, this process of improvement of the preparation of music teachers can address concerns which appear periodically as a result of outcomes assessment. These efforts should be ongoing, with discussions repeated each semester, or at least each year. Continuous, systematic evaluation of the process and the results of the process is critical to long-term success in music teacher education.

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