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Assessing in Music Learning
Assessing Philosophy

Music assessment should be for student self-awareness and teacher planning.

Students should be conscious about how much they know or don't know and fully understand what is expected of them. Teachers should use assessments as a way to gather information to inform the pacing of lessons. Classes can't progress if students aren't ready and teachers should be prepared to offer lessons that contribute to optimal student learning.

I think assessing in school, not just music classes, should be used as information for the teacher and student. Where is the student in their learning? What needs to be revisited? Are the students ready to move on? Grades too often end up being used as punishment. Schools shouldn't emphasize the pass/fail mentality of grading. School is about learning, not labeling the "A Students" and the "C Students." The results of assessment need to be more focused on, "This student needs more help or more time to grasp the content."

I do think it is important to assess musicianship skills in class, such as sight-reading, theory, and rhythms. These skills are useful tools for musicians and in order to progress in difficulty, the teacher needs to be sure the previous steps were covered and understood. Vocal production should also be assessed. The assessment should not judge a student's voice, but should check that students are on the right track to healthy vocalizing. These checkpoints include posture, technique, breath, etc.

Students should be assessed in common class activities. Assessments should not be threatening. Using a wide variety of practice/classroom activities can provide plenty of

“gradable” assessments for the teacher. Any rhythm exercise sheets or staff labeling assignments (pitches, accidentals, intervals, keys, etc.) can and should be used to assess the students. I believe all written activities should be in some way assessed for student and teacher awareness, and then returned to student for study and practice.

Assessing does not need to be a formal, sit down, “this is a test” procedure. Even hearings should not be scary for the student. For example, when assessing sight-reading ability, the students should not be given one sight-reading opportunity, pass or fail. They should be given a sheet with multiple sight-reading exercises with a range of difficulty. The student should attempt as many as they are comfortable with. The teacher should encourage them to always try a little bit past their comfort level, and never tell them to give up if they want to attempt even harder exercises.

Assessing should occur as frequently as possible. It should be an ongoing evaluation. It is important to take note of each student’s progress each day. How quickly are they picking up concepts? Do they need more time? Are all the students struggling, or only a few?

In order for this type of assessment to occur, teachers need to create a non-threatening environment for the students to learn. Students cannot be concerned with failing assignments. The most significant part of my exploration with assessment is to rethink the connection between assessing and grading.