

# Arts Best Practice

## Inquiry Project – Full Report

Zane Schaefer

April, 2000

### Inquiry Question:

For this project I have explored many questions. My desire was to design some sort of activity/assessment that would help all music students better understand the analysis and evaluation components of music performance. I also felt that by becoming better listeners and evaluators students would improve their own music performance skills.

My question then became:

**“How can individual music students practice evaluation of large group performances in a rehearsal setting?”**

### Feasibility:

Many questions came to mind when considering the feasibility of this inquiry.

- Does this activity ‘fit’ with my student learning goals? *Student evaluation is indeed a good fit with my student learning goals. It enhances musicianship and is a goal in and of itself as defined by the National Standards For Arts Education.*
- How much experience have students had with this concept and how would a lack of experience affect the outcome? *Students have had very little experience with formal assessment of the music elements and even less experience evaluating music performances. This fact will surely affect the results.*
- How much time can I afford to dedicate in an already busy band rehearsal schedule? *Time is a critical factor in any high school band program. Many performance expectations exist. I will need to be efficient with time.*
- How well do students understand the elements of music? *Most students have a vague understanding of the elements of music. They have very little understanding of what constitutes great, good, or poor performance of these elements*
- Do students have the tools to evaluate the performance of the elements of music? *No. Specific rubrics need to be developed.*
- What process will best facilitate this activity in a large group setting? *I will need to develop a rotation of students in order to get everyone involved in the evaluation process. Three students per day should work.*
- How will I record the data to best support student learning? *Raw data will be documented in the daily grade log under the learning goal “musicianship”.*

- How can I help to create a safe atmosphere in which to support students giving feedback to other students? *I will work to set up and maintain a “safe” atmosphere that encourages honest feedback based on the rubric criteria. I must not allow the evaluations to focus on individual students. The students must learn to discuss “the performance” not the “performer”.*

After much deliberation and discussions with other music professionals I have determined that this is indeed a feasible question to study. I believe that this activity will enhance student musicianship and foster the life-long skill of listening and evaluating music in a critical manner.

### **Data collection methods:**

The process of collecting data included two levels.

1. I first needed to reinforce student understanding of the elements of music and what constitutes proficiency in each of those elements. This was done by developing a rubric for each of the seven elements of music (tone, rhythm, pitch, articulation, dynamics, phrasing and expression and style).

These rubrics were built in collaboration with my high school students. It was important to me that they fully understood the language used to define each level of proficiency.

### ***Music Skills Assessment Rubric:***

- Tone:**
- 4= The tone is consistently focused, clear, and centered throughout the range of the instrument.
  - 3= The tone is focused, clear, and centered most of the time. Extremes in range cause the tone to become uncontrolled.
  - 2= The tone is sometimes focused, clear, and centered. Some pitches within the normal playing range are uncontrolled.
  - 1= The tone is often not focused, clear, or centered regardless of the range being played.
- Rhythm:**
- 4= The pulse is secure. Rhythms are accurate.
  - 3= The pulse is steady. Rhythms are mostly accurate. A few duration errors.
  - 2= The pulse is erratic. Some rhythms are accurate. Frequent or repeated duration errors.
  - 1= No perceived pulse. Rhythms are seldom accurate.
- Pitch:**
- 4= Virtually no errors. Very secure pitches.
  - 3= A few isolated errors. Mostly accurate and secure pitches.
  - 2= Frequent or repeated errors. Some accurate pitches.
  - 1= Few accurate or secure pitches.

- Articulation:** 4 = Secure attacks. Markings (staccato, legato, slur, accents etc.) are accurate and obvious.  
 3 = Mostly secure attacks. Markings (staccato, legato, slur, accents etc.) are mostly accurate and obvious.  
 2 = Some secure attacks. Markings (staccato, legato, slur, accents etc.) sometimes accurate and obvious.  
 1 = Few secure attacks. Markings (staccato, legato, slur, accents etc.) mostly not observed.
- Dynamics:** 4 = Dynamic levels are obvious, consistent, and an accurate interpretation of the style.  
 3 = Dynamic levels are mostly accurate and consistent.  
 2 = Dynamic levels can be discerned.  
 1 = Dynamic levels not evident.
- Phrasing:** 4 = Musical nuance to indicate phrase structure is consistent and sensitive.  
 3 = Musical nuance to indicate phrase structure is often obvious.  
 2 = Musical nuance to indicate phrase structure is sometimes used but seldom obvious.  
 1 = Musical nuance to indicate phrase structure is not used.
- Expression and Style:** 4 = consistently performs with nuance and style in response to the score and coaching.  
 3 = often performs with nuance or style indicated in the score or suggested by the instructor or peer.  
 2 = sometimes responds to musical nuance indicated in the score.  
 1 = seldom evidence of musical nuance in musical phrases.

The students were asked to practice using these rubrics to assess music performances. Some of the assessments were done using music performed by others. Some were assessments of recordings of their own work.

The enclosed video labeled “students assessing skills” illustrates this process. Each student video taped his or her music performance and then used the “music elements” rubrics to assess that performance. The students were asked to focus on three of the elements at each viewing. Students found it overwhelming to assess all seven elements each time.

2. The second level of my inquiry was to have students apply their understanding of performance proficiency of the elements of music to evaluate large group band rehearsals.

Students were asked to evaluate the band’s performance in terms of music elements. They used the same rubrics that they had used for their individual performances. Once again each student focused on just three of the seven elements each time.

The student doing the evaluation sat in front of the band and “scored” the elements. They were then asked to verbally report to the band. This report included:

- which music elements had been evaluated
- what scores had been assigned for each element
- an explanation of how the rubric related to the assigned score

The students’ ability to evaluate the performance was scored by the teacher using a rubric that defined proficiency in the evaluation process. This rubric focused on the student’s ability to make specific and accurate references to the musical elements in relationship to what they had heard.

## **Rubric for Rehearsal Critique:**

- 4 – Specific and accurate references to musical elements in the performance are specifically linked with the score. (e.g. “the accent is missing on beat two of the second phrase”; “we forgot to sustain the half notes in the first bar of the coda.”)**
- 3 – References are made to some musical elements with specificity and appropriateness but not linked with the score. (e.g. “the staccatos were too long for this style”; “we are not in the correct key”)**
- 2 – References are made to isolated musical elements, they are overly broad, sometimes inaccurate or inappropriate. (e.g. “there were wrong notes”; “the rhythm was sloppy”)**
- 1 – References do not include musical elements. (e.g. “bad”; “great”; “much better”)**

\*rubric adapted from Susan Ferrell

### **Data Organization:**

The data collected for this inquiry is a “baseline” report of student proficiency:

- using the “elements of music” rubric to assess their own performance
- using the “rehearsal critique” rubric to evaluate large group performance

The data represents 171 high school band students. The data was collected during band classes at Annandale High School over a six month period.

Scores and annotated information was documented in the teacher's grade book.

I have chosen to organize the data by grade level reflecting student achievement at each level of proficiency. This information indicates a baseline on which to reflect evidence of growth as the students continue to practice these skills.

### **Data Display:**

I have chosen to visually represent this data via bar graphs that illustrate the per cent of students at each rubric level. The graphs show all band students and also these students by grade level. This will be important as I compare these scores now with achievement in the future.

### **Conclusions:**

As I had expected the scores are low. Having students assess specific elements of music and then evaluate themselves is a concept that will need practice over time.

#### Overall results:

18% of the 171 students scored at level 1

54% scored at level 2

25% scored at level 3

4% scored at level 4

#### Grade 9 results:

16% scored at level 1

67% scored at level 2

16% scored at level 3

0% scored at level 4

#### Grade 10 results:

16% scored at level 1

52% scored at level 2

32% scored at level 3

0% scored at level 4

#### Grades 11 and 12:

21% scored at level 1

47% scored at level 2

26% scored at level 3

5% scored at level 4

Grade level did not make a significant difference in scores. Because this is a process that has not been formally asked of students in the past, maturation seems to make little difference in the results.

My inquiry question is important to me because I am convince that if students are better able to understand music elements in relation to performance criteria and then be able to apply that understanding to the process of listening and evaluating they will be better musicians and consumers of music.

The process of gathering this data has confirmed in my mind that students currently have a low level of understanding about the elements of music and criteria that defines how well these elements are being performed. It is also obvious to me that meaningful evaluation of music performance can take place only when students understand the music elements and can make specific references to how those elements are being performed.

The implications to me as a teacher are many.

- I need to continue helping students to better understand the music elements through daily work.
- I need to ask students to apply the “music elements” rubrics often in order for them to fully understand the specific levels of proficiency.
- Meaningful evaluation of music performance (solo, ensemble, or large group) can only occur when students have a good understanding of the elements and the levels of proficiency. Only when they have these concepts well in mind are they able to make accurate evaluations about what they hear.
- All of this will take careful planning and effective use of class time

I plan to compare this data with student work collected in about a year. This should give some indication as to the effectiveness of the instruction process.