

August 2018

Best Practices for Standards-based Assessment in the Secondary Choral Music Setting

Tasha Twesme

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.uwm.edu/etd>



Part of the [Music Pedagogy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Twesme, Tasha, "Best Practices for Standards-based Assessment in the Secondary Choral Music Setting" (2018). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1935.

<https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/1935>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by UWM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UWM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact open-access@uwm.edu.

BEST PRACTICES FOR STANDARDS-BASED ASSESMENT IN
THE SECONDARY CHORAL MUSIC SETTING

by

Tasha Twesme

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Music

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

August 2016

ABSTRACT

BEST PRACTICES FOR STANDARDS-BASED ASSESMENT IN THE SECONDARY CHORAL MUSIC SETTING

by

Tasha Twesme

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2016
Under the Supervision of Associate Professor Sheila J. Feay-Shaw

This qualitative study of secondary choral music teachers addressed the successes and difficulties of current assessment practices in music education. The purpose of this study was to identify best assessment practices for a secondary choral classroom within a standards-based grading system. In order to understand the process of assessment development and implementation, a mixed-model approach to the research was used including a survey and semi-structured interviews. The survey was intended to gather basic assessment information from a larger population of secondary choral music teachers about their current practice. Following the survey, a small number of participants were identified and interviews were used to gather more detailed data surrounding effective assessment practices.

Surveys were sent electronically to 300 secondary choral music teachers throughout the state of Wisconsin. Sixty-eight teachers responded to the online survey, representing a 23% return rate, providing detailed documentation regarding their assessment practices. After analyzing the survey data using both descriptive statistics and qualitative coding, six teachers were selected and five agreed participate in follow-up interviews to gain additional information about assessment in their teaching practice.

Several themes emerged from the data collected in this study surrounding the use of standards-based grading in a secondary choral setting, as well as best assessment practices for

secondary choral music. Survey and interview data highlighted both benefits and criticisms of the use of standards-based grading in classrooms. Topics such as the inclusion of behavior in the academic grade, and grading of formative and summative assessments were explored in this study. Additionally, responders shared best assessment practices surrounding student involvement in assessments and concert performance assessments.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER ONE	
Rationale	1
Professional Connection to Standards-Based Grading	2
Review of Literature	2
Assessment in Music	3
Criticisms	3
Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance	4
National Assessment for Music Education	5
Standards-Based Assessment	6
Student Involvement in Assessment	10
Summary	11
CHAPTER TWO	
Methodology	12
Survey Design	13
Interview Participants	14
Summary	16
CHAPTER THREE	
Survey Results	17
Assessment Frequency	17
Numerical Value of Grades	18
Assessment Categories	19
Assessment Methodologies	19
Behavior in the Academic Grade	20
Assessment Effectiveness	21
How Assessment Guides Instruction	22
Summary	22
CHAPTER FOUR	
Interview Analyses	24
Assessment Practices	25
Marissa	25
Alex	27
Jessica	28
Kristin	29
Jacob	30
Best Assessment Practices	31
Assessment Effectiveness	33
Student Self-Assessment	35
Assessment in Standards-Based Grading	36
Summary	38

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion	39
Standards-Based Grading in the Secondary Choral Classroom.....	39
The Challenge of Time	40
Grade Reporting.....	41
Behavior in the Academic Grade.....	42
Grading of Formative and Summative Assessments	43
Best Assessment Practices	44
Student Involvement in Assessment.....	45
Concert Performance Assessments.....	46
Summary	47
References.....	49

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey Questions	52
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	53
Appendix C: Jacob Interview.....	54
Appendix D: Jessica Interview	56
Appendix E: Alex Interview	58
Appendix F: Kristin Interview	60
Appendix G: Marissa Interview.....	63

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1.1 The National Standards for Music Education.....	7

CHAPTER ONE

Rationale

As the stakes associated with student assessment become increasingly significant at both state and national levels, teachers are questioning which assessments *really* demonstrate student learning. School districts are feeling pressured to reevaluate current assessment practices, which has caused many teachers to reflect upon their own assessment beliefs and practices. Questions such as, “what can be done to better assess students while maintaining the authenticity and subjectivity needed in a secondary music classroom” have been brought to consideration. Through this process of reflection, some teachers have realized a need for improvement and growth in creating sound, reliable, and valid assessments of student learning.

Music teachers have begun to search for best assessment practices for music education, specifically from a standards-based approach, hoping to find examples, techniques and guides for implementation in their classrooms (Austin & Russell, 2010; Carey, Harrison, Hitchcock, Lebler, & O’Bryan, 2012; McVeigh, 2013; O’Toole, 2003; Reimer, 2009). What has been revealed, however, are endless sources analyzing and criticizing current assessment practices, without many examples or specific recommendations for change. Although assessment is recognized as an integral part of the student learning process within these sources (Carey, Harrison, Hitchcock, Lebler, & O’Bryan, 2012), it is acknowledged that music educators have long struggled to develop sound formal assessment practices. The recent push towards standards-based grading systems in some school districts, could be a possible solution to these challenges, but there has been little research undertaken on the application of standards-based grading in a music classroom (McVeigh, 2013).

Professional Connection to Standards-Based Grading

Three years ago I joined a grading committee to begin transforming the traditional grading model in my school district into standards-based grading. Through this committee, I began researching standards-based grading in music programs to learn how to implement it for my own classes. It was during this process that I realized what few resources were available, which exposed a need for further research surrounding standards-based grading particularly in a music ensemble classroom. Though I am now using standards-based grading in all of my classes, I wanted to learn how to apply best practices with this model in my classroom. Additionally, I wanted to gain a better understanding of what other teachers are utilizing as best assessment practices in their music classrooms. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to identify best assessment practices for a secondary choral classroom within a standards-based grading system.

Review of Literature

Assessment in music education has been brought to the forefront in recent years, exposing the challenges in current assessment practices. O'Toole (2003), who is an advocate of the Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP) model developed in Wisconsin, acknowledged the need for change stating, "Where we have fallen short is in providing students with systematic feedback, involving students in assessing their own learning, and developing meaningful criteria for grades" (p. 69).

The areas presented in this review of literature were developed in response to this stated need for change in practice. Some of the sources scrutinize current practices, while others provide possible solutions to current problems within music education. The review is categorized

into three main topics related to this study: Assessment in music, standards-based assessment, and student involvement in assessment.

Assessment in Music

Criticisms

Despite the implementation of the National Standards for Music Education in 1994 (Consortium of National Arts Education Association, 1994), there continues to be a lack of systematic assessment practices across the field of music education (Austin & Russell, 2010). Austin and Russell (2010) explained, “Many teachers continue to develop their own assessment approaches in isolation – without regard to district curricula or assessment policies, and without considering the assessment practices employed by their colleagues or recommended by experts” (p. 38). This is reinforced by the general attitude that revision is needed in the assessment practices of teachers in music performance classes (Austin & Russell, 2010; Carey, Harrison, Hitchcock, Lebler, & O’Bryan, 2012; O’Toole, 2003; Reimer, 2009). Hoffer (2008) argued, however, that the current assessment practices of music teachers are pointed in the right direction:

Based on what they see or hear, music teachers usually make decisions about how well a class or ensemble did on the particular activity and decide what further actions need to be taken. Usually these judgments are not systematic, and their effects are not carefully analyzed. But they can be a foothold leading to systematic assessment of learning in music classes and rehearsals. (p. 31)

One of the biggest criticisms of assessment in performance music classrooms is the emphasis on non-academic grades such as behavior, attendance, and attitude. After surveying hundreds of music teachers, Austin and Russell (2010) found that, “Grades assigned to music students were based primarily (60% of grade weight) on non-achievement criteria” (p. 42). This does not provide an accurate representation of which skills and course concepts each student has

mastered. Many teachers continue to grade student behavior rather than student knowledge because it appeals to our students, acting in some ways as an incentive to enroll in music classes. As Austin and Russell (2010) described, “Secondary music classes typically are elective in nature, and there is evidence that teachers of elective subjects, as compared with other teachers, occasionally award higher grades that are based on more subjective, non-achievement criteria” in order to maintain population for their classes (p. 46).

Researchers have found, however, that it is more beneficial for students if educators increase the rigor of classroom and assessment practices (Reimer, 2009). After the Department of Music at Christopher Newport University created a more rigorous performance assessment, student scores began to increase. Students admitted that they spent more time preparing for the assessments because they knew they would be held more accountable with the new assessment. In addition to increased performance scores, both professors and students believed the revised assessments were a positive improvement that better depicted the ability and learning of students. Likewise, O’Toole (2003) argued that assessing students on non-achievement criteria could actually hurt music programs. She explained, “By not assessing musical achievement, you lose a valuable opportunity to demonstrate significant learning and advocate for your program to the students, to their parents, and to the school administrators” (p. 99). Though some assessment practices are clearly valued by music educators, there continues to be a lack of systematic examples, which can be used to guide wider practice. One model that is available to teachers is Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP).

Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance

The history of the CMP Project dates back to 1959 with the creation of the Composers Project, sponsored by the Ford Foundation, which later led to development of the Contemporary

Music Project in 1963. After many transformations and re-structuring processes, the CMP Project (Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance) that it utilized today by many music educators, emerged in 1977 in Wisconsin (Sindberg, 2009). This approach serves as a model for planning and assessment for music educators, particularly in secondary ensemble music classrooms. Through the use of backwards design (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) and the linking of assessments to specific student learning outcomes, the CMP model is one of the few “systematic” assessment processes used in music education (O’Toole, 2003). This model encourages the use of meaningful assessments that are based on the learning of students rather than participation. As O’Toole (2003) described:

It has not been part of the culture of ensembles to collect *evidence of learning* but rather to collect *evidence of participation*... [However] by conducting formal assessments throughout a grading period you not only provide your students with systematic feedback but you also build sound criteria for grading. (p. 72)

Quality assessment tools also clarify the learning process and learning objectives for students, which can make the learning outcomes more *valuable* and *attainable* for students. Though the CMP model provides many examples of assessment tools, they are meant to be used as guidelines, which allow each teacher to determine which tools best fit their students and classes based on the desired outcomes.

National Assessment for Music Education

There is still much debate surrounding the necessity of a National Assessment for Music Education (Fischer, 2008). Three national music assessments have been given in the United States through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The first assessment was given in 1971, followed by a second testing in 1978, and a final test in 1997. These national assessments were intended to identify the current ability of *all* music students by testing a random sampling of students across the United States (Fischer, 2008). Unfortunately, it is

believed that findings from these assessments, which revealed a lack of proficiency in the musical knowledge of students, have not actually influenced the teaching practices of music educators (Fischer, 2008).

Still, educators, districts and legislators continue to debate the use of these national assessments today. Proponents for national music assessments believe that these standardized assessments would generate accountability for teachers and their choices for instruction to meet the national music standards. Asmus (1999) argued, “While the ultimate purpose of assessment is ensuring the most effective instruction possible to enhance student learning in music, assessment can also be used to determine the effectiveness of the teacher and the instructional program” (p. 23). Proponents also believe that national assessment establishes music as an important academic subject, which they believe helps develop academic credibility.

Those who are in opposition to a national music assessment argue that because music is a form of artistic expression, which is subjective by nature, and should not be academically tested. There is also concern that the testing would become high-stakes for teachers and programs, as it has in other subject areas. Fischer (2008) argued, “A strong concern seems to exist that national music testing would lead to the high-stakes testing trend present in other core curricular subjects like math and science” (para. 12). Opponents also fear that because all students would take the assessment, whether they are enrolled in a music class or not, teachers would be held accountable for students not in their music programs (Fischer, 2008).

Standards-Based Assessment

In the 1990s, President Bush mandated the development of Content Standards, which brought change to the curriculum of core classes in U.S. schools (O’Connor, 2009). By the end of the 1990s, 49 of the 50 United States had adopted these standards, along with other countries

around the world (O'Connor, 2009). Although these Content Standards did not originally include the arts, the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) (now the National Association for Music Education [NAfME]) led an initiative to develop standards for arts education. The music standards (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994), which were created by music teachers, university professors, policy makers and arts educators (shown in Table 1.1), were eventually included in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act that was passed by Congress in 1994 (Abrahams, 2005).

Table 1.1 The National Standards for Music Education

The National Standards for Music Education
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music. 2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music. 3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments. 4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines. 5. Reading and notating music. 6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music. 7. Evaluating music and music performances. 8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts. 9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

The standards were created to give, “music teachers a framework upon which to develop curricula, assess student achievement, and provide a basis for accountability to their students, administrators, school boards, and communities” (Abrahams, 2005, p. 57). Although many teachers began utilizing the standards as a basis for instruction, they were not as commonly used for the evaluation of student achievement. More recently, however, the standards are being used to not only assess student learning, but to grade student learning as well. This new model is known as standards-based grading (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011; O'Connor 2009; O'Connor 2010). As O'Connor (2010) described:

The primary goal of a standards-based system is for all students to “meet standards”; that is, to be competent or proficient in every aspect of the curriculum. The key to reaching

this goal is to evaluate every student's achievement using similar criteria, consistently applied at all levels. (p. 2)

A fundamental change in standards-based grading, when compared to more traditional models, is the elimination of an “omnibus” or overall grade. In traditional models, assessments are not categorized by standards or content within the grade book; the assessments communicate the overall score for each assignment without communicating which learning objectives were assessed. In standards-based grading, however, assessments are assigned to specific content standards in the grade book, which allows teachers to communicate how well students understand each learning objective. The current argument is that using only one overall grade to convey student achievement provides an inaccurate depiction of student learning (O'Connor, 2010). For example, Tombari and Borich (1999) argued that:

The principal limitation of any grading system that requires the teacher to assign one number or letter to represent...learning is that one symbol can convey only one meaning. One symbol cannot do justice to the different degrees of learning a student acquires across all learning outcomes. (p. 213)

This belief supports the argument that standards-based grading makes grades more meaningful by more clearly communicating which specific learning objectives students understand and which objectives they do not.

Under traditional assessment models grades are often not an accurate representation of what students are learning, or how closely they are “meeting” each standard because grades are not communicating grades by standards, rather they communicate one overarching grade for assignments that may contain multiple standards. As Marzano and Heflebower (2011) explained:

A student might have received an overall or “omnibus” letter grade of B, not because he had a solid grasp of the target content, but because he was exceptionally well behaved in class, participated in all discussions, and turned in all assignments on time. (p. 34)

Likewise, O'Connor believes that grades will become more meaningful when they reflect specified learning goals or standards. In order to achieve this ideal, however, assessments and gradebooks used by schools and teachers would have to be organized around the specific goals or standards goals (O'Connor, 2010). O'Connor (2009) justified this argument by saying, "It is almost self-evident that standards-based grading also requires standards-based assessment; if tests are used, each test must be on a single learning goal or the test must be organized by learning goals" (p. 53).

Proponents of standards-based grading also argue that it is beneficial for grade reporting because of both the transparency and the validity of grades and assessments (O'Connor, 2009; O'Connor, 2010; McVeigh, 2013; Lehman, 2013). This is important because grades should clearly and effectively communicate current student achievement levels to help and encourage student progress in the future. Lehman (2013) explained that standards-based grading is easier for teachers, students, and parents, because of the transparency it offers: "With grading that is criterion-referenced rather than norm referenced, parents can be told with no ambiguity that their child meets or doesn't meet each given standard" (p. 10). O'Connor (2009) argued that in order to eliminate ambiguity, grades must be directly related to the standards and learning objectives of each class. McVeigh (2013) also found that the use of standards increased the validity of grades in the eyes of students. After students from two different school music programs were exposed to a standards-based grading system, they:

Experienced an increase in the perception that their course grade was an accurate reflection of their achievement.... The optimum reporting system would be one where all students believe that their course grade is an extremely accurate reflection of their achievement in class. (p. 60)

It is important for the success of standards-based grading, however, that music educators set standards that are realistic for students to meet, and that assessments of those standards are

not *too* subjective. It is important that standards and assessments are created clearly and objectively enough to ensure reliability. Colwell (2008) cautioned teachers by asking:

What adjectives can we use that are precise enough to be helpful in judging student responses? The standard may say, “Play with a good tone.” But “good” is a slippery and imprecise descriptor, and judges may not agree on whether a given students’ tone is, in fact, good. (p. 24)

Asmus (1999) echoed Colwell’s concerns regarding this conundrum. To eliminate some of this ambiguity, Asmus suggested:

Educators frequently use the term "musically" when describing how a student is to be able to sing or play. A learning target for the goal of “the student will be able to sing the phrase musically” could be “the phrase will be sung with appropriate use of breath, dynamics, tempo variation, and tension and release.” The assessment would cover these specific aspects of performance. (p. 19)

By providing detailed and clear assessments and assessment processes, both teachers and students will be better able to accurately assess student learning. In fact, including students in the assessment process can be a vital component of authentic student assessment.

Student Involvement in Assessment

Researchers in both music and standards-based grading agree that student involvement in the assessment process is a vital key to the learning process for students (Asmus, 1999; Marzano & Heflebower, 2011; O’Connor, 2009; O’Connor, 2010; O’Toole, 2003; Porterfield, 2011).

Incorporating students in the assessment process allows them to develop an understanding of *how* their learning will be assessed, which increases the likelihood of student success. O’Connor (2009) argued that, “Student involvement in developing assessment approaches and student understanding about how teachers will assess their academic achievement, including how teachers will determine grades, is critical to support learning and encourage student success” (p. 191). Porterfield (2011) added to this process by saying:

Before students can demonstrate each skill, they must have an understanding of that skill. The use of assessments help students understand these skills and, in essence, help them become independent learners, placing the responsibility of their education and learning in their own hands. (p. 38)

Student involvement in assessment also helps transform the negative perception that assessment is something that is done *to* students to the more positive comprehension that assessment is something that is done *with* students and *for* students (O'Connor, 2009; Scott, 2012). Through the assessment of their own learning, students are able to develop self-reflection techniques that enable them to self-identify errors and ways to fix them in the future. This is evidenced by O'Connor's (2010) description of this cycle: "Learning is also enhanced when students are encouraged to think about their own learning, to review their experiences of learning, and to apply what they have learned to their future learning. Assessment provides the feedback loop for this process" (p. 5).

Student involvement in assessment can also increase the confidence and independence of students. O'Toole (2003) described, "By encouraging students to assess, evaluate, and reflect upon their performances, you are teaching them to think like a teacher and thus take more responsibility for their learning, a practice that nurtures independent and confident musicians" (p. 99). When students are asked to participate in the assessment of their learning, they become more engaged in the process of their learning and develop an appreciation for the critical analysis required to provide an accurate assessment.

Summary

Systematic assessment in music education continues to be a challenge for practicing music educators, particularly in secondary level ensemble classrooms. Despite the creation of the National Standards for Music Education in 1994, teacher assessments for music students continue to lack reliability and validity for specific music skills. Standards-based grading,

however, may provide a clearer, more accurate and systematic approach for educators both in and outside of the music field. Involvement of students in the assessment process is also an important step in helping students understand and improve their own learning.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to identify best assessment practices for a secondary choral classroom within a standards-based grading system. The following research questions guided the development of this study: 1) what are best assessment practices in secondary choral music education? 2) how can standards-based grading be effectively integrated into a music curriculum? and 3) should standards-based grading be used in a music setting?

In order to understand the process of assessment development and implementation, a mixed-model research approach was used including a survey (Appendix A) and semi-structured interviews (Appendix B). The survey was intended to gather basic assessment information from secondary choral music teachers about their current practice. Following the survey, interviews were used to gather more detailed qualitative data surrounding effective assessment practices from specifically chosen participants.

Survey Design

The survey, designed following the guidance of Phillips (2008), contained both structured answer and open-ended questions. The structured answer questions were designed to gather specific information, and more easily group and sort the findings on current practice. The open-ended questions allowed participants to share varied feedback regarding the value and effectiveness of their assessment processes without being limited to predetermined answers. Because teaching and assessment practices are unique to each teacher and district, it was important to provide opportunities for teachers to expressly discuss their opinions, practices, and ideas. While the structured answer questions supported selection of interview candidates who fit

specific criteria, the open-ended feedback provided greater detail and protocol of current practice for discussion in this thesis.

Surveys were sent electronically to 300 secondary choral music teachers throughout the state of Wisconsin. The names and contact information for teachers were gathered by another choral director who was developing a contact list for high school choral programs, at both public and private schools, using public information. Participation was requested from teachers at schools of all sizes, demographics, and locations across the state to create the broadest representation possible. The choral programs offered at these locations also varied in size and structure, and the teachers selected have varied teaching experiences and methodologies. Sixty-eight teachers responded to the online survey, representing a 23% return rate, providing detailed documentation of their assessment practices.

GoogleForms, an online survey tool, was used to create the survey, disseminate it to participants, and assist with the organization of data. The survey responses for the structured answer survey questions were organized automatically through GoogleForms. GoogleForms groups and sorts structured answer data into charts and graphs of descriptive data to more easily view and interpret survey responses. The open-ended questions were then coded and analyzed to identify common themes throughout the responses (Huberman & Miles, 1994). The data was then triangulated by first coding and grouping responses in comparison to all responders, and then again by grouping and comparing responses among those who use standards-based grading and those who do not (Janesick, 1994).

Interview Participants

After analyzing the survey data, six teachers were selected for follow-up interviews to gain additional information about assessment in practice. Respondents were selected who stated:

1) they were using standards-based grading, 2) they do not report behavior in the academic grade, 3) they shared information regarding their grading practices that was new to me and therefore something from which I felt I could learn, plus 4) were willing to participate more fully in this research. This criterion allowed the selection of candidates whose practice would most resemble the requirements of my district; thus allowing for direct application of ideas to assessment of students in my current environment.

Of the teachers selected, five agreed to participate in an interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with these teachers following the model of Fontana & Frey (1994) beginning with structured questions but allowing for follow up to deepen understanding of content. Four interviews were conducted over the phone and one was conducted in person. All interviews were transcribed live during the interview with each candidate, and the interviews were generally 30 minutes in length. Coding was done across the interviews for common ideas, and notes were written throughout the data to identify themes within the responses (Janesick, 1994).

The first participant, Jacob, teaches in a small city in the northwestern area of the state. He teaches general music at the elementary school, as well as middle school and high school choir. He teaches one middle school choir and one high school choir. In total, he has approximately 77 students in his choral program.

Jessica and Alex both teach at the high school level in separate suburbs of the major metropolitan area. Alex directs three ensembles, with approximately 75 students enrolled in the program. Jessica also directs three ensembles, but has approximately 100 students enrolled in her choral program.

Kristin teaches in a northeastern regional town. She teaches three choirs at the middle school and three choirs at the high school. Both programs have approximately 50 students enrolled.

Finally, Marissa teaches in an eastern suburb of the capitol city. She has a larger program, including four ensembles with 120 students involved.

Summary

The survey and interview process allowed 68 choral teachers to offer insight into the assessment practices that they use regularly in their teaching. The chapters that follow will provide details of the information attained through these research approaches and the ways in which standards-based assessment is demonstrated in the daily work of choral educators.

CHAPTER THREE

Survey Results

A quantitative survey of practicing secondary choral music teachers was used to gather information from directors across the state to learn about different practices surrounding assessment development and implementation. The survey was intended to gather basic assessment information surrounding assessment development, frequency, focus, and implementation. As music teachers often work in small departments, with limited opportunities for communication and collaboration, this method of research allowed teachers from programs of all sizes, demographics, and locations to share their practices.

Sixty-eight of the 300 requested teachers responded to the online survey. The majority of the responses (66) came from high school teachers, however, two of the teachers noted that they teach at the middle school level as well. The choral programs represented in the survey data range in size from 13 students to 440, with an average size of approximately 150 students. The number of ensembles that each teacher directs ranged as well, from one to nine ensembles, with an average of four. The survey responses presented a variety of successful assessment practices throughout the state. Survey data also revealed that teachers from different programs and locations are all facing similar issues in regards to assessment, which is explored in this chapter.

Assessment Frequency

One important element to understand for this study was how frequently teachers have to formally report their grades to students and families based on the structure of their school's grading periods for the year. The formal structure of grading periods does not always align with concert preparation cycles which is a unique factor in performance classes. The grading periods for the majority of the respondents (83.8%) were divided by quarters, yet the number of

assessments given during each grading period varied greatly. Eight directors, or 20.6%, used one or two assessments per grading period, sixteen (23.5%) utilized three or four assessments per grading period, fifteen (22.1%) administered five or six assessments per grading period, and for twenty-three people (33.8%), seven or more assessments per grading period were given to collect evidence of learning. The data collected does not distinguish between formative and summative assessments, which may have influenced how responders reported the number of assessments given. These numbers may therefore, reflect a combination of formative and summative assessments, especially those who provide seven or more assessments per grading period. Given that summative assessments are meant to evaluate the summary of student learning, it would be challenging to assess seven or more summative concepts or skills within a single grading period.

Numerical Value of Grades

Beyond frequency of assessments, numerical value given to formative and summative assessments or weighted value used to determine grades was explored. In a standards-based grading model, formative assessments should not be counted toward any percentage of the reported grade. Standards-based grading supporters such as O'Connor (2010) argued that, "*Formative* assessments are designed to help students improve, and in almost all cases should not be used to determine grades" (p.5). Knowing that one-third of the teachers surveyed stated that they utilized standards-based grading, understanding how the responders address this issue in their classrooms provided valuable information.

Forty-nine teachers reported that they weight formative and summative assessments differently, whereas only 17 teachers specified that they do not make a distinction. Of those who weight their assessments differently, only four people weighted the total of summative assessments at 100% of the grade and formative assessments at 0%, following the standards-

based grading model described above. One teacher explained that formative work is communicated to students: “Formative assessments are not graded, but provided in the gradebooks as feedback.” This was echoed by another teacher who wrote, “Summatives are worth 100%, formatives are worth 0%. The purpose of formative work is solely to provide feedback to students.” While only four teachers followed the pure standards-based grading model, two others reported using 90/10 and two using 80/20 frameworks, of summative/formative assessments. Other teachers explained their individual practice of assigning higher point values to summative grades, or using a different break down of percentages to create their grades.

Assessment Categories

In the survey, teachers were asked to identify *what* they assessed in their music classrooms. The most common activities assessed by the teachers were: performances (97%), rehearsals (84%), and performance critique/evaluations (75%). Music theory (66%), sight singing (62%), and lessons (60%) represented the next level of common assessments. Less than one-third of the teachers assessed ear training (26%), which can be considered a specific key component of music theory. Several teachers indicated additional assessments, such as: portfolio assessments, recorded performance assessments, concert reviews, journaling, presentations, juries, choral citizenship, rehearsal/ensemble skills, and part tests.

Assessment Methodologies

Standards-based grading practices and Grading for Learning (O’Connor, 2009), both of which are utilized in the researcher’s school district, represented some of the models being cited for assessment practice. Survey participants were asked which methodologies were being used or promoted in their districts. Results showed that 77.2% of the choral teachers reported standards-

based grading as the district choice and 28.1% identified Grading for Learning as that which their district has chosen. One person said they use Competency Based Grading (Townsend, 2014), which allows students to work through course content at their own pace, while several others commented that their districts are either transitioning *into* standards-based grading or *out of* standards-based grading.

Behavior in the Academic Grade

In a standards-based grading model one of the non-negotiable policies is that behavior is removed from consideration in the academic grade. In order to gain understanding of how this policy is applied in choral music programs, the survey asked if behavior was included in the academic grade criteria. Despite the specific policy of this model, 73.5% responded that behavior is reflected in their grades and only 26.5% responded that it is not included.

Most of the teachers who provided additional feedback to this question said that they gave daily or weekly participation grades to their students, which were then reflected in percentages for grade calculation. One teacher provided a rationale for including participation in the academic grade by stating,

The unique quality about choir is that it's not an individual class. It's a group class. If you are disruptive in a class where you are only accountable to you, then you are only hindering yourself. In choir, if you do not attend rehearsal, or if you don't participate, you hurt not only yourself, but the group as a whole.

There were also a few teachers who stated that they assess behavior and participation, but it is reported separately from the academic grade. Some teachers report these grades in their individual gradebook (i.e. choral community responsibilities), while others have a school-wide reporting system for these grades (i.e. citizenship grades). As one teacher described,

We are not allowed to include "participation" in our grading practice. I have disguised "participation" as "choral community responsibilities" in the past, but have provided a full explanation of WHY practices relating to this are essential to the choral "team."

Assessment Effectiveness

It is important that assessments effectively communicate student achievement and progress throughout the year to students, parents and school administration. Ongoing individual reflection by teachers on assessment practices is one way to achieve this. In order to understand how teachers reflect upon and evaluate their assessment practices, the survey asked teachers to describe how their current assessment practices effectively communicate student progress. Many teachers discussed the use of pre-tests and post-tests to show student growth. Responders also said that individual and/or small group singing evaluations were additional assessment tools that effectively demonstrate growth. Teachers explained that these evaluations can be done using concert repertoire as well as sight singing material. Some teachers commented that they are able to do this through lessons, while others incorporated it into their rehearsals.

Two teachers commented specifically on their use of standards in student assessment and communication. One explained, “Having set standards for the year, expectations for student achievement increase incrementally throughout. Students have on-line access to these standards and their own progress.” The other teacher compared their use of traditional grading practices and standards-based grading in different ensembles. While they find success with both, they explained that standards-based grading gives a clearer picture of where students’ *current* skills level and content understanding are. They stated,

One choir uses standards based grading, so the students know where they stand in “real time.” The other ensemble has standard percentage grading, so they are receiving an idea of their overall score in class. Both communicate student progress in terms of class content comprehension, but the standards based grading provides a more complete picture.

How Assessment Guides Instruction

The final survey question related to how the teacher's current assessment practices effectively guide their instruction. This could show how teachers use the data collected in their assessments to self-reflect on their instruction, and if they use that reflection to change their instructional practice. One teacher stated, "My assessments, whether formal or informal, completely drive my instruction. We informally assess our performance groups at every rehearsal and make plans for the next time we meet." Many other teachers echoed this by saying that they use their assessments to pinpoint what they need to spend more time teaching or rehearsing in class. They also used assessments to determine the repertoire appropriate for each ensemble.

One teacher explained that they also used assessments to differentiate instruction for individual students, for example: "perhaps one student needs to learn by visual learning strategies while another learns best with kinesthetic teaching strategies. Assessment scores followed by reflection by the teacher will indicate a great deal of information to the teacher!" While most teachers commented on how they use their assessments in their instruction, one teacher said the complete opposite:

My assessment practices don't guide my instruction...it is really the other way around. Honestly our best assessment tool is the final concert, isn't it? We teach our students how to perform within the ensemble for the greater good of being a part of something magical, musical, memorable. They will all take away different things from the course based upon their own musical experiences. In the end, this is what I truly desire for my students. Do they learn tons about the theory behind the music? The pedagogy behind the instrument? Yes and yes, but teaching to the test is not what I signed up for.

Summary

Survey data showed the use of a variety of assessment practices and methodologies across state choral programs. Overall, teachers were in agreement regarding which skills and

concepts they should assess, but responses varied regarding how formative and summative assessments should be weighted, and how frequently they give assessments. The specific practice of standards-based grading was recognized as being used by a number of the teachers, however, the ways in which it is being enacted vary. Although the survey responders utilize varied assessment strategies, they shared many examples of quality assessment practices. After analyzing the survey data, five teachers agreed to participate in follow-up interviews to gain additional information about assessment in practice.

CHAPTER FOUR

Interview Analyses

Survey data described in chapter three provided general information outlining the practice of standards-based assessment in sixty-eight choral programs across the state. In order to more deeply identify application challenges and successes, five teachers participated in follow-up interviews to gain additional information about assessment in practice. The purpose of these interviews was to identify which assessment practices these teachers found most effective and beneficial for the betterment of student achievement, as well as for their teaching practice. In addition to learning about what teachers found beneficial, it was also important to discover challenges that need to be addressed in assessment for secondary choral music in order to improve the effectiveness of this approach. While this study can contribute to the general knowledge for choral music education, my personal teaching practice is currently framed in standards-based assessment based on school district policy. Limited research studies have been conducted in music education settings to provide guidance for application of this practice.

In this study, the term assessment is used to describe a method of evaluating student progress, whereas grading describes the process of assigning a value to assessments, particularly as it is used to communicate with parents and administration. Throughout the document, standards-based grading (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011; O'Connor, 2009) will be used to describe the practice, which encompasses both assessment and assignment of grades. Because my school district uses standards-based grading, and does not include assessment of behavior in the academic grade, survey respondents who identified their use of standards-based grading without reporting behavior in the academic grade were isolated as potential interview candidates. Of the six teachers identified, five agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews.

This chapter describes the data gathered from the five interviewees regarding their best assessment practices, how they assess performances (a key element in choral music), how frequently they give assessments, how they create their assessments, and how they monitor the effectiveness of the assessments for validity, reliability, and accurate understanding of students' knowledge and skills. Additionally, participants shared more about their experiences with standards-based grading, including what they liked and disliked about the model, as well as perception of effectiveness. While each participant has a unique approach to assessment and grading in their classrooms, I found many connections within their practices, which are explored in this chapter.

Assessment Practices

To fully understand the assessment practices of the participants, it was beneficial to explore the full scope of their individual assessment practice, including the frequency and focus of their assessments, as well how their assessments are created. All of the participants used performance assessments in their teaching, both informal in-class performances and formal concert or Solo & Ensemble performances, but the other assessments used to evaluate student progress varied between each person. Additionally, all of my interviewees create the majority of their assessments themselves, but try to collaborate with colleagues when they are able.

Marissa

Marissa teaches high school choral music in an eastern suburb of the capitol city. She has a larger program, including four ensembles with 120 students involved. She has been using standards-based grading for three years, which is the longest of any of the interviewees. Unlike my other participants, it is mandated by Marissa's district that they use standards-based grading.

Of all of the interviewees, Marissa completes the most assessments. Her assessments and grades are divided into different sections: music theory, sight singing, voice lessons, and formal performances. The theory book students use has nine units, so students typically complete two to three units a quarter: “Each unit has a quiz review which is the formative assessment, and the summative assessment is the quiz.” Additionally, students complete three to four formative sight singing assessments each quarter. For lessons, students have three small group voice lessons per quarter and in one of them, students perform a summative sight singing assessment independently.

Marissa’s performance assessments also consist of multiple components. Her summative grade is based on the dress rehearsal of a concert, rather than the actual performance. She described:

The dress rehearsal is a summative grade. It’s more about proving they understand how to have good concert etiquette and if they are appropriately watching other choirs. I have section leader “spies” to watch for cell phones, talking, etc. It’s an automatic ‘no evidence’ and students have to complete make-up if they are caught [doing those things].

While this provides individual information for assessment, it is unclear from Marissa’s description if the assessment has musical components beyond the behavioral ones described. The actual concert performance is viewed as a group assessment that students self-assess using Wisconsin School Music Association (WSMA) rubrics after watching the concert. This grade goes into the gradebook as two formative assessments: one for the comments they provide on a rubric assessing their performance, and one for the rubric grading they provide. Marissa would actually like to move away from grading the concert all together in the future, but fears negative repercussions, such as students not attending the concerts.

While Marissa creates many of her own assessments, she was able to find useful resources through the Wisconsin Music Educator’s Conference. At convention she discovered

One-Minute Theory (Slabbinck & Shaw-Slabbinck, 2005) and *One-Minute Sight Singing* (Slabbinck & Shaw-Slabbinck, 2010) books that she has found extremely helpful. This resource is flexible enough for her to modify as needed, but provides a good foundation for theory and sight singing assessments. As she explained, “now all of my theory and sight singing assessments come from there. There are ‘quiz yourself’ sections that I use as assessments, but I also have students sight sing for me. I came up with a rubric for that.”

Alex

Alex teaches at the high school level in suburbs of the major metropolitan area. He just started using standards-based grading this year. Alex chose to follow this model after collaborating with the Communication Arts department at his school, which was the first department to use standards-based grading in his district. Few other departments are using this assessment model in his high school.

Alex, whose assessments focus on performance skills and text analysis, creates all of his own assessments. He does not like trying to fit into the “mold” of others saying, “I struggle to use other people’s lesson plans and assessments.” He does try to collaborate with others when creating his assessments, though. For example, he created a poetry assessment in collaboration with the Communication Arts department at his high school. This poetry assessment is one of his primary summative assessments, and because he is not as well versed in poetic analysis, he found it beneficial to gain insight and feedback from the teachers in that department. They helped him with both the assessment development, as well as a grading rubric for the assignment. Alex tries to have students complete one analysis for every major piece of poetry on the concert program. As a result, some concert programs require more analysis than others, so the number of assessments changes with each concert.

Alex will also frequently discuss performance assessments with the band director at his school. One of the main performance grades that he assigns is the concert grade, though most of the evaluation for this grade occurs prior to the actual concert performance. Alex assigns grades for concert performances based on formative assessments leading up to the concert: “If the students complete all of the formative work, which I do not put in the gradebook, then they earn all of the points for the concert.” The grade is primarily based on students’ effort and performance in rehearsals leading up to the concert.

Jessica

Jessica also teaches high school choir in a suburb of the major metropolitan area. She directs three ensembles, and has approximately 100 students enrolled in her choral program. Although Jessica’s school follows guidelines from the standards-based grading model, they have not fully implemented it in their district.

Jessica typically focuses on one larger formal assessment each semester. Though the assessment changes from semester to semester, it is typically a singing assessment related to skills needed for repertoire they are working on in class. For example, if they are working on a canon in class, she may ask students to perform a canon for their formal assessment. As she described, “I have students come in in groups of three and they have to be able to hold their own line in the canon. They also need to be able to answer verbal questions about the score.”

Jessica also collaborates with other teachers when creating assessments. Her collaboration is primarily with the band director at her school similar to Alex, especially when creating rubrics for performances in class or lessons; they share a lot of the same students, so they try to align their assessments as much as they can.

Although she gives a singing assessment each semester, for concerts, Jessica bases her grades primarily on attendance, which is true of many teachers who responded to my survey. She does base some of the grade on their attire and preparedness for the concert, as well as considering whether or not they are following concert expectations when assigning grades. Although this does not align with the formal standards-based grading model, Jessica has been able to assess students in this way.

Kristin

Kristin teaches in a northeastern regional town, where she directs three choirs at the middle school and three choirs at the high school level. Like Alex, Kristin started using standards-based grading this year. Kristin and the band director at her school agreed to participate in a pilot of standards-based grading this past year, and will help guide the rest of her district as they begin implementation this fall.

Kristin's main assessment vehicle is a cumulative portfolio project for students. This portfolio project, which allows students to store assessments digitally to track progress throughout the year, is not used by the other teachers interviewed, but is used by other schools in the state. A large component of the portfolio project is performance assessments. Kristin believes performance assessments are the best musical assessment: "Seeing growth in a skill or piece of music, developing it, and being able to master it is really important." For her, the final performance is important, but she also finds value in the performance assessments they do along the way. Other performance assessments that she includes in her curriculum are sight reading assessments, vocal part checks in concert repertoire, and Solo & Ensemble assessments. While she only assesses a few music standards in initial performance assessments, as the year continues, she assesses as many standards as possible during each performance.

While Kristin presents assessments during class, many of her formal assessments are completed by students outside of rehearsal. Most performance assessments included in the student portfolios are self-recorded, and done by students before and after school, or even at home. This allows her to give multiple assessments during each quarter without using rehearsal time during class. As a result, students are usually given two to three formal portfolio assessments per quarter, in addition to the concert performance.

Kristin also collaborates with other teachers when creating assessments. She explained that the band students also complete portfolio assessments, so Kristin and her band colleague collaborate on those assessments. She noted that the structure of the portfolio was modeled after the portfolios used by another music department, so both Kristin and her colleague collaborated with other districts in the creation of the assessments as well.

Jacob

Jacob, who teaches elementary general music, as well as middle school and high school music in a small city in the northwestern area of the state, has been using standards-based grading at the middle school level for two years. He has voluntarily chosen to be part of a pilot group for this model, but is still using traditional grading at the high school level, which allows him to view assessment and grading practices from both models.

Jacob reported that he also creates almost all of the assessments he uses himself, but he will occasionally scour the internet for additional resources. For Jacob, the primary formal assessment that he gives is a summative concert assessment. All other assessments, which are both informal performances and music theory assessments, are formative. Because he teaches across grade levels at his school there are not many teachers to collaborate with, which increased

his independence in creating assessments. He utilizes electronic flashcards, or music notation software Noteflight and Finale to help create music theory assessments.

Jacob told me that he has changed the format of his performance assessment almost every year, if not every semester. In his current assessment the concert is a big part of that grade, but it is not the sole assessment. As he explained, “They need to know how important the concert is, but life circumstances can sometimes affect concert attendance, and I don’t want kids to have an F if they aren’t there.” His assessment consists of the concert performance, a reflection following the concert, as well as individual and small group lesson work leading up to the concert. The addition of the reflection in the overall grade allows Jacob to assess their reflection skills and understanding of course concepts and objectives. He is also able to make better performance skill assessments during lessons when he is working with students one on one or in small groups, as compared to the large group concert performance. He is “most sold” on this assessment because it is based on standards-based grading.

Best Assessment Practices

One of the main objectives of the interviews was to determine best practices for standards-based assessment in choral music. To help identify this, participants were asked which assessments they found most beneficial for both their teaching practice and student skill development. Jacob quickly responded that formative assessments provide the best feedback for both him and his students. He utilizes entrance slips and exit slips as quick formative checks to find out how students are handling course concepts. Typically, these focus on music theory and score study comprehension, which is harder to assess from the class as a whole. As Jacob explained, “it’s amazing how many kids seem like they’re fine, but they really aren’t.” These

formative assessments allow him to quickly check-in with students on an individual level and provide valuable feedback without consuming too much class time.

Jessica and Marissa also found formative assessments to be valuable, especially formative music theory assessments. For Marissa, music theory and sight singing assessments gave the best information on individual progress, since as she explained, “performance assessments end up being more of a group assessment instead of an individual assessment.” She believes music theory and sight singing skills are important for student musicianship in class, which is why she focuses on those assessments.

Jessica uses these assessments to track development as the year progresses; her expectation is that students will see significant growth by the end of the year. By focusing on music theory elements at the beginning of the year, she is able to set a strong foundation for her students. As she said, “It’s important so that they know what I’m talking about [when using musical terminology and discussing music theory].” Starting these assessments at the beginning of the year also helps her identify what students need the most help on throughout the year.

Unlike the other interviewees, Alex believes that his student recording assessments are most beneficial, which echoed what many teachers shared through the survey. This assessment allows him to hear individual students without using valuable rehearsal time. Many students feel more comfortable making a recording of themselves singing alone rather than singing individually in front of someone. Alex finds the one-on-one feedback very beneficial for both him and his students. That said, he explained that he does not like to give assessments unless he has the time to provide quality feedback to students right away: “I do not like to do [singing assessments] and not give feedback right away, so I typically do it two-three times within a concert cycle. I’ll do it four-five times if I’m able to.” As he explained, the number of times this

assessment occurs within a concert cycle is dependent on the opportunities he has to provide timely, valuable feedback.

Assessment Effectiveness

Each of the teachers had effective ways of evaluating the success of their assessments. Both Jacob and Alex use open dialogue with their students to hear their perspective on the assessments. As Alex described, “I try to explain why they are doing it ahead of time and then I follow-up with students to get their perspective. Students are generally very candid.” Jacob has also found this to be beneficial. He explained, “I talk to students when handing the assessments back. I ask them for feedback and listen to their questions. I’m often surprised by their questions; that the connection wasn’t made.”

Jessica is more self-reflective in her evaluation of assessment effectiveness. As she explained her process, “I make notes about trouble areas for students when going through assessments. For example, with sixteenth note rhythms if kids keep getting thrown off by rests, I make notes about that and try to change it in future.” She looks for holes in her assessments or student progress within the assessments. Marissa also uses student results to reflect upon her assessments. She uses the scores of her students to reflect upon and edit her assessments. For example, “is everyone or no one getting a four [the highest rating]?” That information tells her if she needs to make assessments easier or more challenging.

The teachers were also self-reflective about which assessments they would like to change to improve the effectiveness of the assessment. Interestingly, although all teachers had assessments they would like to improve, they all wanted to work on different assessments. Jacob, like many responders in my survey, wanted to improve his concert assessments. After attending a conference regarding standards-based grading, another music teacher attendee asked about

grading concerts. Jacob said the presenter shared this helpful feedback: “She said there should be no grade for the concert if [students] don’t attend and [teachers] should create separate non-academic scores (and behavior scores should go on transcripts).” This inspired Jacob to look at his concerts and try to find a new approach to his assessments, but he is not yet satisfied with his current model.

Kristin reflected that she would like to improve her portfolio assessments to better connect to students so that they are more motivated to complete the assessments. As she explained, “I really like the portfolio concept, but sometimes there is a disconnect between an effective assessment and what the students enjoy.” She believes that if the students enjoyed the assessments more, they would be more invested in submitting quality work. She also struggles to grade students as a three or four on varied assessments and wishes she understood a clearer distinction between what proficient and advanced looks like in music assessments. Some of this struggle may be centered in the traditional grading point of view where students and parents expect an “A” in music regardless of skill accomplishment. Jessica also commented that she struggles with the four-point scale saying, “I don’t understand the four-point scale as much as I wish I did.” She did create different rubrics for her ensembles to accommodate for students with varied musical experience, but she continues to struggle with rubric creation. As she described, “I’m struggling to make rubrics and use rubrics for everything. It’s hard to assess kids in choir because [the voice] is so personal and students struggle with the individual assessments.”

Alex and Marissa are both in the process of building their curriculums, and thus feel like they need more time to fully develop their assessments. Alex admitted, “Right now I feel like I’m writing [assessments] as I’m handing them out. I’m always revising.” Marissa started a new

sight singing and theory curriculum last year, but is not having students “pass out” of the curriculum, so she is struggling to find more advanced resources for them.

Student Self-Assessment

Researchers in both music and standards-based grading agree that student involvement in the assessment process is a vital key to the learning process for students (Asmus, 1999; Marzano & Heflebower, 2011; O’Connor, 2009; O’Connor, 2010; O’Toole, 2003; Porterfield, 2011). Incorporating students in the assessment process allows them to develop an understanding of *how* their learning will be assessed, which increases the likelihood of student success (O’Connor, 2009).

The teachers interviewed had mixed descriptions of their use of student self-assessment in their classrooms. Jacob does not typically include students in his grading processes. He responded, “Rarely; I do this more often in middle school because of standards-based grading, there is more self-reflection in the curriculum.” He acknowledged that he would like to include more of this in his teaching practice, but it is not currently integrated into his curriculum. Alex also struggles to include students in his grading processes, but one of his goals for next year is to do more of this.

Jessica and Marissa spend much more time involving students in self-assessment practices. One way that Jessica includes students is through goal setting:

Students do goal setting at the beginning of each semester. The goal can be very vague or more specific. For example, “I want to be comfortable singing in front of my peers,” or, “I want to be able to understand sixteenth notes better.”

She saves each goal and tries to talk with each student before conferences. She also has all students self-assess their goal progress throughout the year by focusing on questions such as, “Is the goal realistic? Should we re-write it? How is your progress?” She has students regularly write

a few sentences reflecting on different concepts and skills presented in class. These reflections are used formatively, but are not graded.

Marissa includes self-assessment in her class through concerts. When her classes are getting close to a concert she records the rehearsals, then, “Students listen back and do goal setting by writing three positive and three negative things, then we discuss as a class. Sometimes I even do this two times before a concert.” She also has students complete self-assessments once the concert is over. Additionally, she incorporates student self-assessment through an annual Solo and Ensemble Project. This project is a big assessment for her students, as it is the class focus for the end of second quarter through the beginning of third quarter. All students participate by performing at the district festival or performing for the whole class. For self-reflection students complete the WSMA “Beyond Ratings” assessments, available through the WSMA website, in conjunction with this project. She has students complete a peer review as part of the project as well.

Assessment in Standards-Based Grading

The participants shared similar feedback regarding the benefits and drawbacks of using standards-based grading in their classrooms. They largely agree that standards-based grading provides clearer communication to students regarding their achievement. Marissa likes the clarity that the rubrics provide. She believes it is easier for students to understand their grades, and she also feels like students question their grades less frequently. For example, “There is less confusion and it takes out the ‘you just don’t like me’ when grading.” Alex believes it provides clearer communication of students’ grades, saying, “It gives students a tangible way to look at where they are.”

Jacob commented that he likes how students are constantly getting specific feedback and information on their progress. He explained, “It shows progress and shows in ‘real time’ where they are right now.” Along similar lines, Kristin liked that it emphasizes improvement, which aligns with her class values: “I like that it’s more in line with what music rehearsals contain as far as constantly progressing towards goals.”

Participants also commented on the effectiveness of standards-based grading in comparison to our traditional models. Kristin finds it more effective because it focuses on the academic progress of students, rather than their behavior. As she described:

It measures what they know versus how well they can “play school.” For example, how well they can complete assignments on time. You get a truer sense of what they know and they get a truer sense of what they want to know and their progress.

Marissa agreed with this philosophy, stating, “It’s easier for students to know exactly where they are.”

Jacob values the “real time” view that standards-based grading provides. Rather than dwelling on poor grades from past assessments, Jacob likes how standards-based grading focuses on progress. He said, “You need to focus on the difference from the past. We don’t want the F from before to lower your grade now. We need it to show where kids are now, not where they were in the past,” which is possible with this model.

One of the drawbacks noted by my participants, is the time commitment involved in using standards-based grading. As Kristin explained, “The gradebook part of it is really hard and time consuming. Grading itself [is also hard], because you are hearing kids individually, and so it’s taking too long. If you’re not getting assessments back in a timely manner, then you’re not helping them progress.” Alex also struggles with the time commitment of writing rubrics. He does not feel satisfied with his rubrics, and hopes to improve upon them moving forward.

Additionally, Marissa and Kristin struggle with assigning proficient versus advanced grades to students. Marissa described, “I am very type A and like that three (proficient) is standard but I have to swing more to the four (advanced) because our culture is still A-focused.”

Summary

Several themes emerged from the data collected in the interview process. Each teacher emphasized the importance of performance assessments, yet had varied ways of assessing and grading these student vocal performances. Additionally, the interviewees agreed on the benefits of formative assessments in their classrooms. All of the participants were reflective in their assessment practices, and took time to consult with students regarding assessment practices, as well as individually revise the assessments they gave to produce the most valid, reliable, and valuable assessments possible. While not all of the interviewees actively engaged students in self-assessment, they all acknowledged the value of this practice, and those who do not use it in their classes suggested that they would like to do more student self-assessment in the future. The teachers also valued the clarity that standards-based grading provided, but struggled with how time consuming assessment development and grading was using this model.

Together, the teachers interviewed shared many similarities in practices and assessments, yet each one had a unique description of how to best assess students in the secondary music classroom. Although the interviewees shared many strengths regarding their assessment practices, they also highlighted important challenges that need to be addressed in our field. The final chapter of this thesis will look further into the use of standards-based grading practices, propose best assessment practices for a secondary choral music classroom, and propose topics for further research and study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

This study has attempted to identify best assessment practices currently in use by secondary choral teachers within a standards-based grading system. The data collected through both surveys and interviews highlighted successful assessment strategies within music education, but also revealed challenges of daily implementation within current practice in music education. Although many of my findings aligned with themes discussed in the initial literature review, there were also some subjects, such as the inclusion of behavior in academic grades, with which many of the responders disagreed. As a result, this chapter will present examples of best assessment strategies for secondary choral classrooms, as well as propose areas for continued improvement within current standards-based assessment practices.

Standards-Based Grading in the Secondary Choral Classroom

This study confirmed that standards-based grading and assessment practices can be successfully used in secondary choral classrooms. Proponents of standards-based grading argue that this model offers clearer communication to students than traditional models. Lehman (2013) explained, “Today standards-based grading makes transparency far easier. It offers the dual advantage of being easier for teachers to justify and easier for parents to understand” (p. 10). Marzano and Heflebower (2011) also believed that standards-based grading provides more transparency by eliminating the “omnibus” or overall grade for students. By reporting grades through standards, students, teachers and parents have a clearer understanding of the level of proficiency which a student has achieved.

The teachers interviewed agreed that one of the main benefits of standards-based grading is that it provided a clearer depiction of what students do and do not know, which resulted in

clearer communication to teachers and students regarding student achievement. The teachers believed that grades reflected in this model were easier for students to understand and provided a better summary of where students are in “real time,” focusing on where they are right now, as opposed to where they were at the beginning of the school year. Kristin described an emphasis in standards-based grading on student improvement, which encourages students to continue working towards achieving their learning goals. Interviewees also identified that this model focuses on student achievement, rather than non-academic skills. Additionally, survey responders commented on the benefits of using standards in student assessment. They identified that standards set a clearer expectation for student achievement, which makes it easier for students to achieve their goals.

The Challenge of Time

One of the main challenges associated with standards-based grading, is time. As teachers transition into this model, it is time consuming to create valid, reliable rubrics for assessments and align each assessment to specific standards. As a result, more professional opportunities should be made available to music teachers to learn how to both develop rubrics and assessments, and also share them with others. Additionally, the teachers that I surveyed and interviewed have had limited experience using standards-based grading. Of my interviewees, the longest any of them had been using the model was three years, and most of them had only been using it for one year. This infancy of practice revealed most of them were creating the majority of assessments themselves. As a result, more research needs to be conducted to find examples of quality assessments utilized in standards-based grading settings, which can be provided for those using this model to adopt or adapt.

Grade Reporting

Another challenge of standards-based grading, is reporting grades. Currently, many school districts report grades using an overall, or omnibus grade for each assignment and course (Marzano and Heflebower, 2011). While assessment scores may also be listed individually, the assessments are not categorized by standards or content within the grade book; the assessments communicate the overall score for each assignment without communicating which learning objectives were assessed. In standards-based grading, however, assessments should be assigned to specific content standards in the grade book (O'Connor, 2010). As Marzano and Heflebower (2011) explained,

If you can't get rid of the omnibus grade, provide scores on measurement topics in addition to the grade. If public pressure demands that students receive an overall grade or percentage score, a school or district can still employ the benefits of [Standards-Based Grading] by including the bar graphs on a report card, along with traditional omnibus grades. The top part of the report card might display traditional grades and the bottom part, the bar graphs. Of course, if the 0–4.0 scale is used, it must be translated into traditional letter grades. (p. 36)

This becomes an issue for teachers who are choosing to use standards-based grading, but whose districts are still reporting grades using a traditional grading method. Of the teachers I interviewed, three of them are choosing to use this method voluntarily, and are one of few teachers in the school using the standards-based grading approach. As a result, the grade books they are using are not set up to display assessments by standards. Additionally, in standards-based grading a “proficient” score, meaning that a student is meeting a standard, is a score of three out of four. Traditional grade books report a score of three out of four as 75%, or a C, rather than proficient. This requires teachers in those districts to translate “proficient” grades into a numerical value that aligns with the traditional grade book model for the benefit of student transcripts and parent understanding. As a result, additional professional development needs to

be done to show teachers how to do this, especially if they are one of few in their districts who are using this model.

Behavior in the Academic Grade

One of the biggest criticisms of assessment in performance music classrooms is the emphasis on non-academic grades such as behavior, attendance, and attitude. After surveying hundreds of music teachers, Austin and Russell (2010) found that 60% of grade weight was placed on non-achievement criteria. This does not provide an accurate representation of the specific skills and course concepts each student has mastered. Teachers in the study continue to grade student behavior rather than student knowledge, particularly in performance classes, because it appeals to our students, acting in some ways as an incentive to enroll in music classes. The elective nature of many high school music offerings provides a challenge to balance enrollment numbers with academic achievement standards (Austin and Russell, 2010).

Survey results revealed surprising data regarding the reporting of student behavior in academic grades. In the survey, 73.5% responded that behavior is included in their academic grades, where only 26.5% responded that it is not included. Survey responders argued that music is collaborative, which makes it unique to other subjects. Students are learning rehearsal skills, which they believe can and should be assessed. Forty-four people reported that their districts are using standards-based grading, which is a model that does not report behavior, participation, or similar criteria in the academic grade (Marzano & Heflebower, 2011). This would imply that 65% should *not* be including behavior in the academic grade, which is much greater than the 26.5% who so reported.

This was also apparent among the teachers interviewed for this study. Although only teachers using standards-based grading practices were selected as interviewees, two of the five

teachers described the inclusion of attendance and behavior in academic grades (though as if it was musical skill), especially for concert performances, which contradicts the premise of standards-based grading. This seems to imply that either districts and/or teachers are not strictly following standards-based grading, or, perhaps there are elements of standards-based grading that have been found to not fit especially well in a music ensemble setting and therefore have been set aside.

O'Connor (2010) emphasized the need to report behavior separately from the academic grade: "Reporting achievement separately from behaviors means that everyone can know as accurately as possible what a grade means in achievement terms." Several teachers mentioned on the survey that they assess student behavior and participation, but they follow O'Connor's principle by reporting it separately from the academic grade. This provides an option for teachers who believe that behavior and participation need to be acknowledged, but want to follow the standards-based grading model as it was designed.

Further investigation is needed to understand the impact including student behavior in the academic grade has on ensemble performance and the overall academic grade. To complete this investigation, research and reflection should be conducted on the positive and negative impact including behavior in the academic grade has on class behavior, as well as the ensemble environment and performance.

Grading of Formative and Summative Assessments

An issue of consideration for standards-based grading is how choices are being made about the weighting of formative and summative assessments. In a standards-based grading model, formative assessments do not count toward any percentage of the grade (O'Connor,

2010). Niermann (2013) argued that feedback is the key element of formative assessments to better prepare students for summative assessments that will carry the value of a grade.

Within the teachers surveyed, more than half stated that they are given the latitude to determine weighting of their grades. Only four people weighted summative assessments at 100% of the grade and formative assessments at 0%, which is the considered practice for standards based practice. This seems to challenge both the defining qualities and application of standards based grading in practice for music as a philosophical fit for some teachers.

Perhaps, focusing solely on summative assessments when assigning an academic grade does not accurately convey student achievement in a performance-based class. As teachers noted frequently throughout my survey, ensemble rehearsal and practice are an integral part of student skill building and growth in performance classes, such as music. As a result, some teachers would argue it is important to provide academic grades for the formative assessments given in their classrooms. While some school districts, like mine, have chosen to continue reporting a small percentage of formative work with the academic grade, at this time I have not found research that supports the grading of formative assessments in a standards-based grading model. As a result, I believe that this is a topic that requires further investigation for both standards-based grading, and music education.

Best Assessment Practices

In both the survey and interview responses, teachers shared several assessment practices and strategies that they find valid, reliable, and valuable in their classrooms. From the practices presented, I found several trends between what teachers described, and what researchers have described as being beneficial for student learning and evaluation. These “best assessment practices” are explored in this section.

Student Involvement in Assessment

Several studies in the literature emphasized the benefits of including students in the assessment of their work (Scott, 2012; Daniel and Parkes, 2015). Student self-assessment enables students to develop stronger listening skills as well as stronger critical assessment skills and insights (Daniel and Parkes, 2015). Self-assessment is also an example of assessment *as* learning (Scott, 2012), in which students are in charge of their own assessment (Daniel and Parkes, 2015). As Scott (2012) described, “Students monitor their own learning, reflect on what they have accomplished, and use this to inform future learning as they continually strive to perform at more sophisticated levels” (p. 33). This is the “top tier” of assessment because it is student-centered and involves students in their own learning more than assessment *of* learning or assessment *for* learning.

My continued research throughout this project confirmed the findings of previous research: it is important to include students in the assessment process. All of my interviewees agreed that student self-assessment was important for their musical development and achievement. Many of them already include students in this process, and those who have not said that it is something they would like to do moving forward. Interviewees included students in this process by having them participate in goal setting and goal progress reflections. Additionally, they have students watch individual and group performances and reflect upon those performances using rubrics and/or answering open-ended questions. Finally, teachers reported having students self-reflect on their knowledge and understanding of course concepts and skills outside of performance.

Concert Performance Assessments

One theme that emerged throughout both my survey and interview data, is that teachers continue to struggle with the best way to grade performances, especially concert performances, which are a unique element of music ensemble classes. This study revealed that many concert grades continue to be based on attendance and behavior, or students graded as a group rather than individually. Knowing that the criteria for standards-based grading does not currently allow teachers to assess attendance and behavior, and that students need to be assessed individually, it is important to find alternative assessment methods that will meet these criteria.

While my research did not reveal a definitive method for performance assessments, survey and interview data did reveal assessment methods that could improve this process for teachers:

1. Performance assessments before or after the concert
2. Performance assessments based on multiple components occurring before, during, and after concert performances
3. Reporting student concert etiquette, such appropriate stage behavior, attire, and overall participation in a non-academic grade

One performance assessment practice that was described as successful in my survey responses, was assessing students on their concert repertoire closely before or after the concert performance. This allows students to accurately demonstrate their *individual* ability to perform from ensemble-appropriate music technique, as well as show accuracy and expression on concert repertoire. It is implausible that teachers could accurately assess all students individually in a concert performance setting and use that assessment to assign accurate concert grades to individual students.

When using this process, however, it is important to adequately set-up students for success. Duke (2009) reminded teachers to align assessments to students' current skill level: "Expert teachers...control the rates of positive and negative feedback, not merely by choosing to

point out positive or negative aspects of students' performance, but by directing the tasks students perform so that the quality of performance is predictable" (p. 132). To ensure this, teachers should carefully assign assessments and performance tasks that are appropriate to the individual knowledge and skill level of students. This can be done through assigning appropriate repertoire, creating skill-level rubrics, and modifying student assessments for varied skill levels when needed. For example, it may be beneficial to conduct these concert assessments in small groups rather than individually for younger, or less skilled singers.

Another assessment practice described in the interviews was using multiple assessments to assign an overall concert grade. This practice would allow teachers to assign a grade that evaluates more than whether or not a student attended and participated in the concert. The multiple components that Jacob assessed included concert performance, a reflection following the concert, and individual work leading up to the concert. The inclusion of concert reflections and lesson progress could enable teachers to provide individualized evaluations expected of standards based grading.

Finally, teachers using standards-based grading can still report student behavior as part of a concert performance assessment, but criteria would dictate that it should not be included in the academic grade. Instead, teachers could consider creating a different grading category in their gradebooks, such as "success skills" or "citizenship." This category would count for 0% of the academic grade, but would provide behavior reporting for students, teachers, and parents to see.

Summary

The field of music education in general, and ensemble-based classes in particular still have a lot to learn regarding best assessment practices in a secondary choral setting, as well as the use of standards-based grading within this setting. In part, this is because of teachers' limited

experience with a standards-based grading model. Among my interviewees, three years was the longest any of them had been using the model, and most of them had only been using it for one year. Additionally, there may be some practices, such as the exclusion of behavior or “rehearsal skills” from the academic grade, that are not as conducive to a collaborative-ensemble setting like choral music. Standards based grading, however, has been shown to offer teachers an avenue to provide clear, consistent musical feedback to students, through effective application in a secondary choral classroom.

Several ideas were identified that teachers can do to improve their overall assessment practices. Including students in the assessment process by allowing them to self-assess has shown important benefits. It would also be beneficial to re-examine concert performance assessments, and use practices such as individual assessment of students before and/or after concert performances, including multiple assessments to determine the overall concert grade. Improving these practices will allow teachers to provide students with valid and reliable evaluations that improve student progress and better serve communication with students and parents.

References

- Abrahams, F. (2005). Meeting national standards for music in education through choral performance. In H. J. Buchanan & M. W. Mehaffey (Eds.), *Teaching music through performance in choir: Volume 1* (pp. 57-77). Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.
- Asmus, E. P. (1999). Music assessment concepts. *Music Educators Journal*, 86(2), 19-23.
- Austin, J. R., & Russell, J. A. (2010). Assessment practice of secondary music teachers. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 58, 37-54. doi:10.1177/0022429409360062
- Carey, G., Harrison, S. D., Hitchcock, M., Lebler, D., & O'Bryan, J. (2012). Making music or gaining grades? Assessment practices in tertiary music ensembles. *British Journal of Music Education*, 30, 27-42. doi: 10/1017/S0265051712000253
- Consortium of National Arts Education Associations (1994). *National standards for arts education: What every young American should know and be able to do in the arts*. Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference.
- Colwell, R. (2008) Music assessment in an increasingly politicized, accountability-driven educational environment. In T. S. Brophy (Ed.) *Assessment in music education: Integrating curriculum, theory, and practice* (pp. 3-16). Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.
- Daniel, R. J. & Parkes, K. A. (2015). Assessment and critical feedback in the master-apprentice relationship: Rethinking approaches to the learning of music instrument. In D. Lebler et al. (Eds.), *Assessment in music education: From policy to practice* (pp. 107-120). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Duke, R. A. (2009). *Intelligent music teaching: Essays on the core principles of effective instruction*. Austin, TX: Learning and Behavior Resources.
- Fischer, R. (2008). Debating assessment in music education. *Research and Issues in Music Education*, 6(1). Retrieved from: <http://www.stthomas.edu/rimeonline/vol6/>
- Fontana, A. & Frey, J. H. (1994). Interviewing: The art of science. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.361-376). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Hoffer, C. R. (2008) Issues in the assessment of K-12 music instruction. In T. S. Brophy (Ed.), *Assessment in music education: Integrating curriculum, theory, and practice* (pp.29-36). Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.
- Huberman, A. M. & Miles, M. B. (1994). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.428-444). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Janesick, V. J. (1994). The dance of qualitative research design: Metaphor, methodolatry, and meaning. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 209-219). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Lehman, P. R. (2013). How are we doing? In T. S. Brophy (Ed.), *Music assessment and global diversity: Practice, measurement and policy* (pp. 3-17). Chicago: GIA Publication, Inc.
- Marzano, R. J. and Heflebower, T. (2011). Grades that show what students know. *Educational Leadership*, 69(3), 34-39. Retrieved from: www.ascd.org
- McVeigh, M. S. (2013). *Standards-based performance assessment in the comprehensive music classroom* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
- Niermann, F. (2013). Appraisal of achievement from the inside-and from the outside. In T. S. Brophy et al. (Eds.), *Music assessment across cultures and continents: The culture of shared practice* (pp. 37-44). Chicago: GIA Publication, Inc.
- O'Connor, K. (2009). *How to grade for learning K-12*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- O'Connor, K. (2010). *A repair kit for learning* (2nd ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- O'Toole, P. (2003). *Shaping sound musicians*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publication, Inc.
- Phillips, K. H. (2008). *Exploring research in music education & music therapy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Porterfield, S. (2011). The role of assessment in helping middle-level singers become musical artists. In F. Abrahams and P. D. Head (Eds.), *Teaching music through performance in middle school choir* (pp. 37-56). Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc.
- Reimer, M. U. (2009). Assessing individual performance in college band. *Research & Issues in Music Education*, 7(1). Retrieved from: <http://www.stthomas.edu/rimeonline/vol7/>.
- Sindberg, L. K. (2009). The evolution of comprehensive musicianship through performance (CMP) – A model for teaching performing with understanding in the ensemble setting. *Contributions to Music Education*, 36(1), 25-39.
- Scott, S. (2012). Rethinking the roles of assessment in music education. *Music Educators Journal*, 98(3), 31-35.
- Slabbinck, R. & Shaw-Slabbinck, H. (2005). *One-minute theory*. San Diego: Neil A. Kjos Company.
- Slabbinck, R. & Shaw-Slabbinck, H. (2010). *One-minute sight singing*. San Diego: Neil A. Kjos Company.

Tombari, M. L. & Borich, G. D. (1999). *Authentic assessment in the classroom: Applications and practice*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Merrill.

Townsley, M. (2014). *What is the difference between standards-based grading (or reporting) and competency-based education?* Retrieved from CompetencyWorks Learn From the Cutting Edge: <http://www.competencyworks.org/analysis/what-is-the-difference-between-standards-based-grading/>

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

APPENDIX A

Survey Questions

1. How many students do you have in your program?
2. How many curricular ensembles do you teach?
3. How are your grading periods divided?
 - a. Quarters
 - b. Trimesters
 - c. 6 Week Terms
 - d. Other
4. On average, how many *graded* assessments do you give each grading period?
 - a. 1-2
 - b. 3-4
 - c. 5-6
 - d. 7-8
5. Is there a difference in the way you weigh summative assessments versus formative assessments in your grading?
6. If yes, is that by choice or does your school mandate it?
7. Which of the following do you grade (choose all that apply)?
 - a. Performances
 - b. Rehearsals
 - c. Lessons
 - d. Music Theory
 - e. Sight Singing
 - f. Performance Evaluations
 - g. Ear Training
 - h. Other: _____
8. Is behavior, rehearsal attendance, participation, etc. included in your course grades?
 - a. If yes, please explain:
9. Which of the assessment methodologies does your district utilize (check all that apply)?
 - a. Standards-Based Grading
 - b. Grading For Learning
 - c. Other: _____
10. How do your current assessment practices effectively communicate student progress?
11. How do your current assessment practices effectively guide instruction?
12. Which of your assessments do you find most beneficial to you and your students?
13. Would you be willing to share any of your assessments with me?
14. Yes or No (circle one): Would you be willing to follow-up this survey with an interview if needed?

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Follow-up Interview Questions

1. Tell me more about the assessments that you find most beneficial for you and your students.
2. Where do your assessments come from? Do you create all of them yourself; do you collaborate with colleagues, etc.?
3. How do you grade performances?
4. How frequently do you give formal assessments? How does it affect your rehearsals?
5. How do you include your students in your grading processes?
6. How do you know that your assessments are effective?
7. Which of your assessments would like to change? Why?

For those utilizing standards-based grading:

1. How long have you/your district been using standards-based grading?
2. What do you like and/or dislike about standards-based grading?

How is standards-based grading a more effective way of assessing than our traditional models?

APPENDIX C

Jacob Follow-up Interview Questions

1. Tell me more about the assessments that you find most beneficial for you and your students.
 - At the MS/HS I give entrance and exit slips (formative grades that take 5-10 minutes); i.e. letter names in music, solfege, form, key signatures (it's amazing how many kids seem like they're fine, but they really aren't) - I'll check these and review quickly with students
 - At the elementary school I record singing assessments on my ipad - recordings are really beneficial - I record them all time
 - **Formative assessments give the best feedback - better than summative

2. Where do your assessments come from? Do you create all of them yourself; do you collaborate with colleagues, etc.?
 - I create all of them myself; sometimes I will look on-line
 - I create electronic flashcards or will use noteflight/finale to create music theory assessments
 - I am essentially my own department, no one else teaches choir in the district, so all of the music teachers really create their own assessments

3. How do you grade performances?
 - I've actually changed this every year and sometimes even every semester. I'm most sold on my current assessment because of Standards-Based Grading. My current performance assessment gives a "big picture grade." The concert is a big part of the grade - they need to know how important the concert is (but life circumstances can sometimes affect concert attendance and I don't want kids to have a F if they aren't there)
 - The total grade consists of the concert, the reflection following concert, and lesson work leading up to the concert

4. How frequently do you give formal assessments? How does it affect your rehearsals?
 - On average I give 2-3 assessments per quarter
 - The performance assessment for concerts, which I mentioned before, is one of the main assessments that they have. I also assess them on music theory, and sometimes other projects

5. How do you include your students in your grading processes?
 - Rarely; I do this more often in middle school because of Standards-Based Grading, there is more self-reflection in the curriculum.

6. How do you know that your assessments are effective?
 - The biggest thing for me is dialogue in class - i.e. key signatures you expect that to go smoothly and then it doesn't

- Writing; reflection 1) reading the writing - is it authentic or are they playing school 2) I talk to students when handing assessments back; asking them for feedback and listening to their questions (I'm often surprised by their questions, that the connection wasn't made)
7. Which of your assessments would like to change? Why?
- I am not satisfied with concert assessments. I went to a "FIRST Conference" and there was a band teacher there who asked about SBG with concerts - the presenter emphasized the need for students to understand the expectation of attending a concert. She said they should not get a grade for the concert if they don't attend and we should create separate non-academic scores (and behavior scores should go on transcripts)

For those utilizing standards-based grading:

1. How long have you/your district been using standards-based grading?
 - The MS is not fully implemented - last year 5 classrooms, this year a few more, so it is the second year using the methodology – it's not required for everyone at MS and is not done at the HS

2. What do you like and/or dislike about standards-based grading?
 - Like: giving specific feedback constantly; It shows progress and shows in "real time" where they are right now
 - Dislike: it is so much more time consuming! It's hard to allocate time to do that effectively

3. How is standards-based grading a more effective way of assessing than our traditional models?
 - The "Real time" grade is an analogy they used at the FIRST conference.
 - Their example: if you hang out with friends and they say they can ride a bike, but all you remember is a year ago they couldn't ride a bike
 - You need to focus on the difference from the past. We don't want the F from before to lower your grade now. We need it to show where kids are now, now where they were in the past
 - If their grades are 4, 1, 4, 4, 4, they should have a 4 but traditional grading would average it and lower the score

APPENDIX D

Jessica Follow-up Interview Questions

1. Tell me more about the assessments that you find most beneficial for you and your students.
 - I think the first assessment I do at the beginning of the year is: I give a rhythmic assessment (counting) to find out where are they in terms of very simply music theory
 - This is important so they know what I'm talking about! I also do beginning sight singing exercises at the start of the year (easy - do to sol), which is important to see where they are at
 - At the end of the year I want to see growth by the end of the year (i.e. if they can't read at the beginning of the year but can at the end) - growth is important!!

2. Where do your assessments come from? Do you create all of them yourself; do you collaborate with colleagues, etc.?
 - A lot of my assessments I write, but I also collaborate with the band director - we share a lot of kids so we want to align our assessments (we use rubrics for everything - skill based rubrics are easier but performance based is harder)

3. How do you grade performances?
 - It's mostly based on attendance for performances - there is a component for attire/preparedness; are they following the expectations.
 - We cannot grade on participation - so we can't even mention that in assessments.

4. How frequently do you give formal assessments? How does it affect your rehearsals?
 - Once a semester - typically they are singing assessments i.e. if we are singing a piece of music that's in canon, I have students come in in groups of three and they have to be able to hold their own line in the canon; they also need to be able to answer verbal questions about the score - score analysis

5. How do you include your students in your grading processes?
 - Students do goal setting at the beginning of each semester (they put it on a notecard);
 - It can be very vague or specific (i.e. Vague: I want to be comfortable singing in front of my peers; Specific: I want to be able to understand sixteenth notes better).
 - I save the cards and try to talk to kids before conferences. They all self-assess their goal progress throughout the year. Is it realistic? Should we re-write it? How is your progress?
 - Students also self-reflect in class, "how did you feel when you were doing this?" will just write a few sentences - that is not graded.

6. How do you know that your assessments are effective?

- I make notes about trouble areas for students when going through assessments. For example, with sixteenth note rhythms if kids keep getting thrown off by rests I make notes about that and tries to change it in future
- canon assessment - if they can't hold their own part, makes students do more things to improve - looks for holes in assessment or student progress with assessments

7. Which of your assessments would like to change? Why?

- I don't understand the 4-point grading scale as much as I wish I did
- the 4-point scale is mandated by my school (they would like us to tie assessments into goals set by administrators)
- I want to be able to back assessments up to defend them
- **I created different rubrics for freshman/sophomores vs juniors/seniors - that did make using the assessments easier.
- **I'm struggling to make rubrics and use rubrics for everything. It's hard to assess kids in choir because it is so personal and students struggle with the individual assessments.

For those utilizing standards-based grading:

1. How long have you/your district been using standards-based grading?
 - We are not actually on standards-based, but we follow guidelines of standards-based grading
 - However, we do grade behavior in the academic grade
 - The middle school is actually pass/fail in their grading
2. What do you like and/or dislike about standards-based grading?
N/A
3. How is standards-based grading a more effective way of assessing than our traditional models?
N/A

APPENDIX E

Alex Follow-up Interview Questions

1. Tell me more about the assessments that you find most beneficial for you and your students.
 - Student recording assessments because I am able to hear individual students without the fear of the student and killing class time. One on one feedback is really beneficial.
 - *How often do you do that?* I do not like to do it and not give feedback right away, so I typically do it 2-3 times within a concert cycle. I'll do it 4-5 times if I'm able to.

2. Where do your assessments come from? Do you create all of them yourself; do you collaborate with colleagues, etc.?
 - I create 100% of them - I struggle to use other people's lesson plans and assessments. I did collaborate with the Communication Arts department for poetry assessments. I'll also discuss assessments with band director as well.

3. How do you grade performances?
 - I base it on the model of formative/summative.
 - If the students complete all of the formative work, which I do not put in the gradebook, then they earn all of the points for the concert. That grade is based on their work leading up to the concert
 - It's the only summative assessment that I give and it counts as 50% of the grade - it's hard to pass if they don't go to concert

4. How frequently do you give formal assessments? How does it affect your rehearsals?
 - The main assessment I give consistently is the poetic analysis - students complete one for each major piece of poetry on the concert (sometimes more depending on repertoire)
 - Each year kids are in choir they are assessed on more b/c they need to know more
 - Every 1-2 weeks there is an assessment

5. How do you include your students in your grading processes?
 - My goal to do more next year

6. How do you know that your assessments are effective?
 - I talk to students - did they see the benefit of it? I try to explain why they are doing it ahead of time and then follow up with them to get their perspective. Students are generally very candid. They DO like the recording assessment and poetry assessment.

7. Which of your assessments would like to change? Why?
 - Yes, I'm always changing assessments. Especially as a younger teacher I'm still coming up with assessments

- Right now I feel like I'm writing them as I'm handing them out. I'm always revising.

For those utilizing standards-based grading:

1. How long have you/your district been using standards-based grading?
 - We still give traditional report cards, but the Communication Arts department started standards based grading and now I am trying it as well - I just started this year.
2. What do you like and/or dislike about standards-based grading?
 - Likes: It gives students a tangible way to look at where they are
 - I'm really bothered by the quest for an A: students just need to get to proficient level in poetic analysis to receive an A - I'm not locked into Advanced = A
 - Dislikes: I'm having a hard time writing rubrics, but I think I will improve as I continues
3. How is standards-based grading a more effective way of assessing than our traditional models?
 - The effectiveness depends on the learner, but I think Standards-Based Grading is superior for student growth

APPENDIX F

Kristin Follow-up Interview Questions

1. Tell me more about the assessments that you find most beneficial for you and your students.
 - I think it's important that assessment is a combination of what is musically best and what is quantifiable
 - Musically, performance is best (seeing growth in skill or piece of music, developing it and being able to master it is really important); performing is a lot of our assessment, however, we do a lot of assessing along the way
 - Portfolio – it was 3 assessments/quarter this year, and will be 2 next year
 - Tests sight reading, knowing your part in a piece of music, assessing your Solo & Ensemble piece
 - They record themselves and they listen, plus I give feedback
 - I also do assessment in voice lessons, but it's more about helping them with things they don't know
 - Performance assessments: they are standards based and have 9 ELTs (Essential Learning Targets)– at the beginning of the year we assessed only one element in each performance, but we then tried to assess as many standards as possible in each performance now.

2. Where do your assessments come from? Do you create all of them yourself; do you collaborate with colleagues, etc.?
 - The structure of the portfolios the band director and I did together, but we stole it from Fond de Lac – but most of the development we did together
 - I've changed it enough so that it is repertoire specific
 - I want to assess along the way but I don't want it to be formative until the concert; I think we need summative assessments along the way. I also want to make sure that I am showing development throughout the term, and standards based grading has allowed me to do that more
 - I used to do more theory, but since we went 1 to 1 with Chromebooks and since we started the portfolios I do less. They do create compositions in noteflight, but that is more creative than the theory.

3. How do you grade performances?
 - The concerts performances are assessed with as many of the ELTs as possible
 - I usually will grade the group on most things in a major concert, then when I read their reflection and self-assessment rubric I will take that into consideration, but usually by the time we are performing I am giving them pretty high marks.

4. How frequently do you give formal assessments? How does it affect your rehearsals?
 - I explain assessments during class, and they can record portfolio assessments individually during class, but most of the time they complete the assessments at home.

- 3 assessments a quarter, but we may reduce it to 2 next year (this includes compositions, performances, etc.)
 - Additionally, the concerts each quarter add another assessment
5. How do you include your students in your grading processes?
 - ELT on reflection that students are graded on – those assessments count less than the others. Student self-assess after every concert. With each portfolio assessment they have to include a reflection – not just for the ELT but so they will watch the videos and care more about the assessments they are sending in.
 - Sometimes it is discussions, sometimes it is rubrics, one time kids got together in groups and made big posters
 - They will also peer assess and circle rubrics for other students (it does not count as a grade for the kid they are assessing, but to develop a discerning listener)
 6. How do you know that your assessments are effective?
 - How many students do it, how many students do it successfully and with quality
 - When they turn it in, what they say about it. I feel like the prevailing opinion is that they don't like portfolios, but parents and administrators do
 - But, I know they have to record and watch themselves, and I know that is hard, but I know it is helping them, rather than just singing and being self-aware.
 7. Which of your assessments would like to change? Why?
 - a. I know that I would like to improve my curriculum in voice lessons – I spend that time teaching music for a lot of different things (0 study privately, so if they want to learn something it is in their lessons), so I don't do a lot of songs checks. I would also like to make voice lessons more viable – stronger curriculum so I could defend it if needed.
 - b. I really like the portfolio concept, but sometimes there is a disconnect between an effective assessment and what the students enjoy – I think they would like zero assessments
 - c. 4 – how can you be advanced on literature; the 3-4 if tricky when you have to convert to grade letters for GPA

For those utilizing standards-based grading:

1. How long have you/your district been using standards-based grading?
 - One year – but it was a pilot, so not all departments were on it. Both band and choir, were, though.
2. What do you like and/or dislike about standards-based grading?
 - Like: It's made me think a lot more about what I'm teaching and how I deliver it. I like that it's more in line with what music rehearsals contain as far as constantly progressing towards goals
 - Dislikes: The gradebook part of it is really hard and time consuming. Grading itself, because you are hearing kids individually, and so it's taking too long. If you're not getting assessments back in timely manner and then you're not helping them progress.

3. How is standards-based grading a more effective way of assessing than our traditional models?
 - Measuring what they know vs how well they can “play school” – how well they can complete assignments on time; get a truer sense of what they know and they get a truer sense of what they want to know and their progress. It prevents the “this is the way we’ve always done it” philosophy – you have to look at content and not just keeping things consistent year to year.

APPENDIX G

Marissa Follow-up Interview Questions

1. Tell me more about the assessments that you find most beneficial for you and your students.
 - Theory and sight singing because that's where the musicianship part of the class comes in - performance assessments end up being more of a group assessment instead of the individual assessment.

2. Where do your assessments come from? Do you create all of them yourself; do you collaborate with colleagues, etc.?
 - This is my third year here - during my first year I tried to create a lot of the assessments myself (I don't collaborate with other choral people - I'm the only one who teaches choir)
 - Now all of my theory and sight singing assessments come from there - there are quiz yourself sections that I use as assessments, but I also have students sight sing for me. I came up with rubric for that.
 - We are not standards based grading but "Standards based referenced" - the grading doesn't totally follow standards based grading where B=proficient, we're not able to do that - proficient is more like an A rather than B (not everyone in the school is using standards based grading - we decide by department)

3. How do you grade performances?
 - The dress rehearsal is a summative grade. It's more about proving they understand how to have good concert etiquette and if they are appropriately watching other choirs. I have section leader "spies" to watch for cell phones, talking, etc. - it's an automatic 'no evidence' and students have to complete make-up if they are caught.
 - Group assessment based on performance in the concert - they have to self-assess using WSMA rubric after watching the concert; that grade also goes in the gradebook as two formative assessments: one for the for comments and and one for the rubric grading of the students.
 - I would like to move away from grading actual concert, but I'm not quite there.

4. How frequently do you give formal assessments? How does it affect your rehearsals?
 - Grading is divided into portions (theory - theory book has 9 units, so they do 2-3 units a quarter. Each unit has a quiz review which is the formative assessment, and the summative assessment is the quiz)
 - We are on a 3-day rotation schedule, and I see students twice in 3-day rotation. ½ 10 minutes is spent on theory and ½ 10 minutes on sight singing (3-4 sight singing formative - focus on each section)
 - I give a quiz on writing out solfege. Do 2-3 per quarter
 - We also have lessons - each student gets 3 per quarter and 1 is an individual sight singing assessment (summative sight singing)

5. How do you include your students in your grading processes?
 - Concert self-assessments

- Getting close to each concert I record rehearsals - students listen back and do goal setting by writing 3 + things and 3 - things, then we discuss as a class (sometimes I even do this 2 times before the concert)
 - Solo & ensemble project (takes up the end of 2nd quarter/beginning of 3rd quarter - EVERYONE has to participate either at district OR for the whole class - this is mostly student-led. I have a website with rehearsal tracks, pronunciation guides, worksheets (I use the beyond ratings from WSMA - I've tweaked those slightly. Students have to do all 4 of the beyond ratings sheet - the final worksheet is a peer review; we also do mock solo and ensemble 1 month before (I bring in judges to walk them through the process and have those rubrics as well)
6. How do you know that your assessments are effective?
 - Student results - sometimes they have not been ready for the assessment yet. It's trial and error (i.e. sight singing needed changing from last year) - I'm constantly reflecting and tweaking - is everyone or no one getting a 4?
 7. Which of your assessments would like to change? Why?
 - Ever-evolving sight singing and theory (last year was the first "formal" year of using the current theory and sight singing) - now kids are passing out of theory so I have to find more advanced things for next year (the workbook is nice b/c students can work through it on their own)

For those utilizing standards-based grading:

1. How long have you/your district been using standards-based grading?
 - This is my 3rd year
2. What do you like and/or dislike about standards-based grading?
 - Likes: the rubric is very clear (3=meets, 4=above, 2=approaching, 1=minimal); I also like that there is no F (I use numbers for assessments but switch to grades in the gradebook). There is less confusion and it takes out the "you just don't like me" when grading.
 - Dislikes: I am very type A and like that 3 (proficient) is standard but I have to swing more to the 4 (advanced) because our culture is still A-focused
3. How is standards-based grading a more effective way of assessing than our traditional models?
 - It's easier for students to know exactly where they are.