

Performance-based testing in middle level applied music classes; Weighing the benefits of second chance assessments

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Abstract

Applied music classes at the middle level, such as those featuring piano or guitar, involve a large number of students learning the rudiments of an instrument. Individual progress can best be measured when each student receives assessment by performing selected music alone for the teacher. This action music research, involving 6th (n=180) and 7th (n=200) grade guitar class students, seeks to answer the question, whether or not second chance guitar performance testing in the middle school general music class assists students in the mastery of specific guitar playing and musicianship techniques? Each sixth grade student in the study will play three graded songs alone for the teacher, while each seventh grade student will play two graded songs, all receiving assessment and feedback at the culmination of each test. All students will have the option to retake each test as many times as they wish in order to earn the desired grade. Data gathered will map how many students take a given test more than one time and how much their performance improves from the first to the last attempt at that assessment. Data analysis will reveal the percentages of students who chose to play second-chance assessments as well as what guitar-playing skill sets were strengthened as a result of repeated assessments. Conclusions will be made as to what benefits and drawbacks are evident in the progression of students through the guitar curriculum.

This research is in-progress.

Presented at the annual conference of the Pennsylvania Music
Educators Association Hershey, PA March 27-29, 2014

Introduction

Middle school guitar students preparing to play a performance-based assessment may not be able to show a high level of mastery only given one chance to perform. Information about the mastery levels of repeat testers will inform applied instrument teachers in general music settings as to whether or not second chance testing is worth the time and effort it takes in the classroom.

Methods

- 6th and 7th grade general music students were given specific guitar performance tasks to prepare for assessment.
- Each student played the musical excerpt related to the set of performance tasks alone for the teacher.
- Teacher provided targeted feedback about what was played correctly or incorrectly and about ways to improve the incorrect portions of the excerpt.
- Students chose either to accept the initial assessment grade as their final grade or to play the excerpt again after taking corrective action through additional practice.

Results

- Students who took second chance assessments tended to score lower initially than their peers who did not take second chance assessments.
- Students who took second chance assessments tended to score higher on their final assessment than their peers who did not take second chance assessments.
- Overall, the scores for second chance assessments were higher than those scores from students who only took the assessment one time.
- The most frequent guitar playing/overall musicianship skills that showed improvement in second chance test students were
 - Left hand accuracy in terms of finger independence and placement
 - Fluency and consistency of tempo
 - Accuracy of reading and playing correct rhythms

Conclusions

These findings indicate that second chance guitar testing by middle school students increases their mastery level in guitar playing and overall musicianship skills. Because of the benefits of increased mastery level, further study of the same or similar groups of students may reveal the reasons why not all middle school guitar students choose to take second chance assessments.

Resources

Essential Elements for Guitar, by Will Schmid and Bob Morris, Copyright 2005 by the Hal Leonard Corporation, is the source for all guitar testing materials used in this study.