



ORCHESTRA

Self-Assessment in the String Classroom

by Christopher Jannings

Any educator in any subject or grade level is likely very familiar with the term “assessment.” Keeping track of specifically what it means in multiple contexts, however, can be a bit of a difficult task. We have to keep track of Common Assessments, Formative Assessments, Summative Assessments, and more. In this article, I’d like to discuss a different type of assessment that I feel is even more important than the aforementioned assessment types that are so en vogue in the education world at the moment: self-assessment.

What is self-assessment?

While the term self-assessment is rather self-explanatory, determining how to use it in a music classroom is perhaps not as easily explained. Self-assessment can be used in many forms with your orchestra students. The most beneficial ways in which I’ve implemented self-assessment are in the following areas:

End of term Participation and Practice Assessment

I look at this as the biggest and most beneficial way to use self-assessment with my students. Like many music educators, a good portion of the grades I give students are based on “participation” categories like punctuality, preparation and practice, rehearsal etiquette, and preparedness. The students are given a participation grade every two weeks based off of a 25-point rubric that I developed. At the end of each trimester, I have the students complete a self-assessment that uses many of the same categories of my rubric. This self-assessment is put in the grade book and factored into their final grade. While including the self assessment in student grades is completely optional, I do think that most students will take it more seriously and give more thoughtful answers when it means more than simply filling out a piece of paper. You may ask...do the students actually give themselves an honest assessment knowing this will be going in the grade book? In my experience, the answer is almost always yes. In fact, many of the students actually grade themselves a bit tougher than I would.

Playing Test Assessment

Shortly before each concert, I give my students an individual playing test to evaluate their improvement and preparation on our concert material. While I give them feedback on their playing test form, I will also sometimes ask them to fill out an assessment of themselves. This is typically not graded; it’s designed more to just get them thinking specifically about some concrete skills they need to improve on.

Post Concert Ensemble Assessment

This is self-assessment on a more “global” level. Every music educator and student comes out of a concert feeling good about some elements of the performance and more tepid on others. Doing a post concert assessment gives the students a chance to celebrate strengths and identify areas for improvement on an individual level and share them out to the ensemble.

Why is self-assessment beneficial?

It makes students take an honest look at their strengths, weaknesses, behaviors, practice habits, and contributions to their ensemble. We as music educators and conductors need one main thing to begin growing an ensemble or program: buy-in. If the students are truly invested, virtually any program can overcome a myriad of obstacles and thrive. Giving the students the opportunity to be a part of the assessment process will make the ensemble environment more collaborative and, thus, increase student buy-in for the program.

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