Assessment:  Perceptions and Challenges of General and Choral Music Teachers: Survey Results

By Chet-Yeng Loong

Author Note

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Abstract

An online survey conducted by the author was the basis of a research article published in the summer, 2014 issue of *The Orff Echo* (46:4), 58-66. This online article contains complete results of the survey without significant interpretation. Click on [hyperlinks](#Table_1) to move between the text of the article and supporting documentation and tables. The complete article, with interpretation, is on pages 58-59 of the summer, 2014 issue of *The Orff Echo*.

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Parts one and two of the survey gathered demographic information on the participants. The majority of respondents were female, nearly half (43%) were above 50 years of age, and more than half (53%) had master’s degrees. Participants came from six regions in the United States. Most were members of AOSA and NAfME; 41% of them were members of at least two national organizations. More than half of the subjects were full-time general music teachers, and 39% had taught more than 20 years. Demographic information gathered about the participants in the survey is displayed in [Table 1](#Table_1) and [Table 2](#Table_2).

The next section of the survey focused on assessment practices, which included SLO implementation, type of activities, use of authentic assessment, and importance and confidence levels of assessing students. The most assessed activities were singing, reading notation, and playing instruments. Participants were asked to mark all of the different activities they assessed. More than three-quarters of the participants (78%) assessed between four and seven activities (see [Table 3](#Table_3)). Nearly one third of respondents (37%) reported having started the process of implementing SLOs, while almost half of respondents were unfamiliar with the term. The majority of teachers who have started implementing SLOs came from Regions V and VI (60% and 45%, respectively). Sixty percent were from the states of CT, NJ, NY, IN, OH, WI, HI, GA, and MD. More information about SLO implementation can be seen in [Table 4](#Table_4).

A large percentage of respondents reported regularly using authentic assessment in their classrooms (82%). Approximately three-quarters of the participants (76%) believed that assessment is important regardless of their academic qualifications or years of teaching. More than half the participants (60%) were confident when assessing students, although participants who had taught more than 25 years had more confidence in assessment than those who had taught less than five years. Participants who used authentic assessment perceived themselves as confident or extremely confident in assessing students.

A large percentage of respondents reported regularly using authentic assessment in their classrooms (82%), while 15% administered authentic assessments some of the time, and 3% did not use them at all. Chi-square analyses were conducted to find the differences in participants’ years of teaching and confidence levels. Participants were grouped according to their years of teaching: Group I (n=102), one to five years; Group II (n=94), six to 10 years; Group III (n=96), 10 to 15 years; Group IV (n=96), 15 to 20 years; and Group V (n=252), more than 20 years. The confidence levels were based on a four-point Likert Scale (1=not confident, 2=somewhat confident, 3=very confident, 4=extremely confident). Participants with more than 20 years of teaching experience had significantly more confidence (*df* =12*, X2*=38.70*, p*=.00). In contrast, participants who had taught less than five years had less confidence in assessing students.

The majority of teachers indicated that they were somewhat confident (35%) or very confident (47%) in assessing their students, while 13% were extremely confident. Only 5% of teachers reported not feeling confident at all with assessing students.

Chi-square analyses were used to find the differences in respondents’ confidence levels and their use of authentic assessment. The participants were divided into three groups. Group I (n=525) used authentic assessment, Group II (n=94) somewhat used authentic assessment, and Group III (n=22) did not use authentic assessment. Significant differences were found among these three groups of participants (*df = 6, X2=46.10, p =. 00*). Participants who used authentic assessment in their classrooms reported they were very or extremely confident in assessing. Those who did not use authentic assessment reported they were not confident in assessing.

The majority of teachers felt that assessing students’ musical performances was extremely important (76%), while others felt it was somewhat important (23%). Only 1% felt it was unnecessary.

Two one-way Analysis of Variance tests (ANOVAs) were used to investigate whether participants with differing years of teaching experience and academic qualifications held different perceptions towards the importance of assessment. Participants were grouped according to years of experience for the first ANOVA, and by educational levels attained for the second ANOVA. The dependent variable for both tests was participants’ Likert scale scores based on the importance of assessment (1=unnecessary, 2=somewhat important, 3=important, 4=very important). No significant difference was found among participants who had different years of teaching (*F*(4, 635 )=1.32, *p*=.26) and held different academic qualifications (*F*(26, 613)=1.17, *p*=.25). Assessment was important regardless of teachers’ academic qualifications and years of teaching experience.

In the fourth part of the survey, participants were asked about the impact of standards-based curricula and assessment on their classrooms, and whether assessing would take away time from other musical tasks. Participants, regardless of academic qualifications or years of teaching, indicated that a standards-based curricula and assessment somewhat, but not significantly, impacted their teaching or the amount of time they spent on musical tasks. But participants who had somewhat or no confidence assessing students indicated assessing took away time from teaching musical tasks.

A MANOVA was used to investigate two aspects of question 4: whether teachers with more experience and higher levels of education believed that the adoption of standards-based curricula would affect their assessment practices, and whether these practices would take time away from other musical tasks. No significant differences were found among teachers in either scenario of levels of education (*F*(10, 1266)=1.30, *p*=.23, Wilk’s Λ = 0.98) or years of experience (*F*(8, 1268)=0.60, *p*=.77, Wilk’s Λ = 0.99). Regardless of education level and years of teaching experience, teachers mainly reported that the adoption of standards-based curricula would only somewhat affect their grading systems, and these assessment practices would somewhat detract from other music making engagements.

To examine whether teachers felt assessment would take away time from other musical tasks, a one-way ANOVA was used to analyze the main effect differences among four groups of participants by their confidence levels. Group I (n=34) had no confidence in assessing students, group II (n=226) were somewhat confident, group III (n=301) were very confident, and group IV (n=79) were extremely confident. The three-point Likert-type scale (1=yes, 2=somewhat, 3=no), which measured teachers’ perceptions of assessment as a detractor from other musical tasks, served as the dependent variable.

Significant main effects (see [Table 5](#Table_5)) were found among four groups of participants (*F*(3, 636)=13.72, *p*=.00). Post-hoc Sheffe test revealed differences between participants in Groups I and IV (m=1.68 and m=2.24, respectively), Groups IV and II (m=2.24 and m=1.78, respectively), Groups III and II (m=2.08 and m=1.78, respectively), and Groups III and I (m=2.08, m=1.68, respectively). Group I and II participants systematically expressed that assessing students significantly reduced teaching time, while Group IV participants repeatedly indicated that assessing students somewhat took time away from musical teaching tasks.

The fifth section of the survey asked respondents to indicate the frequency of using informal and formal assessment. Also included were questions about frequency of assessing the “4Cs” within the music curriculum. Finally, participants were asked to indicate kinds of support provided by administrators, and what resources and trainings they found helpful in preparing students for assessment.

Teachers reported using informal assessment the most, followed by rubrics, formal assessment, and pre- and post-tests. When conducting informal assessments, participants most often implemented informal observation and questioning techniques. Manipulatives and think-pair-share were less common assessment techniques. When assessing 21st century skills—the “4Cs”—teachers indicated “creativity” as most often assessed of the “4Cs,” followed by collaboration, critical thinking, and communication. Participants who had taught more than 25 years assessed critical thinking and collaboration significantly more often than participants who had taught fewer years.

More than half of the respondents (60%) expressed that administrators provided some, quite a bit, or extensive levels of guidance for the assessment and grading of their students. All participants indicated that attending conferences and reading journals were somewhat helpful in preparing them to assess students. Participating in workshops or conference sessions focused on classroom assessment strategies and implementation or having access to sample assessments online was preferred by more than 75% of the participants.

Teachers used informal assessment the most (m=3.78), followed by rubrics (m=3.26), and formal assessments (m=3.04). Pre- and post-tests (m=2.28) were used the least among all participants. Under Formative Instructional Practice (FIP), respondents used informal observation the most often (m=1.13), followed by questioning (m=1.47), manipulatives (m=1.81), think-pair-share (m=2.43), self-assessment (m=2.59), exit slip (m=3.17), response logs (m= 3.35), and four corners (m=3.43).

Participants were asked the frequencies of assessing the 4Cs (communication, creativity, critical, and collaboration skills) in their classrooms on a four-point Likert-type scale (1=often, 2=sometimes, 3=seldom, 4=never). Participants assessed creativity the most often (m=1.97), followed by collaboration (m=2.02), critical thinking (m=2.05), and communication (m=2.28).

A one-way ANOVA was conducted using teaching experience as the grouping variable and the frequency of assessing the 4Cs as the dependent variable. Group I (n=102) taught one to five years; Group II (n=94) taught six to 10 years; Group III (n=96) taught 10 to 15 years; Group IV (n=96) taught 15 to 20 years, and Group V (n=252) taught more than 20 years. Significant main-effect differences were found for assessing critical thinking (*F*(4, 639)=4.93; *p*=0.00) and collaboration (*F*(4, 639)=2.73, *p*=0.03; see [Table 6](#Table_6)).

Post-hoc Sheffe tests revealed that Group V participants (m=1.88) assessed critical thinking significantly more often than Group II (m=2.34) and Group III participants (m=2.27). Group V participants (m=1.87) assessed collaboration more than other groups.

Participants were asked to select resources and trainings that they found helpful for integrating assessment into practice, based on a four-point Likert-type scale (1=not applicable, 2=not helpful, 3=somewhat helpful, 4=very helpful). The rankings were as follows: conferences (m=3.05), journals (m=2.93), websites (m=2.58), district professional development workshops (m=2.46), publications and materials from the teachers’ Departments of Education (DOE) or school districts (m=2.16), graduate courses (m=1.93), university workshops (m=1.90), and undergraduate courses (m=1.64).

School administrators did not monitor or guide the assessment and grading of students for Group I participants (40%). Group II (44%) said that the administrators helped them somewhat; Group III participants (13%) indicated the administrators guided them quite a bit. Group IV participants (3%) received extensive guidance from their administrators.

Lastly, participants were asked which kind of assessment-based professional development activities would be beneficial for AOSA, NAfME, OAKE, and other organization’s members. Most of the participants (87%) expressed that organizations providing information and samples of assessment tasks and measurement tools online were their top preference. The next highest request (80%) was offering workshops about assessment strategies and/or implementing assessment in the classroom, followed by offering workshops or conference sessions about various assessment topics (75%). Lastly, teachers requested published articles or journals about assessment (63%).

The final portion of the survey allowed respondents to offer additional thoughts, opinions, and viewpoints on music assessment that would be of benefit to this membership survey. Among all participants, 475 responded to the open-ended question. These responses were grouped into three main categories plus one category of mixed comments. The three categories were challenges of assessing students (36%), positive aspects of assessment (16%), and suggestions for further professional development (26%).

Most respondents stated that they had more than 400 students. With limited time, they struggled to plan, assess, and collect data. Some participants noted that assessing took away time from learning and making music. They also grappled with keeping other children occupied while assessing a few students. Three participants mentioned that the classes they took as undergraduates did not prepare them to assess students. New teachers felt very overwhelmed by assessment. Time constraints curtailed the use of formative assessment, including paper-and-pencil tests, by some respondents. Lack of support from districts and administrators, especially in construction of assessment tools (including SLOs), was also mentioned. Participants suggested that administrators needed to be educated about music assessment because “administration knows so little about music education.”

Participants who indicated the positive and important aspects of assessment comprised 16% of the responses. One respondent wrote that music teachers assessed “their students all the time but may not be aware of it as assessment.” Others expressed that “it is imperative that we as music teachers constantly assess our students”; and yet, assessment should not “get in the way of children's enjoyment of learning and experiencing music.” Most respondents suggested that teachers use performance-based, authentic assessment, because authentic assessment was effective and would not interrupt any form of instruction.

Assessment was chosen by 26% of the respondents as a priority for professional development. One participant recommended that AOSA-offered sessions on assessment “be dynamic models of active and authentic assessment strategies.” Most responders were eager to acquire more information about guidelines, techniques, and strategies for conducting assessment. They looked for samples of SLOs, and quick and reliable assessment tools such as rubrics, various formal assessments, and information on how to implement technology, including mobile digital devices such as the iPad®. In addition, they suggested ideas such as networking and observing how other teachers assessed their students, possibly by viewing their classes through online videos.

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Tables

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Table 1: Participant Demographic Information.

| **Variable** | **N** | **%** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Gender* |  |  |
|  Male | 90 | 14 |
|  Female | 550 | 86 |
| *Age* |  |  |
|  22-29 | 98 | 15 |
|  30-39 | 146 | 23 |
|  40-49 | 123 | 19 |
|  50+ | 273 | 43 |
| *Education a* |  |  |
|  Undergraduate in Music Education | 229 | 36 |
|  Undergraduate in Music | 38 | 6 |
|  Master’s in Music Education | 247 | 39 |
| Master’s in Music | 92 | 14 |
| Doctorate (non-specified) | 32 | 5 |
| *Membership**b* |  |  |
|  AOSA | 524 | 82 |
|  NAfME | 335 | 52 |
|  OAKE | 94 | 15 |
| *Region* |  |  |
|  I (AK, CO, ID, MT, NM, OR, UT, WA, WY) | 96 | 15 |
|  II (AZ, CA, HI, NV) | 78 | 12 |
|  III (AR, IA, KS, LA, MN, MO, ND, NE, OK, TX, SD) | 119 | 19 |
|  IV (AL, DC, FL, GA, MD, MS, NC, SC, VA) | 96 | 15 |
|  V (CT, DE, MA, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT) | 118 | 18 |
|  VI (IL, IN, KY, MI, OH, TN, WI, WV) | 133 | 21 |

*a Participants reported the highest degree attained*

*b* *Some participants reported multiple memberships*

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Table 2: Teaching Assignment Characteristics and Years of Teaching Experience.

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|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable** | **N** | **%** | **Variable** | **N** | **%** |
| *Teaching Status* |  |  | *Years of teaching experience* |  |  |
|  Full-time music | 548 | 86 |  1-5 | 102 | 16 |
|  Full-time music & classroom | 31 | 5 |  6-10 | 94 | 15 |
|  Part-time music | 59 | 9 |  11-15 | 96 | 15 |
| *Teaching Assignment* |  |  |  16-20 | 96 | 15 |
|  General music | 343 | 54 |  20+ | 252 | 39 |
|  General music + choir | 229 | 36 | *Number of students*  |  |  |
|  General music + band | 43 | 6 |  < 100  | 27 | 4 |
|  General music + orchestra | 11 | 2 |  100-400 | 225 | 35 |
|  Multiple music disciplines | 12 | 2 |  > 400 | 388 | 61 |
| *Teaching Levela* |  |  | *Instructional minutes per weekb* |  |  |
|  Early childhood (Pre-K music) | 141 | 22 |  ≤ 30 | 62 | 10 |
|  Elementary school | 608 | 95 |  40 | 235 | 36 |
|  Middle school | 128 | 20 |  60 | 213 | 33 |
|  High school | 32 | 5 |  > 80 | 130 | 21 |

a Respondents checked all levels that applied to their current teaching assignment.

b Number of instructional minutes students receive per week in music.

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Table 3: Percentage of Teachers Who Reported Assessing Musical Processes and Skills.

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|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Activities** | **N** | **%** | **No. of Skills Assessed**a | **N** | **%** |
| Singing | 612 | 95 | 1 | 6 | 1 |
| Reading notation | 609 | 95 | 2 | 29 | 4 |
| Playing instruments | 581 | 91 | 3 | 63 | 10 |
| Analyzing/Describing music | 401 | 63 | 4 | 119 | 19 |
| Moving/dancing | 377 | 59 | 5 | 119 | 19 |
| Improvising | 370 | 58 | 6 | 115 | 18 |
| Composing | 356 | 56 | 7 | 142 | 22 |
| Digital media/technology  | 86 | 13 | 8 | 48 | 7 |

a Number and percentage of teachers who assessed one or more of these skills.

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Table 4: Percentage of Teachers Implementing SLOs by Stage and Region.

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|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Regions** |  |
| **I** | **II** | **III** | **IV** | **V** | **VI** | **Total** |
| Pilot year  | 1.56 | 1.56 | 0.78 | 1.88 | 2.81 | 3.44 | 12.03 |
| First year | 0.78 | 0.63 | 0.63 | 0.63 | 2.03 | 1.41 | 6.09 |
| Second or third year  | 2.34 | 0.94 | 2.97 | 2.19 | 6.25 | 4.53 | 19.22 |
| Not implemented  | 2.19 | 2.97 | 2.81 | 2.66 | 4.38 | 3.13 | 18.13 |
| Unfamiliar with SLOs  | 8.13 | 6.09 | 11.41 | 7.66 | 2.97 | 8.28 | 44.53 |

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Table 5: One-Way ANOVA Results of Teachers’ Confidence Levels (Group) And Their Perceptions of Time Spent Embedding Assessment.

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|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Sum of Squares** | ***df*** | **Mean Square** | ***F*** | **p** |
| **Between Groups** | 20.82 | 3.00 | 6.94 | 13.72 | .00 |
| **Within Groups** | 321.73 | 636 | 0.51 |  |  |
| **Total** | 342.55 | 639 |  |  |  |

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Table 6: Summary of One-Way ANOVA: The Frequencies of Assessing the 4Cs.

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|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Sum of Squares** | ***df*** | **Mean Square** | ***F*** | **Sig.** |
| **Communication** | Between Groups | 10.44 | 4 | 2.61 | 2.04 | 0.09 |
| Within Groups | 810.50 | 635 | 1.28 |   |   |
| *Total* | *820.94* | *639* |   |   |   |
| **Creativity** | Between Groups | 9.84 | 4 | 2.46 | 2.28 | 0.06 |
| Within Groups | 683.66 | 635 | 1.08 |   |   |
| *Total* | *693.49* | *639* |   |   |   |
| **Critical Thinking** | Between Groups | 20.64 | 4 | 5.16 | 4.93 | .00 |
| Within Groups | 664.86 | 635 | 1.05 |   |   |
| *Total* | *685.50* | *639* |   |   |   |
| **Collaboration** | Between Groups | 12.03 | 4 | 3.01 | 2.73 | 0.03 |
| Within Groups | 699.57 | 635 | 1.10 |   |   |
| *Total* | *711.6* | *639* |   |   |   |

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