

Arts Assessment For Learning

MUSIC — 5TH GRADE

REFLECTION: IMPROVING SCALE PERFORMANCE

Without judgment, describe what you did. Just the facts:

1. Students were put into pairs and given 2 checklists.
2. Students were told to rotate tuners so many groups could use them.
3. I explained that one partner was going to slowly play three scales (of their own choosing) for their partner. Their partner would circle incorrect notes and when able label the mistakes.
4. The listening partner would explain what he/she heard, point out the errors and assign a score 1, 2, 3, or 4. One per scale and one for overall total.
5. Playing partner would practice again fixing errors. (Listening partner can also be practicing at this time.)
6. Playing partner plays again, as listening partner remarks checklists.
7. Roles are reversed and they do all steps again.
8. Checklists are kept in music folder to be used during practice at home.

What went well?

Using the checklist for both partners to see helps the students to play the correct notes. Students seemed to enjoy being assessed as well as being the assessor. Having tuners available is extremely helpful, even though note names (G# ~ Ab) on the tuner needed to be explained.

What was so-so?

An octave range for elementary students can be a challenge. It is definitely difficult for students who do not practice at home. Using a tuner to check if a partner was playing the correct notes presented some challenges. First, if the tuner registered an "A#" the students marked it as a mistake because it didn't say "Bb". This was corrected by writing in both pitch names on the checklist. Then, for instruments not in the key of 'C', the tuner (Korg or Snark) would read out their concert pitch note names not their relative pitch. That was corrected by using a transposing tuner (Samson) and writing in a concert pitch row on the checklist.

What was the most challenging part of trying this?

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Time – forcing myself to make time to implement and use the checklists. We also spent most of our time developing the checklist and learning about scales we were left with very limited time to use it. Did I mention, “getting the kids to practice”?

What was the impact of this strategy on student learning? (specific examples)

All students are able to get individual feedback with this strategy. Listening skills were strengthened as students listened to determine if correct notes were being played. They know what to look for (watch fingerings) and how to express what is needed. Peer assessment increased student learning.

What questions were raised for you as you implemented the assessment practice?

I really needed to breakdown the simple task of playing a scale into many mini lessons to identify all the steps, terms and mechanics needed for each scale. Students quickly voiced why questions, such as “Why is the tuner saying D# and not Eb?”

What new insights or understandings are forming as a result of this experience?

Students who are excited about playing an instrument really liked the challenge playing scales provided. Students enjoyed finding scale movement within their music. I quickly discovered that tasks needed to be broken down into understandable and manageable components in order to be understood by the students. Once understood, they were better able to assess their peers.

How do the results of your action plan inform your inquiry question?

I discovered the task I was assessing did not require a rubric. The use of a checklist was fine. The checklist works great for peer assessment but cannot really be used for self-assessment. Individually it is best used as a learning tool and as a practice tool.

I have identified the following evidence of student learning:

Students showed significant improvement in their ability to play three major scales. Playing and assessing scales has had an additional benefit of improving students listening skills and they are beginning to learn how to identify notes and pitch. This evidence was captured with checklists, photographs and videos.