

Arts Assessment For Learning

MUSIC — 6TH - 8TH GRADES

REFLECTION: GUITAR ENSEMBLE

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

I presented each “step” as a class lesson (class meets for one session each week). Step 4 was extended over 3 lessons. Students remained (basically) with the same group for step 3 and 4. Each student had his/her own guitar. Written reflections were introduced in the step 3.

What went well?

Each student had his/her own guitar (with larger classes, guitars were shared with a partner) and so had more playing time. Students had previous knowledge of the chords being used, and how to make the progressions sound “like a song”. Students, for the most part, demonstrated protocol when addressing each other. Giving each group responsibility to complete one song to performance worked well.

What was so-so?

There never seemed to be enough time for the writing reflection; more thought was needed. The “specificity” of feedback needed work; students tended to repeat themselves on general ideas.

What was the most challenging part of trying this?

Stepping back and letting each group work things out on its own; some groups took much longer than I had thought they would (and longer than I had planned!) to get the song up to “performance speed”. Videoing the students in the small space was a challenge.

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

Being in a small ensemble (no more than 4 in a group), students were more engaged as each was responsible for his/her group’s success. Weaker students gained confidence from being in a small group (and could not “hide”, as they might in a large ensemble), and stronger students became leaders. All had to think about and act on how to get the song to performance level – and, make sure all the members of the ensemble were successful performers.

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

Would the students have accomplished more as individuals each practicing on his/her own, and then playing for and being assessed by each other? Should I do more modeling on the assessment procedure before having students assess each other?

What new insights or understandings are forming as a result of this experience? (share with group)

Next step - have students select their own songs to prepare for a performance for peers and/or parents. Insights – give students more time for reflection and practice. Refine the written checklist for ensemble playing and develop a rubric from it.

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

I need to continue the steps, and (I believe) create a more specific inquiry question.