

Arts Assessment For Learning

MUSIC—1ST GRADE

REFLECTION: KEYBOARD FLUENCY

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

Classes 1-3 were implemented as planned with a criteria checklist as the end result using student-generated phraseology. In the absence of exemplars, I played pieces for identification of the problematic area. At the end of the third class, each student quoted whether it was pitch or rhythm they found most challenging during the practice of their keyboard piece and I recorded their responses.

In class 4, students showed their choices by placing their name-card beneath the criteria with which they had the most problems.

In class 5, the choice of either pitch or rhythm was recorded in a personal log booklet. This time the analysis went slightly deeper to record a descriptor from the checklist that reflected the particular aspect of the criteria on which they needed the most work.

During class 6, students were paired at keyboards where they could hear each others performance. After one student played, the other was to comment on any problems that were heard. The process was repeated with the other student playing and the first student now commenting.

Classes 5 and 6 were repeated with two more pieces.

What went well?

The protocol for the reflection booklets was implemented quite smoothly with each child carrying their own with a pencil to the keyboard. They could be completed on the spot without a lot of movement back and forth from their seat causing a loss of practice time at the keyboard. Having the booklet with them also allowed for two rounds of playing with an opportunity for deeper reflection the second time.

What was so-so?

It became clear that there was still come confusion about the difference between pitch and rhythm which prompted a review of the descriptors and additional means of simplifying the broad concepts.

For our first attempt, the students were also unsure what to write as to why they chose either pitch or rhythm

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What was the most challenging part of trying this?

It was evident that the students would need more use with the tool to confidently respond with correct application of knowledge. I face the limits of a fast approaching deadline to gain a true picture of the effectiveness of this tool and its protocol.

I have observed that students can often be overly generous in praise of themselves, fully believing that they have been successful to play a piece correctly only to discover that their orientation of hands is completely backwards.

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

Students' use of musical vocabulary has increased.

There is greater rhythmic distinction between eighth notes and quarter notes.

In general, students also seem to be attending more to the proper length of longer notes to count them out.

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

Is it a realistic expectation to have first grade students self-assess their keyboard performance?

Are first grade students developmentally able to listen acutely while they are navigating the mechanics of playing a new piece?

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

The booklets may need to have a copy of the criteria checklist included on the inside cover instead of just hanging on the wall.

Even though the criteria checklist displays several descriptors for each criteria heading, it is still necessary to provide a simple summary of each as a directional hint for narrowing their focus.

For instance, Pitch has to do with the hands and fingers being used, while Rhythm has to do with patterns of long and short sounds.

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

I sense that students have more of an understanding that in order for a piece "to be done" there must be a connection of notes and a flow from beginning to end; a steady tick-tock beat. That is a big step toward attaining fluency. The goal is that the piece should sound the way we sing it.

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I believe this was attained because of the heightened attention given to specific details of what each criterion was to look like.

Students have a greater awareness that to attain a flow in playing, the problems with pitch and rhythm must be identified and solved first. Through this process, students realized that frequent stopping in a performance was an indicator of a problem either in understanding or mechanics. It was then necessary to pause and to work through the problem.

As their familiarity with the checklist grew, I observed an increasing number of students be more self-directed as to what to do next rather than to just play through a piece once, pressing the designated inventory of “buttons” on the page (a la the completion of a worksheet) and declaring they were done.

Documentation to bring (student work, photos, writing, teacher journal, etc.):

- Sample copies of the journal booklets
- Videos of students playing
- Videos segments of student discussion and feedback
- Teacher reflections with observation of student quotes