



# Rehearsal Break

Jennifer Rodgers, editor

## **Beyond the Attendance Sheet: Addressing Assessment in the Choral Classroom**

by Skyler Bluemel

Grading principles that rely solely on attendance and participation fall short of capturing a student's true development in musical skills and knowledge. While these measures offer some insight into engagement, they do not fully reflect a student's understanding of musical content such as theory, aural skills, or their ability to reflect on their own musicianship. As educators, it is essential to move beyond these traditional indicators and embrace authentic assessment,<sup>1</sup> or methods that provide meaningful, individualized feedback and measure student growth more accurately. This article will explore the principles of authentic assessment and how adopting these practices can enrich both teaching and learning in the choral classroom.

### **Framework**

Professional development in P-12 schools includes support and dedicated research for assessment practices, including readily available resources; those offerings, however, often prioritize core subjects, leaving music educators to adapt generalized approaches to their specialized classrooms. This discrepancy between available resources and a lack of addressing the unique needs of music instruction presents ongoing challenges.

Common problems related to assessing students are: time constraints, workload, large class size, managing diverse student abilities, and limited guidance from administrators with minimal changes to assessment practices despite the adoption of standards-based curricula. Many choir teachers grade students heavily on non-achievement skills such as attendance, participation or effort, and attitude.<sup>2</sup> Music educator Benjamin Kambs suggested that reliance on non-achievement criteria prioritizes logistical convenience over fostering musical growth, noting a disconnect between what teachers believed was important and the actual practices they employed, with most assessments being based on ease and practicality.<sup>3</sup>

The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) does provide music educators with the Model Cornerstone Assessments (MCAs). The MCAs are described as "focused on student learning and are not evaluations of teacher quality or effectiveness. They are to be used by teachers to inform instructional decisions and curricular choices."<sup>4</sup> Although the MCAs are certainly helpful in providing supports such as scaffolding, sequencing, and assessment criteria, they have not been updated since 2017, and the size of the documents can be overwhelming.

Notably, the body of assessment research and resources available for non-music classes is much broader. For meaningful evaluation and growth in musical knowledge, choir teachers should consider exploring more effective and efficient methods for individually assessing students on musical content rather than non-achievement skills. Rather than create systems from whole cloth, the following existing resources could be adapted for effective use in music education settings:

- The Classroom Assessment Scoring System.<sup>5</sup> This system assesses the quality of teacher-student interactions using a 1–7 scale in three domains: (1) emotional support, (2) classroom organization, and (3) instructional support.
- Heidi Andrade’s contributions to self-assessment,<sup>6</sup> which is a formative feedback process that promotes learning and enables students to adjust and improve their performance.
- Agnes Smale-Jacobse and colleagues’ systematic review on differentiated instruction,<sup>7</sup> or tailoring instruction to students’ diverse learning needs within the same classroom.
- Sherri Scott’s headings of assessment: (1) assessment *of* learning, (2) assessment *for* learning, and (3) assessment *as* learning.<sup>8</sup>
- Brian Wesolowski’s work of meaningfully connecting district-suggested student learning objective frameworks with music classrooms.<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of this article is to provide choral educators with strategies to evaluate their students by providing meaningful, specific, and research-based approaches to assess musical content knowledge instead of non-achievement skills. Some suggestions will involve technology while addressing potential limitations. Some technology tools are mentioned multiple times to highlight that teachers do not need to learn a myriad of new technology in order to implement these ideas.

All content in this article aligns with the four strands of the National Coalition for Arts Standards with the accompanying Anchor Standards found in their Na-

tional Core Arts Standards: (1) Creating, (2) Performing, (3) Responding, and (4) Connecting,<sup>10</sup> and should be applied or adapted to meet the individual needs of each class and student. The strategies presented here are those I have successfully implemented in public school choral classrooms. Asterisks (\*) are included next to select sample assessments in the provided tables to indicate tools that could be used as teaching plans for substitute teachers. Additional supplemental materials—including reading recommendations, sample grading rubrics, and assignment templates mentioned in this article—are available by scanning the QR code at the end of this article or visiting [acda.org/choral-journal](http://acda.org/choral-journal) and clicking the link on the October 2025 issue page.

### Assessments in Creating

Assessments in Creating do not need to be difficult or stressful. Example content in the creating strand often includes tasks associated with composition or improvisation, though they look different depending on the experience of the students, the experience of the instructor, and the interests of both (Table 1 on the next page). A sample assessment in composition that my students enjoyed was a daily melody or rhythm journal as a class starter option during a particular timeframe, such as a four-week unit or between two concerts. Students were asked to document musical ideas in a digital journal using a simple and accessible cloud-based program like Google Docs or Google Slides. Google Slides can be particularly helpful because each slide can represent a different day or idea.

Students’ compositional brainstorming can be guided by providing a slide template that includes convenient “drag and drop” notation symbols. Providing the notation for students to drag where they want proves helpful for many inexperienced students, while also allowing the instructor to introduce new concepts as they see fit to best cater to the scaffolding of each class. If students are still at the beginning stages of learning how to read music, consider using shapes, letters, or pictures instead of traditional music notation. Students should submit their journal periodically for feedback and grading, which is made easier by having them all digitized. Physical journals work if technology is not as



accessible for all students, though educational supports will look different such as using stickers instead of digital “drag and drop” items.

One method of assessing Creating through improvisation without assigning dedicated projects is implementing improvisational ideas or skills organically through routine teaching. For example, foster student creativity and leadership by involving them in warm-up creation and extension: changing or adding words with guidance, varying rhythms, and guiding them to create new melodies to use. Each day, the improviser should rotate so all students have an opportunity to participate.

To help formalize the structure, provide clear expectations and grading criteria and take care to not turn the experience into a “boring assignment.” The act of grading the assignment takes little time if you thoughtfully create a rubric with a simple “check the boxes” process. If you prefer more specific feedback, consider leaving space in the rubric for your comments.

By implementing improvisation this way, students are overall more engaged in the warm-up sequence, and most express excitement when it is their turn to be the improviser.

If you have already included Assessment in Creating tasks in your curriculum, consider extension projects such as utilizing Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) like Audacity or GarageBand to record, edit, and mix audio. Students could work with recordings from previous rehearsals or concerts, or they could record their own audio to use. They could then apply their work to making podcasts or social media videos to advertise concerts, promote recruitment for the choir, or teach musical concepts.

Assessments in Performing

According to NCAS and implications from research,<sup>11</sup> assessing Performing should include content beyond tracking attendance at a concert. This is often

Table 1. Creating Table and NCAS Anchor Standards

Creating			
Anchor Standard 1		Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.	
Anchor Standard 2		Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.	
Anchor Standard 3		Refine and complete artistic ideas and work.	
Example Content	Anchor Standard	Sample Assessment	Tool or Strategy
Composition: Assess original musical creations based on given parameters	1, 2, 3	Melody/Rhythm Journal	Google Suite (Slides or Docs)
Improvisation: Evaluate ability to spontaneously create music within a given structure.	1, 2, 3	Improve text, rhythm, or solfège in warm-ups; daily rotations	Rubric to assess selected criteria; “check the boxes”



the area where I have experienced frequent barriers. It seems impossible to accurately assess every singer on performance standards when you have forty-nine minutes in a class period and more than fifty singers in a choir. I found separating Performing assessments from actual concerts to be difficult but noticeably worthwhile for my teaching goals. I began by separating evaluative qualities and Performing tasks into categories (Table 2 on the next page), then developing assessments that would both accurately assess them and cause the least amount of disruption to my routines.

One assessment I quickly adopted into my “teaching toolkit” was Speed Dating,<sup>12</sup> or as I call it “Speed Sharing” in an educational setting. The concept is simple: students teach each other learned concepts to demonstrate content mastery and collaboration in their learning process. After learning a concept, such as proper alignment, students stand in groups of two lines facing each other. Their task is to teach information about the topic to the student they face, rotating regularly.

Table 3 on page 44 shows the rotation process, separating the stationary orange students with the mobile blue students. Each orange student could teach a part of proper alignment so each blue student will learn the entire lesson after a complete rotation through the line, or each orange student could teach an entirely different concept from alignment, providing a broader educational experience for the blue students. It is important to set clear objectives and expectations, and I have found it helpful to have a visible timer to signal rotations.

To assess an activity like speed dating, include yourself as a blue student to determine the orange students’ understanding of the topics. Alternatively, move around and take notes during the activity; rubrics could also come in handy here. This activity offers flexibility for varying group sizes, time available, and experience-appropriate topics. “Speed Sharing” works well as a summative assessment at the end of a class period or lesson, or as an opening review at the start of class. Consider introducing the process by allowing the students to teach anything they want (within your school’s guidelines). You might be surprised to learn what your students enjoy doing and learning!

Vocal technique, musicianship, and accuracy can also be assessed through singing checks using clear rubrics and cloud-based video submissions. Video recordings

are helpful to minimize disruptions to class routines, and they allow you to pause for comments, rewind for accuracy, and speed up to save time. I recommend using either excerpts from class literature or software like Sight Reading Factory to generate musical examples so you do not have to create the content yourself. Also, Sight Reading Factory allows students to record themselves with each generated example and can connect to some learning management systems such as Canvas or Blackboard, further preserving your time.

Other ensemble skills include balance, blend, and coordinated singing and can be assessed through small-group performances. These performances can happen in class or for an event like a dedicated concert or a “Parents’ Night.” When assessing it for a grade, consider giving the students their own rubric to assess themselves, each other, or both to deepen the learning process.

Practicing is an important part of performance,<sup>13</sup> so teaching and assessing practice habits is paramount to effective teaching in music.<sup>14</sup> After teaching appropriate procedures and elements of effective practicing, hold a “practice day” where your students demonstrate what they have learned. If you do not have an entire day to dedicate, set aside at least fifteen minutes for this activity. While your students practice in front of you, move around the room to observe, correct, and provide specific feedback as necessary. After a couple iterations of this activity, “practice days” lend themselves well as plans for substitute teachers.

Finally, the NCAS anchor standards four and six suggest there is merit in teaching your students how to appropriately select literature for a concert program. A simple assessment activity includes students creating a concert program using accessible software like Google Slides or Google Docs. More advanced programs like Canva are also effective, though they may entail learning curves for you or your students. I enjoy seeing which songs the students programmed, finding a few gems for my own choral library along the way. Consider selecting a song or two from this project to perform with that group. Students will feel overjoyed when a song they selected becomes part of the concert!

**Table 2. Performing Table and NCAS Anchor Standards**

Performing			
Anchor Standard 4		Analyze, interpret, and select artistic work for presentation.	
Anchor Standard 5		Develop and refine artistic work for presentation.	
Anchor Standard 6		Convey meaning through presentation of artistic work.	
Example Content	Anchor Standard	Sample Assessment	Tool or Strategy
<b>Vocal Technique:</b> Assess proper alignment, breath support, vowel shapes, etc.	5, 6	Peer-teaching	"Speed Dating" or "Speed Sharing"
<b>Accuracy:</b> Evaluate pitch, rhythm, and note accuracy	5, 6	*Singing Checks	Sight Reading Factory, Video/Audio Submissions
<b>Musicianship:</b> Assess phrasing, dynamics, and expression	5, 6	*Singing Checks	Sight Reading Factory, Video/Audio Submissions
<b>Ensemble Skills:</b> Evaluate students' ability to blend, balance, and sing in sync with others	5, 6	Small Ensemble Performance	Rubric: Students' and Teacher's
<b>Practice Habits:</b> Assess students' ability to practice effectively	4, 5, 6	*"Practice Day(s)"	Procedure and Rubric
<b>Programming:</b> Assess students' ability to effectively select literature for performance	5, 6	*Organize a Concert Program	Google Suite (Slides or Docs)

\*Indicates sample assessments that could easily be used as sub plans

## Assessments in Responding

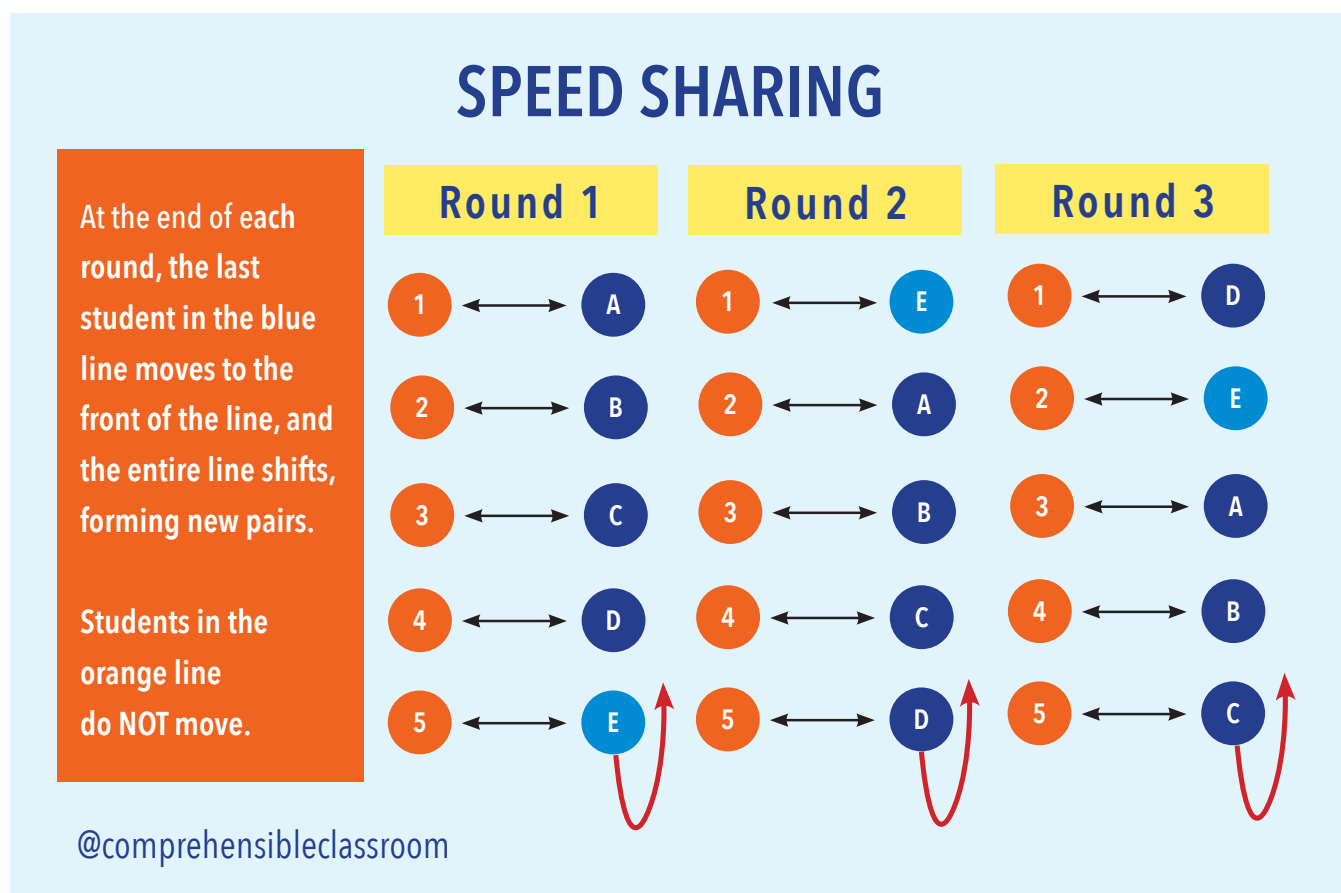
Responding is a strand that integrates well into assessment strategies of the other strands, offering many “two for one” assessments (Table 4 on the next page). The Responding content of sight-reading, for example, can also be used as the content for the previously discussed singing checks. Although listening skills can be assessed with ensemble skills and even composition and improvisation, I chose to focus on the context of analyzing musical recordings to broaden students’ musical experiences, as well as to learn how to study and discuss their own rehearsals and performances.

A guided listening journal has proven to be a simple and efficient assessment method. I often use it as the starter during a unit or grading term and choose excerpts or songs that are appropriate for the singers’ age, interest, and ability. Frequently, I select recordings of music from my choral library, selections from other

concerts I have seen, or otherwise engaging music like unaccompanied vocal mashups. The journal document itself includes prompts, specific questions, and sentence stems as scaffolding tools to guide their thoughts. I recommend the journal be a cloud-based digital document to keep it readily available, organized, and easy to submit; again, Google Docs is a great option.

Although worksheets and handouts are common formal assessment tools to determine music literacy and knowledge of music theory, many students prefer games. Educational online games and applications are often fun and simple while connecting directly to appropriate knowledge and content. They also lend themselves nicely to serve as substitute plans or activities for extension or review. Consider game services like Blooket, Gimkit, or Kahoot (links available at the end of this article). Similar to Sight Reading Factory, some games might be able to be integrated into your district’s

**Table 3. Speed Dating or “Speed Sharing” (Comprehensible Classroom, 2014)**



**Table 4. Responding Table and NCAS Anchor Standards**

Responding			
Anchor Standard 7		Perceive and analyze artistic work.	
Anchor Standard 8		Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.	
Anchor Standard 9		Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.	
Example Content	Anchor Standard	Sample Assessment	Tool or Strategy
<b>Music Reading:</b> Assess ability to read musical notation, including rhythms, pitches, musical symbols, and proper use of terms	7, 8, 9	*Educational Games: Blooket, Gimkit, Kahoot, etc.	Screenshot of "score" or results
<b>Sight Reading:</b> Evaluate students' capacity to perform unfamiliar music at first sight	7, 9	*Singing or Rhythm Checks	Sight Reading Factory, Video/Audio Submissions
<b>Music Theory Knowledge:</b> Assess understanding of scales, key signatures, chord progressions, etc.	7, 8, 9	*Educational Games: Blooket, Gimkit, Kahoot, etc.	Screenshot of "score" or results
<b>Listening Skills:</b> Assess ability to analyze and describe musical elements in recordings	7, 8, 9	Guided Listening Journal	Google Docs
<b>Self Assessment:</b> Evaluate personal performances and progress	7, 9	Regular Reflections (Post Concert)	Google Forms or another survey tool

\*Indicates sample assessments that could easily be used as sub plans

learning management system, providing you with the capabilities to easily create activities, assignments, and assessments.

Self-assessment is always included in my post-performance routine. I have a pre-made Google Form duplicated and adjusted for each performance that asks questions about their recent experiences at the performance and throughout the rehearsal process. I also have singers set specific individual goals to work on before the next performance, giving me insight into their concerns, priorities, and musical understanding. The bulk of the self-assessment reflection instructs the students to rate themselves in areas I have identified as my focus objectives for the year. Some examples include pitch, behavior, sight-reading, and musical notation. As a bonus, parents have usually shown more interest and support when I bring the responses to parent-teacher

conferences, especially if they can see trends and progress in their child's educational experiences in choir.

## Assessments in Connecting

Connecting has always proven difficult to assess without assigning large papers or projects, and I used to think that I could not spare that valuable instruction time. However, after experiencing a shift in priorities during my early teaching years, I began to include a few graded tasks throughout my regular teaching. Almost immediately I noticed a difference in the way students discussed music and culture, so I began dedicating time in my curriculum to teach and assess the Connecting strand (Table 5).

A favorite assessment to reinforce historical and cultural context in our music and community is a collabora-

**Table 5. Connecting Table and NCAS Anchor Standards**

Connecting			
Anchor Standard 10		Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.	
Anchor Standard 11		Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historic context to deepen understanding.	
Example Content	Anchor Standard	Sample Assessment	Tool or Strategy
<b>Historical/Cultural Context:</b> Evaluate knowledge of music history, styles, and cultural influences	10, 11	*Collaborative slideshow on an era, style, or culture; Present at PTC	Mentimeter, Nearpod, Google Slides
<b>Personal Connection:</b> Applying meaningful transfers between personal experiences and musical literature.	10	* Self "interview" on a class song; "new hit single"	Google Docs or Forms; video project

\*Indicates sample assessments that could easily be used as sub plans




rative slideshow for each choir using software programs like Mentimeter, Nearpod, or Google Slides. Each student takes ownership of a single slide and contributes to the topic of the slideshow, or they can choose their own topic within set parameters. The content must relate to what we are singing or studying, or what they are learning in other classes, to ensure a connection is made to their personal lives. Students have expressed how much they ended up enjoying the experience, noting feelings of collaboration and satisfaction when the slideshow is finished. I display the running slideshow next to my area at parent-teacher conferences as well as email a link to all of my students' parents/guardians and the rest of the school's faculty, staff, and administration; this often receives quite a bit of positive feedback.

A "self-interview" can be a helpful way to assess students' connections to class content and their personal experiences. Students will choose a current class song and conduct an "interview" either by filling out a simple digital document using Google Forms or Google Docs, or by including actual video footage of the students responding to the questions using recording tools such as a camera application. I especially like the assessment for its flexibility, relevance to social media, and technology integration. Students enjoy the creativity of the assessment, which often results in engaging and sometimes hilarious interviews.

### Exit Ticket

Addressing effective assessment in the choral classroom is crucial for fostering genuine musical growth and aligning teaching practices with educational standards. This article has explored various strategies for evaluating students based on musical content knowledge rather than non-achievement skills, addressing the four strands of the National Core Arts Standards: Creating, Performing, Responding, and Connecting. By implementing innovative assessment methods such as those discussed in this article, choral educators can more effectively gauge their students' musical development while maintaining engaging and efficient classroom practices.

The shift toward content-based assessment not only enhances the educational experience for students but

also provides teachers with more meaningful data to inform their instruction. By embracing these approaches, teachers can create a more comprehensive and equitable evaluation system that truly reflects students' musical abilities and progress, ultimately leading to more effective and rewarding choral education experiences. 

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QR code for  
Supplemental Resources

### Suggested Technology Tools

Apple Inc.,  
GarageBand Computer software  
<https://www.apple.com/mac/garageband/>

Audacity Team,  
Audacity Computer software  
<https://www.audacityteam.org>

Blooket LLC,  
Blooket Educational platform  
<https://www.blooket.com>

Canva Pty Ltd.,  
Canva Graphic design software  
<https://www.canva.com>

Gimkit LLC,  
Gimkit Educational platform  
<https://www.gimkit.com>

Instructure,  
Canvas Learning management system  
<https://www.instructure.com/canvas>

Kahoot! AS,  
Kahoot Educational platform  
<https://www.kahoot.com>

Mentimeter AB,  
Mentimeter Presentation software  
<https://www.mentimeter.com>

Nearpod Inc.,  
Nearpod Educational technology platform  
<https://www.nearpod.com>

Sight Reading Factory,  
Sight Reading Factory Computer software  
<https://www.sightreadingfactory.com>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Palm, "Performance Assessment and Authentic Assessment: A Conceptual Analysis of the Literature," *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation* 13, no. 4 (2008): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.7275/0qpc-ws45>.

<sup>2</sup> A list of suggested reading related to assessment practices is available in the supplemental resources document. See the QR code on page 47 or visit [acda.org/choraljournal](https://acda.org/choraljournal) and view the October 2025 issue page.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Kambs, "Assessment Practices and Beliefs of Secondary Choir Teachers," *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* (2024): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/875512332412366>.

<sup>4</sup> National Association for Music Education, "Music Model Cornerstone Assessments." NAFME, accessed October 10, 2024, <https://nafme.org/resource/music-model-cornerstone-assessments/>.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher A. Hafen, Bridget K. Hamre, Joseph P. Allen, Courtney A. Bell, Drew H. Gitomer, and Robert C. Pianta, "Teaching through Interactions in Secondary School Classrooms: Revisiting the Factor Structure and Practical Application of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System–Secondary," *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 35, no. 5–6 (2015): 651–80, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431614537117>.

<sup>6</sup> Heidi L. Andrade, "A Critical Review of Research on Student Self-Assessment," *Frontiers in Education* 4 (2019): 87, <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2019.00087>.

<sup>7</sup> Agnes E. Smale-Jacobse, Adrie Meijer, Madeleine Helms-Lorenz, and Rindert Maulana, "Differentiated Instruction in Secondary Education: A Systematic Review of Research Evidence," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019): 2366, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02366>.

- <sup>8</sup> Sherri J. Scott, "Rethinking the Roles of Assessment in Music Education," *Music Educators Journal* 98, no. 3 (2012): 31–5, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0027432111434742>.
- <sup>9</sup> Brian C. Wesolowski, "Tracking Student Achievement in Music Performance: Developing Student Learning Objectives for Growth Model Assessments," *Music Educators Journal* 102, no. 1 (2015): 39–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0027432115589352>.
- <sup>10</sup> National Coalition for Arts Standards, National Core Arts Standards. Accessed October 10, 2024, <https://www.nationalartsstandards.org/>.
- <sup>11</sup> Elizabeth R. Hearn, "Assessment in the Choral Classroom: A Case Study of a Secondary Choral Program," *International Journal of Research in Choral Singing* 9 (2021): 41–67; Benjamin Kambs, "Assessment Practices and Beliefs"; Edward J. Kotora, "Assessment Practices in the Choral Music Classroom: A Survey of Ohio High School Choral Music Teachers and College Choral Methods Professors," *Contributions to Music Education* 32, no. 2 (2005): 65–80; Julie A. Russell and James R. Austin, "Assessment Practices of Secondary Music Teachers," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 58, no. 1 (2010): 37–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429409360062>.
- <sup>12</sup> Comprehensible Classroom, Speed Dating, "The Comprehensible Classroom," 2014, <https://comprehensibleclassroom.com/2014/11/28/speed-dating-cooperative-learning>.
- <sup>13</sup> Aaron Williamon and Elizabeth Valentine, "Quantity and Quality of Musical Practice as Predictors of Performance Quality," *British Journal of Psychology* 91 (2000): 353–76, <https://doi.org/10.1348/000712600161871>.
- <sup>14</sup> Katie Zhukov, "Effective Practising: A Research Perspective," *Australian Journal of Music Education* 1 (2009): 3–12, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ912405.pdf>.