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An Appraisal of Current Practice in Instrumental Tuition Assessment to Identify 'Best Practice' Strategies

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Abstract

Assessment in instrumental teaching utilizes a range of different strategies including external exams. The purpose of this study is to give an appraisal of current practice in instrumental tuition assessment to identify 'best practice' strategies. Seventeen experienced instrumental teachers were selected as subjects to complete a small-scale survey to help identify assessment strategies, explore why they were used and determine a range of qualities of 'best practice' assessment. The quantitative and qualitative data gathered reinforced the importance of a formative assessment as the preferred assessment method used by instrumental teachers with external summative exams being utilized if they were in-line with the student's development. 'Best practice' assessment recognises the individual needs of the student through negotiated goals and flexible teaching strategies. Current assessment practice is valid and authentic but the reliability could be improved through teacher training and support. A large scale research project could provide data on a greater range of instrumental teachers and gather more in-depth information through interviews and observations over a greater period of time. Future directions include: research into instrumental teacher professional development and mentoring, the development of an instrumental teaching assessment resource, and studies into why students learn instruments and what they enjoy about making music. It was also noted that instrumental teaching seems to lack a central body that provides standards of learning, teaching, curriculum and assessment and supports professional development or mentoring.

Definitions

Alternative assessment: assessment strategies other than traditional assessment

Assessment: the measurement of student knowledge and skill

Assessment drivers: the reasons why assessment occurs

Best practice: provides a benchmark of excellence

Classroom music: the secondary school music class which has a theoretical focus rather than a performance focus.

Formal assessment: collects and reports data (Grashal, 1993 pp 41)

Formative assessment: assessment that occurs during learning and places more emphasis on the process of learning

Informal assessment: assessment that is used for student or teacher development but is not collected or reported

Instrumental music: music classes that focus on ensemble performance, such as a concert band

Instrumental tuition: individual or small group music lessons taught by an instrument specialist

Pre-service assessment strategies: assessment strategies that the subjects had been exposed to prior to becoming an instrumental teacher

Portfolio: a collection of artefacts that demonstrates the process and product of learning

Segmented assessment: a device used to break down an assignment into objectives and to specify point values for each part (Chiodo, Frakes, MacLeod, Pagel, Shuler, Thompson, & Watts 1998 pp 34)

Subjects: participants in the survey

Summative assessment: assessment that occurs at the end of learning and places more emphasis on the end product

Traditional assessment: assessment strategies based on performance or paper and pencil tests (Hickey & Webster, 2001 pp 23)

Introduction

Instrumental tuition is a vital element of secondary school music education, supported by the Department of Education and Training in Victoria and through targeted programs in schools. Assessment is an essential part of these programs and many schools use models based on the external exams offered by organisations such as the Australian Music Education Board, Trinity College (London), the Australian and New Zealand Cultural Arts and the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.

Since the 1880s in Australia these external exams have served as benchmarks for instrumental teachers in regard to repertoire, technical exercises and graded levels of progression. Instrumental teachers have continued to instruct using this traditional approach which is in line with general secondary and tertiary approaches worldwide.

Whilst there has been much research into assessment strategies in instrumental music and classroom music, instrumental tuition has been somewhat overlooked. Educational literature from Australia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom has a wealth of information regarding assessment practices, yet there appears to be little consistent application of these principles to instrumental tuition. There is a strong tradition in instrumental music of teaching "the way you were taught" with little application of modern assessment techniques, possibly due to a lack of teacher education and support.

This project has been inspired by my observations of current assessment techniques used in instrumental tuition that seem to be heavily reliant on the external exam model. It recognises the lack of research into instrumental teaching assessment strategies, and reviews existing strategies to provide valuable data for further research.

Therefore, this research project is an appraisal of current practice in instrumental tuition assessment to identify 'best practice' strategies.

To achieve this aim Chapter 1 investigates the elements assessed in instrumental music and assessment strategies used, in order to define the qualities of 'best practice'. Since there is a lack of literature regarding this topic in Australia, articles from the United States of America and the United Kingdom are also considered.

Chapter 2 outlines the methods considered to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data from a range of instrumental teachers in Victoria. It justifies the appropriateness of the survey format, selection of subjects, questions posed, and the analysis of data

Chapter 3 analyses the results of the instrumental teacher survey and discusses summative versus formative assessment, 'best practice' assessment strategies and teacher training and support.

The final section draws conclusions concerning current assessment practice in instrumental tuition, 'best practice' strategies and directions for future research.

Chapter 1 - Literature Review

Instrumental tuition's primary goal is for students to learn the skills and knowledge required to play an instrument. Music students at secondary school level receive tuition at a private studio or at their school and are assessed using summative and formative assessment strategies such as performance exams and self-assessment. Alternative assessment methods, such as the use of a portfolio, are used widely in classroom assessment and could be adapted for instrumental tuition to acknowledge the process of learning as well as the final product.

Since there is a prominent gap in research regarding assessment in instrumental tuition in Australia, this review will explore literature related to instrumental music and classroom music assessment practices. It is commonly recognised that there is no one 'best way' to assess the complex process of music learning and according to Hickey and Webster (2001) best practice would utilize a range of assessment strategies.

1.1   General Practice

Assessment in instrumental tuition is concerned with the student's ability to master specific objectives, both technical and musical (Department of Education, Queensland in association with Ministry of Education (Office of School Administration), Victoria, no date). Some music programs also focus on non-musical elements that recognise the abilities of the student as a learner.

Common technical objectives are:
- Instrument knowledge
- Playing posture
- Tone
- Pitch repertoire

- Tuning and intonation

- Articulation

- Musical symbols and terms

Common musical objectives are:

- Performance of music

- Responding to music

- Understanding of melodic, rhythmic and harmonic properties

- Recognition of the world's musical heritage through range of repertoire

- Music as a mode of expression

- Improvisation and composition

Common non-musical elements are:

- Attendance

- Attitude/Behaviour

- Organisation

- Effort

Technical objectives are measured using formal assessment methods that clearly show competency levels. This can be done using formative and summative assessment methods. Formative assessment is the regular monitoring of student learning (Goolsby, 1999) and can be realised through the use of a portfolio, student diary or checklists. Summative assessment occurs at the end of learning (Goolsby, 1999) and can be realised through concerts, auditions and external or school-based exams.

The assessment of musical objectives is a problem that many music teachers struggle with. A combination of formal and informal methods gives the student the greatest opportunity to demonstrate their musicality. Formal assessment methods require the collection and reporting of data (Grashal, 1993) such as a recital or a paper-and-pencil test. Informal assessment methods consist of

discussions and observations made throughout the lesson (Morton, 2006) and the diagnosis of learning difficulties (Goolsby, 1999).

Non-musical elements have a history of being too subjective and do not give any information regarding the student's musical development (Lehman, 1997). This has become a particular problem in the United Sates where students can complete the band program with excellent grades due to good behaviour and effort, but have no mastery of instrumental skills or musical knowledge.

The United States of America has developed national standards for music which take into account technical, musical and non-musical elements. LeCroy (1999) emphasises that these standards reflect the best interests of the nation's music students, create definitive levels of accomplishment that are accepted nationwide and are useful for assessing the effectiveness of a program and enhancing it through comparison.

1.2   Best Practice Assessment

Whilst there are many arguments for which assessment strategies should be used in instrumental music, there are some characteristics that pervade all 'best practice' strategies.

In 1985, Wanwick identified the two most important features in good assessment as validity and reliability. Validity is the relevance of the assessment to the task and reliability is the consistency of the assessment and results (Brasher, Circle, Granlie, Griffith, Hansen, Kember, Le Croy, Rinaldi, Sanz, & Wells 1999). These features make up the key characteristics of best practice assessment today with the addition of authenticity to the list (Brasher, et al., 1999, Bryce 2006).

Authenticity refers to tasks that have a real world context and give valid information about a student (Scott, 2004). Hallam (1998 pp 279) advocates

music performance as "the most authentic assessment that we can provide for instrumental pupils." During instrumental tuition, theoretical concepts can also be reinforced by practical exercises.

The characteristics of validity, reliability and authenticity are necessary for any 'best practice' assessment task. The role of the assessment task to assess the process of learning or the product of learning has sparked much debate between various musical educator factions. Summative and formative assessments are able to be valid, reliable and authentic, but the purposes of the two methods are quite different.

1.3   Summative Assessment

Summative assessment provides additional feedback on a student's progress in achieving learning outcomes, often in a realistic exam situation such as a contest or recital. They are also an accountability tool, often undertaken externally to provide an objective report of the success of the student, teacher and music program (Lehman, 1989).

One of the most popular forms of summative assessment in Australia is the external exams run by the Australian Music Examination Board. These exams are useful for providing additional feedback on a student's progress in a range of areas such as performance, technique, theory, aural skills and music history.

Summative assessment occurs in instrumental music in the United States with paper-and-pencil tests for their national standards that provide an objective dimension to the appraisal of musical aptitude and achievement (Wanwick, 1985). The removal of the teacher from the assessment process ensured that an objective grading of student understanding was reported.

Summative assessment of performance is traditionally done holistically with an experienced assessor grading the performance as a whole. To be able to accurately assess students on a range of areas in summative assessment, it is necessary to break the product down into a series of descriptive items (Bryce 2006). Carl Seashore was the first to promote segmented assessment in music with his thirty aspects of the 'musical mind' in 1919 (Bryce, 2006). But it wasn't until the 1970s that segmented assessment began to be taken seriously in music literature in the form of rating scales. In 1991 the United Kingdom replaced their holistic approach to summative assessment in music performance with a segmented system (Mills, 1991).

Segmented assessment can take the form of a rating scale, checklist, rubric or criteria that consist of outcomes relevant to the instruction. It is a device used to break down an assignment into objectives and to specify point values for each part (Chiodo, Frakes, MacLeod, Pagel, Shuler, Thompson, & Watts 1998). The strength of segmented assessment lies in its objective measurement that is useful for determining levels of perception, preference and skill (Webster, 1998) to assist in learning as well as having an emphasis on measurement and accountability (Cope, 1996). Students are well aware of the outcomes of instruction by using segmented assessment and can be involved in the development and revision of the assessment criteria (Scott 2004, Wells 1998).

Segmented assessment is seen by some educators as being not as musically credible as holistic assessment as examiners feel that they must turn the performance into something less coherent than music before assessing (Mills, 1991). But it is generally agreed that a segmented approach is much more valid than subjectively ranking a student's playing without the use of predetermined criteria (Haley 1999). In Australia, Bryce (2006) argues that segmented assessment is useful for assisting learning, but that it is more authentic in music to use a holistic approach to assessment.

Summative assessment can have a negative impact on student learning. External exams can conflict with school assessment procedures and end up dominating lesson content (Morton 2006, Watson & Forrest 2004). Music exams have been criticised as being a traditional approach that do not think in terms of sound, aesthetic decision making or demonstrate the merger of skills with creative application (Hickey & Webster 2001). Hallam (1998 pp 272) notes that "if assessment is by examination or test, pupils tend to adopt a surface approach to learning."

Lehman (1989) questions the validity and reliability of summative assessment where a particular person or group is performing a particular music at a particular time. 'High stakes' assessment like this requires high reliability ratings between assessors which Bryce (2006) suggests can be achieved through explicit criteria and comprehensive briefing and training.

Whilst summative assessment can be valid, it must be part of a larger picture of formative assessment tasks that are a natural part of the learning process (Webster, 1998). This ensures that a student's grade is not determined by a one-off event, but a collection of assessment tasks over time.

1.4   Formative Assessment

Formative assessment focuses on short-term goals within a larger learning sequence, giving the teacher and student valuable feedback in what progress is being made and which teaching approaches are most effective. Formative assessment occurs regularly in instrumental tuition as the teacher determines content and appropriate instructional methods, during the lesson to check understanding and at the end of the lesson to determine its success, the student reaction and how it may impact future lessons (Morton, 2006).

In music, self-assessment is a common formative assessment strategy which assists student learning through critical listening, reflection, comparison and ownership of their learning (Brasher et al. 1999, Bryce 2006, Burrack 2002, Hallam 1998, Wells 1998). It is very popular in classroom music with some teachers giving a self-determined result equal weight in a grade along with peer and teacher assessment (Chiodo, et al., 1998).

Hallam (1998, pp 281) identifies two stages in creating a self-assessment task: setting criteria and making a judgement about the extent to which the criteria have been met. This can be focused in the form of a rating scale, rubric or teacher-lead discussion. Older students are seen as articulate enough to be able to explain what they have accomplished and present the information orally (Brasher, et al., 1999).

Self-assessment is also used to teach students how to develop independently by giving the students the tools for enhancing their capacity to learn (Goolsby 1999, Flowers 2003, Wells 1998). Students can develop their own criteria of what constitutes a successful performance and through evolving these criteria, improve their evaluative skills and musical beliefs.

1.5   Combining Summative and Formative Assessment

A combination of summative and formative assessment is most beneficial to the student and the teacher as it ensures the process and the product of learning are recognised. Performance assessment exams have a summative outcome, but targeted comments by the examiners can make it also formative (Mills 1991). In current exam methods, students are more influenced by the grade received rather than the general comments received, often from a teacher who is not even a specialist on the examined instrument. It is this focus on the end product that hampers the development of students by not recognising that the creation of music is a continual work in progress.

Many educators support the idea of music assessment being more than just a summative evaluation of the product, but also recognising the process of learning (Colwell 1998, Hickey & Webster 2001). This could be achieved through the incorporation of a self-assessment component to performance exams or the construction of a series of small-scale tasks that culminate in a final exam.

We must always keep in mind what the role of the assessment is, to prevent the undertaking of assessment for assessment's sake. Hallam (1998 pp 273) cautions us that "in education, assessment is usually the end product of a process of learning…in instrumental music this reverses with the evaluation or assessment procedures determining what is learnt."

1.6   Less Common Assessment Practices

There has been much advancement made in the range of classroom music assessment practices, but these have not been as readily accepted by instrumental music teachers. Two alternative assessment methods that have become more popular with the advent of modern technology are the use of recordings for self-reflection and the creation of a student portfolio.

In the last ten years video and audio technology has improved to the standard where recordings are being commonly used in classroom music to document performances and provide the vehicle for self-assessment (Chiodo, et al.1998, Hallam 1998, Wells 1998). The formative nature of the self-assessment supports student reflection on achievements and assists in the setting of new goals (Burrack, 2002).

If the main goal of instrumental tuition is to develop the skills to play an instrument, it is highly important for the student to be able to be critically aware of their development. For those who advocate a non-standardized format to

assessment, the recording of student's practice, demonstration or performance for later comparison meet the requirements of authentic assessment (Colwell 1998). Burrack (2002 pp 31) supports this argument commenting that students using recordings can "authentically assess their performance beyond what was possible while they were playing."

Recordings are adaptable to a range of assessment methods including segmented and holistic approaches. Instrumental teachers can use video and audio recording for repeated self-assessment that can focus on specific musical dimensions as well as using it to discriminately assess the dynamic of a whole group and individuals (Chiodo, et al. 1999, Wells 1998).

But meaningful recordings require greater time, funding, training and quality equipment on behalf of the teacher and the school. Bryce (2006) cautions us that the ability of recorded performances to enhance or impair performance will always depend on its quality.

Another way that students can be critically aware of their development is through the collection of artefacts over time in a reflective portfolio. A number of instrumental music teachers in the United States are requiring their students to create audio portfolios: a tape that has recordings of all the student's performance assessments throughout the student's time in the music program (Brasher, et al., 1999 pp 29). These can be prepared by students and submitted digitally or by using audio cassettes and draws attention to critical performance element of tone quality (Goolsby, 1999).

Many music educators see the student portfolio as the preferred assessment tool for focusing on both process and product (Asmus 1999, Bryce 2006, Cope 1996, Hickey & Webster 2001, Webster 1998). Bryce (2006 pp 30) defines a portfolio as a collection of artefacts of a student's learning experiences assembled over

time. These artefacts are reflected on to identify strengths, weaknesses and progress made and can be reviewed to establish new goals (Burrack, 2002).

Portfolios are particular adept at documenting learning in creative-thinking tasks, such as composition and improvisation, as well as musical understanding, aesthetic sensitivity and critical-listening skills (Burrack 2002, Hickey & Webster 2001). Bryce (2006 pp 30) suggests the inclusion of tangible artefacts such as 'final performance' recording accompanied by diary notes on practice and rehearsal, listening log, written harmonic accompaniment to a song and the recoding of a student's composition.

A valid, reliable and authentic assessment of a student portfolio is a challenge for any teacher. Hickey and Webster (2001) recommend the use of a rubric to evaluate a portfolio, perhaps using previously established criteria (Asmus, 1999). Bryce (2006) maintains that a portfolio is best assessed through a student/teacher conference.

Using recordings and developing a portfolio are excellent tools for recognising student development, but they require a lot of time and management on behalf of the teacher. In classroom music this is much more manageable where the teacher has a number of periods a week with a student, but in instrumental music lessons often occur on a weekly basis for as little as thirty minutes. The frequency of lessons, length of the lesson, support from other music staff, access to equipment and training in assessment are all factors which hamper the use of these alternative assessment strategies.

Instrumental teachers assess students both informally and formally on technique, musicality and sometimes non-musical elements. The role of assessment can be either summative or formative but best assessment practice should always exhibit qualities of validity, reliability and authenticity.

Summative assessment strategies used include external exams, national standardised tests and segmented assessment. A weakness in these strategies is their validity as a once-off event, the danger of the assessment becoming non-authentic and how exam content limits the range of student learning.

Formative assessment strategies are teacher driven and commonly involve self-assessment. Formative and summative assessment strategies can be combined very effectively to give a student an accurate picture of not only where they are at, but where they have come from and can head towards.

Alternative assessment strategies such as the portfolio and audio or video recording can be very useful in assessing both the product of learning and the process of learning, but are resource-heavy and require training and support if they are to be used effectively in instrumental tuition.

Though the literature review provided lots of information regarding qualities of best practice, there were no examples on concrete tasks that are used successfully in instrumental tuition. Through an investigation into well-established models of teaching, instrumental teachers could be informed about a variety of successful assessment practices and why they are used. This would help to fill a large gap in resources for instrumental tutors and could provide support for alternative assessment techniques.

Therefore, this project is designed to be an appraisal of current practice in instrumental tuition assessment to identify 'best practice' strategies

Chapter 2 – Methodology

The research question derived from the review of literature contained a number of themes that indicated the type of data required for my research approach. This chapter explores the different methods available for data collection and justifies the choice of a survey model and subject selection. The relevance of both quantitative and qualitative data are discussed to inform the design of the survey questions and responses. Responses from the subjects would need to be anonymous and coded to allow for analysis.

2.1   Research Question

Assessment in instrumental tuition has been primarily based on summative external exams, but an extensive review of literature revealed that a range of formative and summative assessment strategies provide a more accurate representation of student learning. There is a vital need for data regarding the range of assessment strategies used in instrumental teaching and what constitutes 'best practice'.

There were five themes that I developed to expand upon the literature findings regarding assessment in instrumental tuition:

1. What is considered 'best practice' by instrumental teachers?
2. What assessment strategies are being used in instrumental music and why?
3. Do instrumental teachers find summative or formative assessment methods more valid?
4. How are instrumental teachers developing assessment strategies?
5. Do assessment strategies reflect the teacher's values or are in response to the various drivers of assessment?

2.2   Method Approach

The literature review revealed a lack of information concerning assessment in instrumental teaching and the need for a basic interpretive study. Since there was no previous research done in this field, careful thought needed to be given to the method approach and research instruments.

Since the focus of this project would be to identify 'best practice' strategies, it would be more relevant to select a homogenous sample of experienced instrumental teachers rather than a broader study sample.   Seventeen experienced secondary school instrumental teachers were selected as survey subjects from contacts I had formed over the years of music making and teaching. Using a random name generator, I was able to create pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and created a consent form which can be observed as Appendix 1.

This small-scale project would be ideal for gathering initial quantitative data on assessment strategies currently being used in instrumental teaching. A qualitative approach would also be incorporated to draw out rich and complex data concerning 'best practice' perceptions by the subjects.

A case study would have too narrow a range in using teachers from a single school, and observing events or behaviours would be too time-consuming given my project constraints.   An interview approach would be suitable, but time constraints would limit the ability to extract the relevant data. I also believe that interviews limit reflection for answering deeper-level questions.

A small scale survey was ideal as it would allow for both qualitative and quantitative questioning, could be readily distributed and analysed as well as allowing for personalised responses from the subjects. An initial survey for selected experienced instrumental teachers was developed to begin collecting

data on instrumental teaching assessment, with the projection of influencing a wider, more in-depth survey of instrumental teaching.

It was important to have three levels of questions that would allow for different modes of response:

1. Simple/factual information about teacher (quantitative),
2. Selection/multiple choice (quantitative/qualitative)
3. Open ended, descriptive questions (qualitative)

The formal questions would gather factual data regarding the teacher and their practice. The open-ended questions would be designed to encourage elaboration by the subjects.

2.3   Data Collection

I began by fashioning ten questions that would address the five themes stated in 2.1 Research Question:

1. What are the qualities of good assessment?
2. Is assessment necessary in instrumental tuition?
3. What could be done to improve assessment in instrumental tuition?
4. Why do the assessment strategies used work?
5. What assessment strategies are learnt in pre-service training?
6. What strategies are used now?
7. How frequently are these strategies used?
8. What goals of music are valued?
9. What are the main assessment drivers?
10. Are government standards from VELS, CSF II, VCE and VET useful?

I felt it was also important to classify the teaching environment and subject background with information regarding school type, class size, and years of teaching experience. This would help in identifying any environmental anomalies

and act as engaging, easy to answer questions to begin the survey with. Care was taken with the wording of questions regarding experience as they could be seen as offensive to teacher's training, especially given the informal acquisition of skills in instrumental tuition

The ten questions were grouped under the headings of assessment history, assessment philosophy, assessment guidelines and assessment evaluation. By looking at the possible responses it was determined whether to use a list, open-ended questions or Likert-type scales such as 5-point opinion categories and frequency categories.

A draft survey was trialed with colleagues to get feedback on individual survey items and the completion time. Modifications were made to categories including the incorporation of a neutral alternative and space for adding 'other' responses. The final draft of the survey can be observed in Appendix 2.

The length of the survey was five pages due to tables for the list and category questions, but it averaged twenty minutes to complete due to the logical progression of questions and amount of pre-coded response categories. It was distributed and collected via email with the exception of one survey that was given in hard-copy to a subject who preferred to write by hand.

It was initially recommended that between thirty and fifty subject results would be required to draw conclusions. But since this is a small-scale survey, it would be more realistic to hand-pick ten experienced instrumental tutors from five different schooling systems: Government, Independent Private, Independent Catholic, Primary and Private.

It was necessary to have a reasonable time limit by which the surveys should be returned. Even though the survey takes around twenty minutes to complete, I

gave the subjects a week to return it due to the irregular hours of the instrumental teacher, and to allow time for reflection.

One disadvantage of the survey approach is that the subject only gets one opportunity to give an answer. If a question is unclear or the subject is are pressed for time the responses (especially the descriptive ones) will suffer. I kept the questions clear and short and designed the survey so that there was a gradual progression in the depth of questioning, and in the final descriptive question. The consent form also gave a summary of the purpose of the survey and my contact details if there were difficulties.

2.4   Data Analysis

There was a relatively high response rate of 65% (eleven out of seventeen) with non-responses being due to technical difficulties and work commitments. The qualitative responses from each of the subjects were very informative and I believe this is because the topic is highly salient to the respondents. The results were double-checked and manually inputted into a Microsoft Excel® spreadsheet so that tables and graphs could be generated.

The first three questions concerning subject data were coded according to the listed responses. The responses for question 2.1 were sorted into categories of 'education degree', 'music degree', 'master-classes' and 'other'. Question 2.2 was given one mark for each pre-service strategy exposed to and then this was given as a percentage out of 11 so that the lack of exposure was also recognised.

Question 2.3 had five frequency categories ranging from 'every lesson' to 'never'. These responses were coded as 0 to 4 with 4 being the highest. The mean for each strategy was calculated and then given as an overall percentage out of 100.

Question 3.1 had five opinion categories: 'essential', 'important', 'undecided', 'not important' and 'not essential'. After experimenting with different values it was decided that 'undecided' would be given the middle value of 2 with 'essential' being 4, 'important' 3, 'not important' 1 and 'not essential' 0. It was necessary to give 'undecided' a greater value than the two negative opinions so that positive and negative patterns were easily identified. The mean for each aim was calculated and then given as an overall mark out of 4 so it would relate to the initial category descriptors. The results for Question 3.2 were analysed in the same way as for Question 3.1.

For the open-ended questions, all responses were written out and then coded into themes. A brief summary was written outlining the key points using pseudonyms and the question number for reference. The pseudonyms of the 11 subjects were: Steven, Paul, Amy, Deborah, Susan, Lucy, Kathy, Albert, Sylvia, David, Robert and Juan.

A small-scale survey was constructed which would gather both quantitative and qualitative data from a homogenous selection of experienced instrumental teachers. Closed-ended questions were designed in the form of lists, opinion categories and frequency categories to allow for ease of response and coding. The second half of the survey contained five open-ended questions that were designed to elicit complex, qualitative responses. The quantitative data was coded numerically to allow for statistical analysis whilst the qualitative data was summarised using key themes and quotes from the responses. A consent form was sent with the survey and the anonymity of all subjects was preserved through the use of pseudonyms.

Chapter 3 – Results and Discussion

The results from the small-scale survey identified three main areas of 'best practice' assessment in instrumental music: summative versus formative assessment, best practice assessment strategies, and teacher training and support. Because of the lack of research in this field and development of theories, comparisons to the literature review will be limited. There will be no summary statement for at the end of this chapter as the formal conclusions will be drawn in the last chapter.

3.1   Summative versus formative assessment

The literature review revealed that summative forms of assessment, such as external exams, place emphasis on the product of learning and that formative assessment focuses on the process of learning. Graph 3.1 below indicates the assessment strategies, both summative and formative, that the subjects were exposed to pre-service.
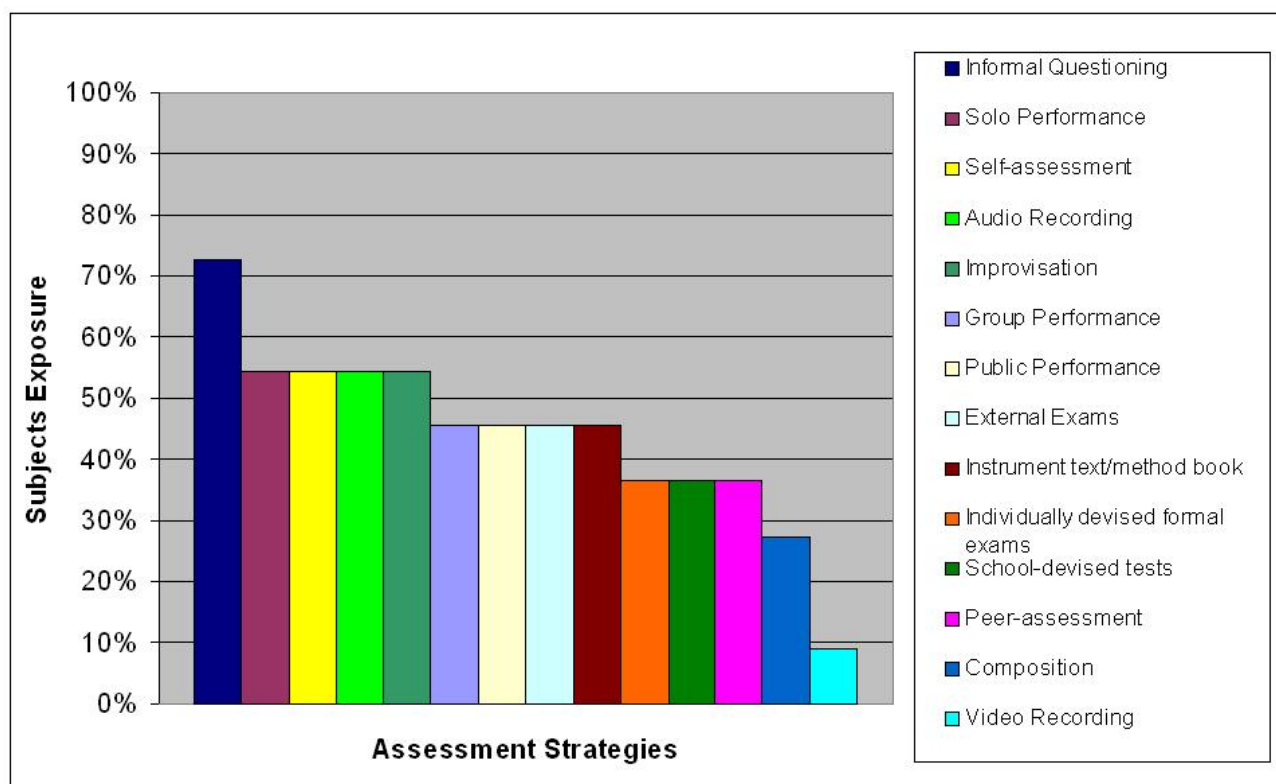
GRAPH 3.1 – Subject Exposure to Pre-Service Assessment Strategies

As seen above, informal questioning was by far the most commonly used form of assessment encountered before training. This formative assessment is used in frequently in instrumental music to diagnose problems (Goolsby, 1999) and provide immediate feedback, so it was no surprise that it was the most common form of pre-service assessment.

More than half of the subjects were also familiar pre-service with solo performance, self-assessment, audio recording and improvisation, reflecting Hallam's (1998) belief of performance being the most authentic assessment in instrumental teaching.

The low familiarity with video recording, composition, peer assessment, school-devised tests and individually devised formal exams could be due to the perception of these strategies as classroom music assessment. Instrumental

music teachers can lack resources as well as the time to give these strategies as much emphasis as practical skills.

Overall, the assessment strategies the subjects were exposed to pre-service were not common enough for significant preferences. By looking at the use of assessment strategies currently used by the subjects, it could be observed which formative and summative assessment methods were used more frequently.
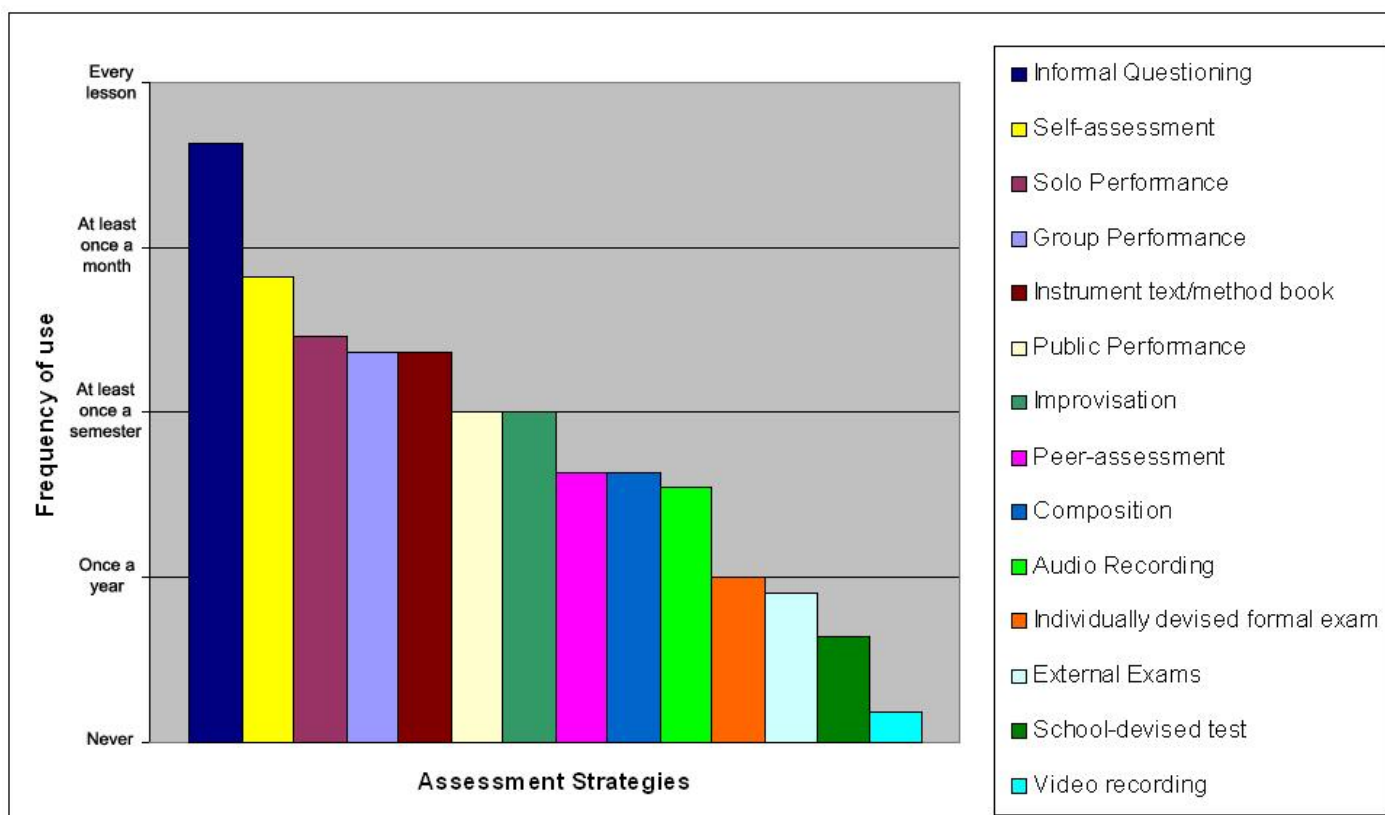
GRAPH 3.2 – Frequency of Current Assessment Strategy Use

The initial intent of this question was to offer a comparison between how the subjects were taught and how they currently teach. Since the responses to the questions were structured in a different way (one regarding exposure, the other regarding frequency) a valid comparison between pre-service assessment strategies and current assessment strategies could not be made.

For current assessment strategies used by the subjects, informal questioning was clearly the highest, occurring in every lesson by nine of the eleven subjects. The positive effect of immediate feedback coupled with the informal nature of the assessment made this strategy popular with the subjects. Sylvia noted that formal assessment was not necessary "as long as there is good communication about the progress of the student between the three parties (student, parent, and teacher), through lesson diaries or verbally."

The high frequency of self-assessment in Graph 3.2 shows that this assessment strategy is still a common method of formative assessment in instrumental tuition (Brasher, et al. 1999, Bryce 2006, Burrack 2002, Hallam 1998, Wells 1998). Solo, group and public performance all occurred 'at least once a semester' which supports Hallam's (1998) belief that performance in instrumental music is an excellent starting point for assessment due to its authentic context. Paul even went as far to say "let the performances speak for themselves". Steven commented that "I don't believe that assessment is an essential part of teaching…more important for the student's development are performance opportunities (at any level) and quality feedback."

Individually devised formal exams, external exams and school-devised tests naturally scored low frequencies as these summative assessment strategies occur at the end of learning. It is worth noting that these traditional forms of assessment frequently employ segmented marking systems and do not think in terms of sound, aesthetic decision making (Hickey & Webster, 2001). Perhaps the frequency of use could be supplemented by another question asking the subject's opinion on the strategy's usefulness.

Whilst some subjects have their students sit external exams, the majority find it more relevant to devise their own summative test. These individually devised formal exams occur on average once a year, but are more tailored to the student's needs and development than externally devised exams. Robert

supported the design of music standards using "internal exams with set guidelines that all IMT (itinerant music teachers) follow."

It was interesting to note how infrequently audio and video recordings were used even though they considered as highly effective self-assessment tools. This could once again be due to lack of resources, time or training.

An understanding of what is important when learning an instrument (from the teacher's perspective) would give a better indication of which assessment strategies (formative, summative, formal, informal) would be most effective. Graph 3.3 on the following page indicates the importance of various aims of learning to play an instrument.

GRAPH 3.3 - Assessment Philosophy

Legend:
- Enjoy music making
- Appreciate music
- Develop self-discipline
- Learn how to look after an instrument
- Learn about different styles of music
- Play in an orchestra/band
- Play in small groups
- Play in concerts
- Learn to communicate
- Read music
- Develop motor skills
- Increase concentration
- Use music for comfort
- Provide opportunities for developing social relationships
- Learn how to play different kinds of music
- Conquer nervousness
- Develop personality
- Learn to perform in public
- Learn about composers and the history of music
- Improvise
- Learn to compose
- Be able to take part in family music making
- Play an instrument well
- Play by ear
- Play from memory
- Pass examinations
- Become a professional musician

Aims of learning to play an instrument

Importance: Essential, Important, Undecided, Not Important, Not Essential

The subjects were unanimous in their belief that 'enjoying music making' is 'essential' (44/44) with 'appreciating music' a close second (43/44) followed by 'self-discipline' (39/44). These aims are based around the development of the aesthetic response, repertoire range and personality of the student rather than practical skills. These aims were previously mentioned in the literature review as the areas lacking in external exams (Hickey & Webster, 2001)

Performance related aims centred on the 'important' value with learning to compose as the first aim that the subject were mostly 'undecided' about. Instrumental music is focused around learning to play an instrument and performances (orchestra, small group, concerts and public) are an authentic medium for this. Whilst performance related aims were high, the aim of becoming a professional musician was the lowest. This could be due to the nature of instrumental tuition as an 'extra-curricula' activity until VCE. It could have been more relevant to have reworded this aim as 'continue music making beyond secondary school'.

Learning an instrument to 'pass examinations' was the first 'not important' aim. This could be reflective of the subjects' understanding of assessment not being an end unto itself as Hallam (1998) noted in Chapter 1.5. Amy commented that "too much focus is generally put on an end result, rather than the level of development achieved by a particular student. This takes away from a student's enjoyment of learning an instrument and puts the focus on correctness, rather than musicality."

It is evident from this data that instrumental teachers see the role of formal assessment through summative exams (external or school based) as 'not important'. Whilst the outcome can be useful to give an objective valuing of a student's progress, they should only be used if they fit in with a student's progress. Deborah noted that "the threat of an upcoming exam may be a

powerful motivation tool for some students, but the actual process of formal assessment is largely irrelevant."

If instrumental teachers believe that enjoying music making is so essential to music and that formal assessment is "largely irrelevant", why then are so many instrumental students undertaking summative exams? Graph 3.4 shows the relative importance of different factors which drive assessment.
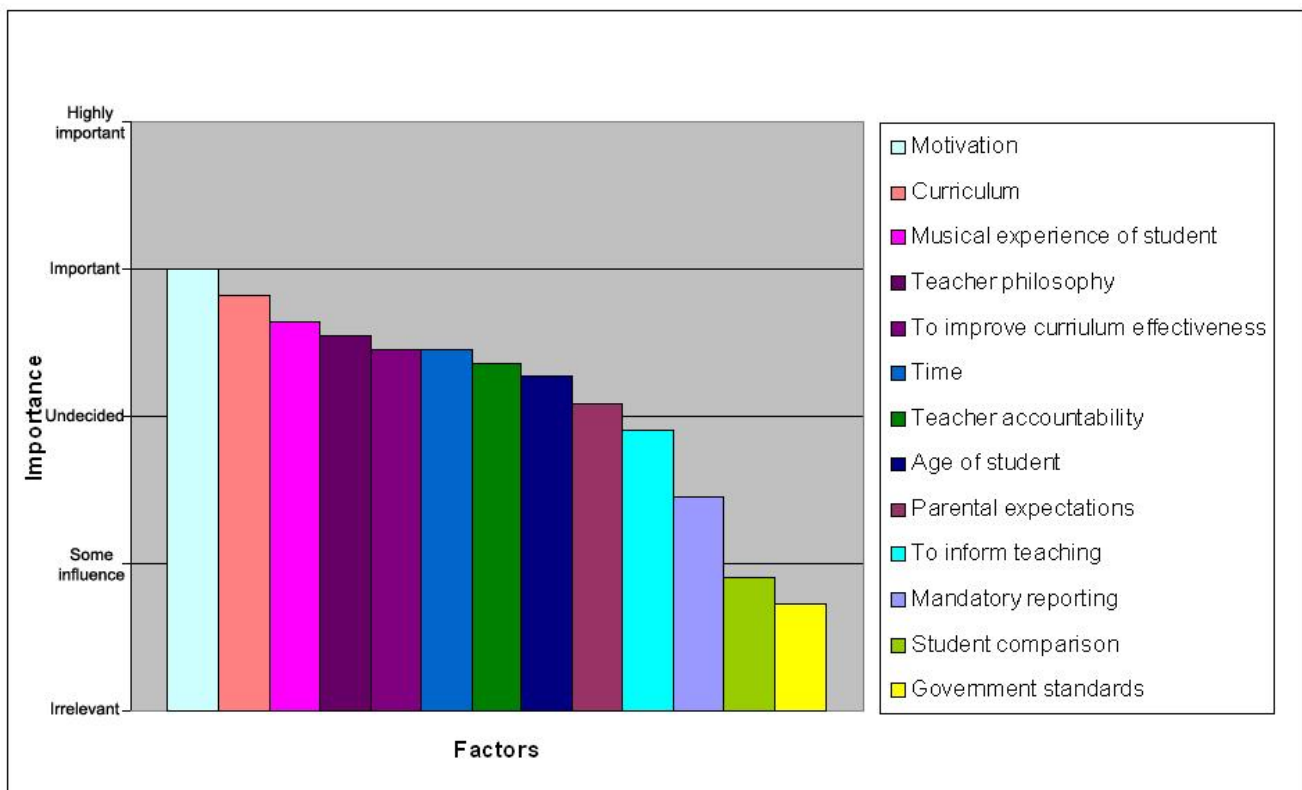
GRAPH 3.4 – Importance of Drivers of Assessment

The main drivers of assessment for the subjects are to motivate the student and the curriculum they are teaching within the school. Motivation is an 'important' driver with the assessment task giving the students a goal to work towards and an objective measurement of the work (or lack thereof) that they have done. Curriculum driven assessment is particularly evident with VCE students and

schools that require formal exams for reporting but this does not account for enough students to give it a greater value than 'important' by the subjects.

Student comparison was very low on the scale according the subjects, but I suspect that it would rate much higher if this question was asked of students. Students see assessment tasks as a means of comparison between each other and can be highly influenced by a formal summative grade, unlike teachers who tend to look at the bigger picture.

Government standards were the least important driver of assessment even though seven of the eleven subjects taught in Government schools. Half of the subjects understood VELS and the CSF but chose to "do their own thing", whilst the other half were not influenced by them at all. Susan comments that VELS is "something that needs to be accountable to what we are already doing (a time waster) instead of a guide for better teaching." Juan believed that VELS and CSF were of limited use as there are "too many motherhood statements and wish-lists".

It is interesting to note that none of the drivers averaged to be above 'important'. This greater standard of deviation could be due to the influence of the various teaching environments of the subjects (private studio, secondary private, secondary catholic, secondary government and primary). This range of individual responses can be observed on the following page in Table 3.1 with 'highly important' to 'irrelevant' being coded as 4 to 0 respectively.

	Steven	Amy	Deborah	Kathy	Sylvia	Juan	Paul	Susan	Albert	Robert	David	TOTAL
Mandatory Reporting	1	0	0	0	1	3	1	4	1	3	2	**16**
Parental Expectations	1	1	1	0	3	1	4	3	3	3	3	**23**
Student Comparison	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	2	2	1	0	**10**
Motivation	3	1	4	1	2	4	3	4	4	4	3	**33**
Teacher Philosophy	0	4	4	1	2	4	3	4	3	3	0	**28**
Curriculum	1	4	3	3	1	3	3	4	4	4	1	**31**
Time	0	4	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	2	**27**
Teacher Accountability	0	3	4	0	2	3	3	0	4	4	3	**26**
Age of Student	0	2	1	1	3	4	3	1	3	3	4	**25**
Musical Experience of Student	3	2	1	1	2	4	3	4	3	3	3	**29**
Government Standards	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	1	2	**8**
To Inform Teaching	1	3	0	0	1	3	3	0	3	4	3	**21**
To Improve Curriculum Effectiveness	1	4	0	1	1	3	3	3	4	4	3	**27**

TABLE 3.1 – Coded Importance of Drivers of Assessment

'Parental expectations' and 'to inform teaching' were two assessment drivers that ranked as 'undecided' in Graph 3.4 but as you can see from the figures in Table 3.1, no responses were 'undecided' (coded as 2).   It was interesting to note that this anomaly did not occur in the previous quantitative questions, indicating that perhaps this question was not as clear to the subjects. The misleading score could also be avoided in future surveys by not having a neutral response.

3.2   Best Practice Assessment Strategies

The literature review identified authenticity, validity and reliability as the qualities of best practice assessment. These qualities are reflected in the characteristics that the subjects identified with good assessment strategies.

There was a clear theme amongst the subjects' comments of assessment catering to individual student needs, rather than a 'one size fits all' approach. Unlike a classroom where everyone is exposed to the same teaching method to acquire skills and knowledge, the aim of instrumental teaching is more concerned with the individual student's enjoyment of music making and performing; therefore, assessment tasks need to be relevant and authentic to each student.

Instrumental students still develop technical skills, but not to the detriment of making music that is meaningful to them. David refers to this as "teaching to the student and their progress, rather than trying to adapt a student to set criteria." Steven explains that his teaching covers "the fundamentals of the instrument and general music performance, while providing flexibility to allow students of varying tastes to be properly assessed in their specialties." Deborah acknowledges that "just as each learning program is tailored to the ability and needs of the individual, so should assessment criteria." Assessment that highlights the process of learning rather than the product can give greater recognition to the individual student's learning.

The subjects made a number of suggestions to improve assessment in instrumental teaching. Amy believes students can have a more balanced development by being assessed on a range of musical skills including "aural development, improvisation/creativity development, technical development and musical appreciation." According to the subjects these assessment strategies need to be: fair; individually based; have a focus more on the development than the result; explore a range of tasks and approaches to account for different learning styles. Sylvia, Susan and Albert noted that negotiated goals between the teacher and student are much more positive and timely than Government mandates.

Albert and Robert believe that it is necessary for assessment results to be appropriately communicated to parents, students and staff. Notes in practice

diaries, letters, phone-calls or interviews can relate information regarding a student's progress at a relevant time, rather than just at certain times determined by the school.

Other qualities of good assessment practice suggested by the subjects include: consistency, fairness, impartiality, providing a challenge, encouragement, thorough record keeping, follow-up (with both students and parents) and a clear understanding by both the student and the teacher of the parameters of the task.

3.3   Teacher Training and Support

It was noted that only four of the eleven subjects have an educational qualification, the rest being graduates of music degrees. The graduates of music who have no education qualification rely on master classes, their peers and 'learning on the job' to teach beyond their level of instruction. The reality is that the professional development of instrumental teachers is easily overlooked.

Albert suggested that to improve current instrumental teaching methods master classes and professional development opportunities are needed on assessment in music, both in tertiary studies and during service. Yet Deborah, an educationally qualified teacher, points out that their education training in assessment was not sufficient and that they "learnt more from doing than studying." Perhaps graduate instrumental teachers could be assigned a mentor for support in the workplace, similar to what currently happens with graduate classroom teachers.

Government standards and documents are not functional enough for instrumental teachers to use to as a guide for assessment. Eight of the eleven subjects did not have any resources that helped guide assessment. The other three subjects used pre-established curricula of external examining bodies as a guide; such as, the Associated Board of the Royal School's of Music and the

International Baccalaureate. The majority of subjects simply devise their own curriculum using a greater range of repertoire, but do not use the external examination as the primary assessment strategy.

Finally, Albert commented that there is plenty of research that has been done on assessment and education in music, but this needs to be made relevant and accessible to instrumental teachers. Juan recommends looking at what life-long skills instrumental music lessons give our students and how assessment strategies can give support to the development of these skills.

Conclusion

The appraisal of current practice in instrumental tuition assessment to identify 'best practice' strategies gave insight into a number of key areas: current practice in instrumental teaching, 'best practice' assessment strategies, and future directions to be taken. Instrumental teaching seems to lack a central body that provides standards of learning, teaching, curriculum and assessment or supports professional development or mentoring.

Current practice in instrumental tuition

It appears that instrumental teaching is consists mainly of series of informal assessment strategies culminating in a summative formal assessment through an external examining body. Formative assessment is the preferred assessment method used by instrumental teachers. It provides ongoing assessment, caters to the individual needs of the student and supports the main goals of instrumental music: enjoying music making and appreciating music.

Summative assessment methods are supported by instrumental teachers if they are in line with the student's progress, but otherwise they are at odds to the developmental aims of learning an instrument. External exams can be used as benchmarks for learning but require teacher intervention to ensure the student is developing aesthetically and is applying their skills creatively.

The survey highlighted the need for teacher support through practicum training at the tertiary level and professional development opportunities when in the workforce, especially in regard to assessment. Student motivation and the curriculum were the greatest drivers of assessment with Government standards considered as largely irrelevant. There is a need for relevant research regarding instrumental music being made accessible to instrumental teachers.

Best Practice Assessment Strategies

Best practice assessment strategies can improve the outcome for teachers and students by supporting more than just the development of technical and musical skills and knowledge. It was revealed that teachers place the most importance on the student's enjoyment of music making and the appreciation of music. This project lacked the time and data gathering methods to reveal a collection of assessment tasks that instrumental teachers can apply to their lessons. Instead, the focus shifted more to the qualities of the strategies that makes assessment 'best practice'.

Best practice assessment in instrumental teaching should recognise the uniqueness of each student through teaching strategies and individually negotiated goals. It covers a range of music tasks and should always be related to performance. Valid assessment strategies are being used in an authentic context, but their reliability can only be ensured through appropriate teacher training and support.

Best practice is guided by on-going formative assessment supplemented by valid summative tasks. In this way the focus is on the process of learning rather than the product. Assessment strategies used most frequently included informal questioning and student self-assessment. In all cases, best practice assessment needs to be clearly communicated to all parties and followed-up with reporting.

Future Directions

This small-scale project has identified a number of issues that could benefit from further research. A large scale research project could provide data on a greater range of instrumental teachers (rather than just experienced ones) and gather more in-depth information through interviews and observations over a greater period of time.

Some qualities of 'best practice' assessment strategies in instrumental music were identified in this project, but further research could look into the actual design of the tasks, the development of a resource for instrumental teachers, a comparison between pre-service and post-service teaching strategies, and teacher opinions on holistic and segmented assessment.

I believe that the incorporation of student portfolios and recordings in instrumental music could lead to more valid and authentic assessment. This could be supplemented by a study into reporting methods looking at assessment communication and the follow-up after completing a task.

Future studies could also look at what student's value in instrumental music in terms of assessment grades or comments, why they play an instrument and what they enjoy about learning an instrument.

It was highlighted in this project that instrumental teachers do not see much relevance in Government standards regarding assessment. I believe it is critical that graduate teachers are given an independent benchmark to help guide the levels of assessment.

Word Count: 7,754

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Appendices

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
Faculty of Education

An Appraisal of Current Practice in Instrumental Tuition Assessment to Identify 'Best Practice' Strategies

My name is Shannon Ebeling and I am a 5th year student in the Bachelor of Music/Bachelor of Teaching course at the University of Melbourne. This survey is part of my honours project which is a requirement of my final year of study. My supervisor is Dr Neryl Jeanneret and I can be contacted on ~~[redacted]~~ or via email at s.ebeling@ugrad.unimelb.edu.au

The purpose of this survey is to gather information from instrumental teachers regarding 'best practice' assessment strategies used in instrumental tuition in Victoria.

Due to the timeline of this project, I would require results by **Monday 16th October**. You are welcome to send it before this date via email to the above address or notify me via my mobile and I can collect it in person. This consent form will need to be given to me in hardcopy with your signature or faxed to Dr Jeanneret at ( ) ~~[redacted]~~.

The survey is brief and will take no more than 20 minutes to complete. There are 13 questions including multiple choice and descriptive responses. There are no risks associated with these questions.

All information recorded will be confidential and ensure your anonymity. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and withdraw any unprocessed data.

I ……………………………………. (name) consent to participation in the above project.

I acknowledge that I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time and may withdraw any unprocessed data

I have received an adequate explanation of the processes and procedures to be used for collection of data

I have been informed that information from this project will be kept confidential and will be safeguarded subject to any legal limitations.

This study is being conducted for assessment of student work and will not lead to any publishable results.

Signature: Date:

BLANK SUBJECT SURVEY

For questions that ask you to indicate your answer, type an x in the relevant box.

1. SUBJECT DATA

1.1 Indicate your experience of teaching instrumental music.

Less than 1 year	1 to 3 years	3 to 5 years	5 to 10 years	More than 10 years

1.2 Indicate your current instrumental teaching environment(s).

Primary School	Secondary (Government)	Secondary (Catholic)	Secondary (Private)	Private Studio

1.3 Indicate your instrumental teaching context(s).

Individual	Small Group (2-4)	Small Ensemble (5-8)	Ensemble (more than 8)

2. ASSESSMENT HISTORY

2.1 List any training that has enhanced your instrumental teaching (degree and university, professional development, specialist courses undertaken, workshops/masterclass).

2.2 Indicate assessment strategies that you were instructed in **during pre-service training**. There is space to add other strategies.

Strategy	
Group Performance	
Solo Performance	
Public Performance	
External Exams	
Individually devised formal exam	
School-devised test	
Composition	
Improvisation	
Informal questioning	

Peer-assessment	
Self-assessment	
Video Recording	
Audio Recording	
Instrument text/method book	

2.3 Indicate the strategies that you use in your **current** instrumental tuition and how frequently they are used. There is space to add other strategies.

Strategy	Every lesson	At least once a month	At least once a semester	Once a year	Never
Group Performance					
Solo Performance					
Public Performance					
External Exams					
Individually devised formal exam					
School-devised test					
Composition					
Improvisation					
Informal questioning					
Peer-assessment					
Self-assessment					
Video Recording					
Audio Recording					
Instrument text/method book					

3.   ASSESSMENT PHILOSOPHY

3.1   Indicate the importance for the following aims of learning to play an instrument. There is space to add other aims.

Aims	Essential	Important	Undecided	Not important	Not Essential
Play in an orchestra/band					
Play in small groups					
Appreciate music					
Play in concerts					
Be able to take part in family music-making					
Enjoy music making					
Learn to compose					
Play an instrument well					
Use music for comfort					
Pass examinations					
Develop self-discipline					
Become a professional musician					
Learn how to play different kinds of music					
Read music					
Improvise					
Play from memory					
Play by ear					
Increase concentration in every area of work					
Develop personality					
Develop motor skills					
Learn about different styles of music					
Learn how to look after an instrument					
Learn about composers and the history of music					
Learn to communicate					
Learn to perform in public					
Conquer nervousness					
Provide opportunities for developing social relationships					

3.2 Indicate the importance for each of the following factors as drivers for assessment.

Drivers	Highly important	Important	Undecided	Some influence	Irrelevant
Mandatory Reporting					
Parental Expectations					
Student comparison					
Motivation					
Teacher Philosophy					
Curriculum					
Time					
Teacher Accountability					
Age of student					
Musical Experience of student					
Government Standards					
To inform Teaching					
To improve curriculum effectiveness					

4. ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES

4.1 How do you utilize government standards such as VELS, CSF II, VCE and VET to guide assessment in instrumental tuition? Are there other documents that help guide your assessment?

5. ASSESSMENT EVALUATION

5.1 List the strengths of the assessment strategies that you use.

5.2 List your characteristics of good assessment.

5.3   How necessary is assessment in instrumental teaching?

5.4   What could be done to improve assessment in instrumental tuition?

Further comments: