

# The purpose, frequency, methods, objectives and problems of assessment in secondary general music classrooms

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## *Abstract*

The purpose of this research was to examine the use of assessment in the secondary general music classrooms in Cyprus. Five research questions of this study were the following: •What are the main motivating purposes for teachers to assess their students? • How frequently do music teachers use assessment? • What methods/tools of assessment are used? • What student- skills or content of knowledge do secondary general music teachers assess? • What are the main problems music teachers face regarding assessment? All these were established through survey responses from secondary music teachers (n=109). Its design incorporated both close and open responses. A repeat of this survey study with more respondents could provide a more generalizable set of data from which to draw conclusions about the secondary general music community as a whole.

## *Key words*

Music assessment, secondary general music classrooms, authentic assessment.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Educational process, including the assessment of students and their performance, are constantly criticized in Cyprus like everywhere else. Some doubt but others support the necessity of it. Nowadays, in the new and contemporary society, a fast but accurate assessment is demanded, and this makes the task of the teacher more demanding. What is the etymology of the word assessment? The word «assess» comes from the Latin word "*assidēre*". Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1991) determines the Latin derivation of assess as: "to sit beside someone as an assistant judge". This is our role: as teachers to monitor students while assessing themselves!

Before we start assessing students it would be helpful to ask ourselves a few questions about assessment: *What is the purpose of assessment? Who is it for and why do we want it? How are the results to be used? What will be gained from the assessment? What are we trying to accomplish? How will we know when it was done?*

The review of bibliography abroad shows that over the past few years a lot of research about assessment in general has been done (Ashbacher, 1991; Newman, 1997; Wiggins, 1998, Asmus 1999; Chiodo et al, 1998; Brophy, 2000). Few studies though have focused on methods and perceptions of music teachers on assessment (Dirth, 2000). Lack of a systematic research in Cyprus on assessment is unfortunately a fact. Due to that, the aim of this study was to collect and examine the purpose, the frequency, the methods and procedures, the objectives, problems and perceptions Cypriot music teachers have in assessing secondary school students.

**PURPOSE** As mentioned earlier, many researchers such as Bennet (1996) pointed out that even though there has been adequate investigation regarding music assessment in general, not much attention has been given to the effects of assessment as perceived by teachers as well as by students and other educational stake holders.

Many factors motivate teachers to assess their students. These motivating factors can be educational. Despite the fact that music teachers do not necessarily agree on their individual incentives for the use of assessment in the classroom, most of them agree that it is important. Although teachers' attitudes toward assessment in the classroom are positive many choose not to implement it (Kotora, 2001). What is the danger in not evaluating student learning? Fiese and Fiese (1999) say "*In the absence of assessment, we are unable to determine if our students are actually improving their musical skills and knowledge about music*" (p.13). For those teachers who do assess, many factors influence their use of assessment. Research has shown that teachers are far more likely to

make decisions regarding assessment based on personal choice than on influence by local, state or national guidelines or standards (Kotora, 2001).

Nevertheless, by recognizing the reasons for becoming a music teacher, one can identify his motivation for believing assessment is important (Brophy, 2000). However, in the process of becoming an effective teacher, the process and product of learning is often ignored because of the teacher's focus on the process of teaching. According to Fiese and Fiese "*if you believe what you teach is important and how you teach is important, then what and how you assess what you teach is no less important because it is all one process*". So, what are the main motivating purposes for teachers to assess their students? This is what we are going to look into next.

**1. Proof for teachers and parents in order to compare:** With the proper assessment, such as the authentic assessment, objective information is received. There is no mystery and all parties are informed about the grading of students. Assessment provides information about the progress of students to parents, administrators and state directors through progress report. It also constitutes a tool to compare each student with his classmates as well as himself.

**2. Evidence to the government:** Accountability can motivate assessment. Teachers should be prepared to prove by substantiating evidence the progress of their students to others (Abell, 1993; Niebur, 1997) such as the Ministry of Education, parents and so on. Well organised assessment data could help demonstrate to everybody outside the music classroom that students can accomplish more in the music classroom. This will enhance and establish the importance of the subject and teachers' extracurricular activities will be adequately supported.

**3. Teacher's feedback:** Assessment provides information to teachers about the musical growth and progress of students as well as the effectiveness of their instruction. Collecting and reviewing the data will enable teachers to reflect on prior actions. Dahlberg, et al. (2002) pointed out that, when teachers collect data about their student's learning and their own teaching they are able to integrate their assumptions about their own teaching effectiveness. Assessment can help the teachers to explain, determine, monitor the progress of students (Abell, 1993; Brophy, 2000; Niebur, 1997 ;) and promote student learning. It offers suggestions of what needs to be revised. According to Colwell (2003) assessment must be credible and illuminating, inform about decisions taken and motivate learning.

**4. Improving instruction:** As being reported previously assessment can help in guiding teachers to improve their teaching methods, be inspired (Fu, Stremmel& Hill, 2002) and make any adjustments in the future (Abell, 1993; Brophy, 2000; Fiese& Fiese 1999; Niebur, 1997). If we, as teachers, want to improve the overall educational process, we have to improve the quality of our teaching strategies. Only then our assessment techniques will be improved. Assessment assists the teacher in planning future curriculum expectations on modifying long-range planning, organizing appropriate lesson planning, adjusting daily teaching strategies and meeting individual student learning needs. A review of students' learning processes and products will enable the teacher to revise his or her goals, plan instruction, and adjust the teaching process appropriately (Vani, 2000).

**5. Feedback to students:** *Is it really necessary to assess students in music?* The literature supports the practice of assessing and evaluating students in music even during the early elementary years (Beatly, 2000; Bell & Bell, 2003; Goolsby, 1999). Assessment helps learning because assessment measures are necessary to ensure that students understand and internalize what is being taught. As teachers we must not forget that students have different views, way of thinking and understanding because of different experiences. So the appropriate assessment will provide feedback to inform them of their progress individually (Farell, 1997; Hill, 1999; McClung, 1996; Niebur 1997). According to Brophy (2000), if students are notified on what they are expected to do and what musical material learning they will be assessed on before assessment takes place and that the results of these assessments will be announced to their parents, the music class will take on a new sense of purpose for the children.

## FREQUENCY

According to bibliography, the extent to which music teachers at every grade level use assessment in the classroom has not been clearly determined. The majority of researches examining the use of assessment in music

have studied assessment in the secondary level music classroom (Hanzlik, 2001; Hill, 1999; Kotora, 2001; McClung, 1996, Simanton, 2000). Kotora's (2001) survey of Ohio music teachers found the frequency of assessment strategies (from most used to least used in the high schools classrooms) as follows: performing at concerts, student participation, student attendance, singing tests, written tests, student attitudes, audiotape recordings, individual performances, videotape recordings, independent study or written projects, check sheets/rating scales/rubrics, and student's portfolio. Responses from his assessment survey indicated a substantial increase within the last two years for every assessment strategy when compared to the years prior to that (Kotora, 2001).

Brophy (2000) claims that assessment at regular intervals can help teachers support the importance of the music lesson in their schools and may also provide a detailed evidence for parents who question the teacher's grading as well as their choice. If your marks are ever questioned by a parent, you will have documentation of student's achievement to back your marking up.

In Cyprus schools there is a monotonous pattern on how students are assessed by music teachers. Throughout the whole island there is no systematic, comprehensive and formal assessment of students in the music lesson. They are usually assessed by one or two written tests per term, based mainly on cognitive domain instead of their overall perception, abilities, beliefs, attitudes and skills about music. And the question is: *Is it fair to assess students on their performance once or twice a term? Do we get a clear picture on what progress has been made?*

Assessment should occur as an integral part of the teaching and learning process. By increasing the frequency of assessment in music lessons teachers would reap the benefits of determining accurately student's achievement. It could also lower anxiety for students. Fixed routines in student assessment should be established. When objectives are clarified and an appropriate schedule for assessment is provided, students will be able to prepare for assessment activities without being dominated by anxiety or surprise. If assessment is a regular part of classroom activities it will support the goals of the curriculum and allow students to become better musicians.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Music is a multi-faceted art that involves knowledge, attitudes and performing skills. Music is experienced in many ways including performing, listening, creating, analyzing, evaluating. In any classroom there is a wide spectrum of ability levels among students. As teachers, we have to have a clear idea of what we want our students to learn. What content of knowledge, which musical behaviour, which skills do music teachers believe are important to assess? In general, teachers abroad place a high level of importance on assessing students' performance abilities (Hanzlik, 2001; Kotora, 2001; McClung, 1996). Assessing performance abilities includes measuring the student's abilities to sing or play correct notes and rhythms as well as demonstrating correct playing or singing techniques. From various researches teachers also reported assessing student knowledge of music symbols, terms, and music theory concepts, as well as student knowledge of a piece's historical or background information.

The objectives of the Cyprus Music curriculum put too much emphasis on singing, performing, creative activities, listening (music of Greek and Cypriot folk songs, Byzantine music, classical music, rock, jazz, popular and world music), musical appreciation, perception, the cultivation of student's ability to assess and select compositions of popular music, theory of music, history of music, musical analysis, movement, rhythmical activities, reading and writing the European notation, the relation between music and other arts, the use of music in order to develop co-operative learning, communication and socialization, respect for the various kinds of music, critical thinking and a positive attitude towards music. Despite all these objectives an appropriate model of assessment has not been developed. How each teacher prioritizes skills, knowledge or attitude is up to his personal music assessment philosophy.

## **METHODS-TOOLS**

Which methods of assessment are more appropriate and effective for measuring the progress of musical learning? Music teachers usually rely upon the use of informal assessment with no recorded data to determine what their students know and are able to do (Brophy, 2000). However, Brophy believes that, due to the advent of higher

standards of learning in music education, informal teacher observation cannot be the primary strategy for student assessment. He believes a new set of assessment strategies need to be developed and used.

Some teachers are reluctant to assess student's musical achievement based upon performance. Unfortunately the cognition-centred system of assessment in schools is still the same. How can we assess the affective and psychomotor domains? How can we assess multiple intelligences? If the assessment could be done in so many other ways the attention and interest of the students would increase, making music more exciting as a subject. Piaget, Vygotsky and Gardner, who support the social-constructivist approach (collaborative approach) of the development of the child, support that since the learning process is multi-dimensional, the assessment required should also must be multi-dimensional. Unfortunately, in Cyprus, our model of teaching is very teacher-centred: "*play with more expression, use the proper hand position, use articulation more, shape this phrase*" and so on are comments you can hear during a lesson. What do we really assess? Our teaching! We have to adapt more student-oriented assessment approaches in our lessons.

Many music teachers have never been fully comfortable with assessment and are not informed about what methods are available and how to implement them with the large number of students they have. The nature of data collected in general music classrooms should include the full range of learning experiences in which students are engaged (Brophy, 2000; Winner, Davidson, and Scripp, 1992). Music education literature suggests that written tests, check sheets, rating scales and rubrics, individual projects and performances, audiotapes, portfolios as well as mental record keeping are useful tools in measuring student performance because of the creative nature of the arts in general. However, many teachers rate these techniques as less useful than assessing student attitude, student performance, and student attendance (Kotora, 2001). Kotora suggests that teachers deep down have other beliefs than what they do in practice. There is often a gap between a teacher's personal philosophy of what is important for assessment and what is realistically achievable. In the Cyprus curriculum the ministry does not require the teachers to have a specific system of student evaluation and so this may account for their "do-as-you-please" style of assessment. Abell (1993) states that programs might be better if "evaluation is publicly and consistently an integral part of instruction".

Music educators abroad have devoted a great deal of effort for the development of formal tests that effectively assess students' musical achievement. Formal tests are measuring tools that provide written documentation of a student's achievement progress towards an objective. However, many teachers are no longer accepting the use of tests that are designed to measure knowledge or student's musical behaviour in a manner that is inauthentic. In order to draw an accurate picture of student learning, tests that are intended to measure a student's skill at a particular task need to be administered in a method and context that most accurately represent the environment in which students typically complete the task. This is often referred to as authentic assessment. Assessing learning in real world situations is very important. Svinicki (2004) states that authentic assessment means that the assessment strategy is based on student activities that replicate real-world performances as close as possible.

This formative assessment is recognised as an important component of classroom assessment strategies. Luckily there has been an increase in music education literature addressing the use of authentic assessment in the music classroom (Brophy, 2000; Farrell, 1997; Foley, 1999; Niebur, 2001). Authentic assessment not only informs students of what the teacher is looking for prior to the start of the assessment but also offers an immediate feedback to teachers, and this is very important because teachers can improve their way of teaching immediately. This helps to eliminate the gap between instruction and assessment.

Nierman (1996) established three guidelines to which authentic assessments should adhere: 1) requires active participation; it requires more knowledge because students are not only performing something but they are also creating it; 2) demonstrates knowledge or skills and shows the process involved; 3) directly reflects intended outcomes. Brophy (2000) provides another criterion for authentic assessment when he states "*Authentic assessment occurs when assessment aligns with curriculum, teaching, and a student's developmental trajectory. It is possible for teachers to use these guidelines when developing appropriate assessment strategies.*"

One method of implementing authentic assessment occurs when a teacher records students' behaviour on a cassette or video tape and makes brief notes while the students are already involved in a learning activity (Brophy, 2000). Playing or singing tests are considered authentic assessments and are commonly used by

educators (Kotora, 2001; Hanzlik, 2001; Hill, 1999; McClung, 2000). Farell (1997) states that authentic assessment strategies stress more the procedure than the product of learning. Process and product assessment are both necessary strategies to gain an understanding of student knowledge. They provide an innovative, imaginative and effective way of assessing.

Music educators still support the use of more traditional assessment methods like written tests which examine facts, dates, vocabulary, notation, listening skills as well as other concepts. A fair number of teachers believe that measuring music with pencil and paper tests is a very limited way to represent growth and learning. However, Farell states that music teachers often test students for what they know rather than what they understand. Recalling the facts does not necessarily indicate the student's understanding of them. She states that the processes that students engage in as active learners cannot be accurately evidenced on a norm-referenced, numerically-scored written test. Those activities need to be assessed using one of the authentic methods.

The best assessment is a combination of all the above tools which will show the student's developmental trajectory. There is a great value of using a wide variety of assessment measures to show student understanding in as many ways as possible. All these can be included in a portfolio or processfolio, a useable method, where everybody can see a student's achievement and overall musical behaviour throughout the year. Technology also is a useful tool in assessment. The ability to incorporate computer software such as the Smart Music, Audacity, Cubase and so on allows individual recordings to be saved indefinitely so that the teacher could listen to each individual quickly and easily. Also the use of web sites on the Internet such as the *You Tube* can be used as a tool of disseminating information and is very valuable.

## **PROBLEMS**

Generally, the assessment of the arts is difficult enough. Teachers all around the world have tremendous difficulty in reaching the correct conclusion on how much progress has been made by their students. They don't have solid proof on the student's overall musical development such as their progress, attitude, effort and achievement apart from the cognitive domain. A lot of times a teacher's judgement about student's progress is not substantiated because there is no specific criteria to measure it. According to Papas (1980) teachers today are not trained to assess. That is why the method they use to assess is seen as educationally unprofessional.

The fact that grades given in music tend to be higher compared to other lessons is probably proof of the lack of a serious assessment. Most of the teachers insist that they need a reporting system in which the progress of each goal is crystal clear giving them meaningful information about their children.

During the 20 years that I have been a music teacher in secondary schools I have noticed that there is a weakness amongst teachers to assess objectively. The subjective nature of quality in musical performance in general makes accurate assessment difficult. Hill (1994) insists that personal factors regarding the teacher such as the interest, the motives and the educational background, might affect the way they assess to a great extent. As a result, assessment in music education differs amongst teachers.

Music teachers encounter many problems when using assessment in the music classroom. To measure a student's progress in music is difficult because there are too many students in a class. Also music assessment is difficult to assess and is very time consuming. This makes it almost impossible for the music teacher to spend time individually with each student and as a result difficult to gather any assessment data. The lack of systematic research in Cyprus is yet another problem. They need benchmark assessment examples and models. Cyprus and Greece have not yet shown any studies concerning the assessment on music as a subject. Most research concentrates on methodological approaches, music curriculum, philosophy of music etc. We expect that the educational reform which will be put into effect in Cyprus as from 2010 will give importance to music assessment. It is hoped that a number of changes in evaluation practices for teachers will be proposed by policymakers.

Another difficulty teachers face in implementing assessment is the short duration of class periods, 40-45 mins (Kotora, 2001; McClung 1996; Shih, 1997; Simanton, 2000). Classroom management becomes difficult in large classes when teachers attempt to assess students individually (Kotora, 2001; Shih, 1997). Lack of time affects

assessment in a negative way because teachers do not have much time to debate with their students and provide them with feedback on their progress. Time restrictions make it also difficult to test on an individual basis. Written assessments can create large piles of essays and marking for teachers. Observations are difficult to be recorded in an accurate and objective manner. It should be emphasised that subjective conclusions have questioned reliability and validity.

Music teachers have to face a generation of Greek Cypriot students who are culturally "ignorant" and as a result do not recognise the significance of the arts in general (music, theatre, dance, visual arts) in the curriculum. Students give scant attention to music as a school subject. Emphasising the value of music education to parents who lack knowledge about the arts is tricky. This leads to the apathy of some parents towards music lessons (Kotora, 2001). Many parents are still largely concerned with facts and figures and they view success in the arts as dependent upon the amount of talent their child has as an individual. Music teachers are also concerned about the perceived gap between the educational value and status (given to core academic subjects) versus the value and status that is given to music as an elective subject. They believe that perception can be positively changed through assessment practices (Hill, 1999; McClung, 1996; Taggart, 2002).

Music teachers also feel that they do not receive support and understanding from the administration (Kotora, 2001). They believe that they lack the proper training necessary to implement successful assessment in the music classroom (Kotora, 2001). They indicate that their undergraduate music teacher methodology do not prepare them to assess student achievement. Future music teachers need specific practical ideas for doing so, and a systematic follow-up in their field experiences and student teaching guidelines. Teachers need a continued education and professional development plan in the matter of assessment in order to implement appropriate assessment practices. Ongoing professional development, whether at local or national levels, is imperative to strengthen teacher's teaching methods.

In spite of the numerous articles and books that are available to teachers that provide guidelines for using formal assessment in the music classroom, many music educators state that there should be more guidelines to follow in developing and implementing students' assessment (Abell, 1993; Kotora, 2001; McClung, 1996). Music teachers feel they have difficulty in developing an assessment system that will hold students accountable for achieving lesson's objectives and classroom requirements (Kotora, 2001; McClung 1996). Many teachers still resort to using a student's behaviour, attendance and participation as the primary means to assess their students (Brophy, 2000; Hanzlik, 2001; Hill, 1999; McClung, 1996, Simanton, 2000).

In addition to pre-service inclusion of assessment practices, there is a need for in-service teacher training in assessment. They need continued training and models of assessment throughout their teaching career in order to possess knowledge of different types of assessment in music, scoring procedures, how to collect data, how to write rubrics, and what to do with the data collected.

Additionally, seminars that address assessment in schools are needed since they can play an important role in networking with music educators in other countries and would be pivotal for professional growth. Teachers anticipate a brief annual visit from the inspector or the principal, who, according to the stereotype, stands stone-faced at the back of the classroom filling out a form. This is not enough!

## **Method**

### ***Participants***

Participants (N=109) for the study were specialist music teachers from Cyprus. From the 180 teachers that were approached 109 corresponded. There was an unequal representation of men and women in the research, where 71.6% (78) constitute the women and 28.4% (31) the men. The majority of teachers teach in junior high schools, as music is an obligatory course, while in the high schools is elective. The majority of secondary music teachers surveyed have worked between 5-15 years and possess one or more university degrees. The majority of teachers are on direct contact with their students for 40-45 minutes, twice a week. Half of the teachers have postgraduate study in music, while four of them have a doctorate. One in five has attended seminars on assessment of music. The overwhelming majority of teachers, 79%, did not watch seminars of which topic was assessment.

## Measures

A researcher-constructed questionnaire was developed for this study. It was a two-part survey instrument based on the research questions described earlier. The survey was organized into two main sections: 1) background or demographic information and 2) survey questions. The demographic section included five demographic items (gender; years of classroom teaching experience; grade levels currently teaching; highest level of qualifications/degrees; whether they attended a seminar on assessment; and the survey questions included a close-end format organized according to five-category Likert Scales. The questions posed in the survey began with a single question of teacher's opinion on the main motivating factors/purposes for teachers to assess their students, followed by a question on the frequency music teachers use assessment. A question followed regarding the methods and tools of assessment they use. The next question was about the student- skills or content knowledge that secondary general music teachers assess and the final question was about the problems music teachers face regarding assessment.

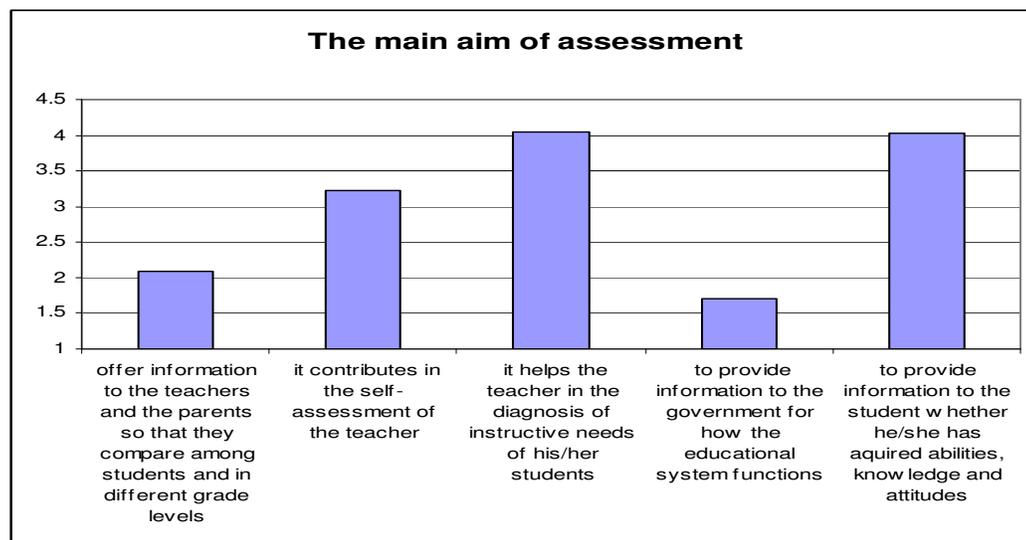
## Procedures

As a start, a questionnaire was piloted using a sample of teachers in order to determine the effectiveness of the final survey instrument. The sample population of the pilot study consisted of teachers in the Teachers Training course (since one of the researchers during the years 2007-08 was teaching at the specific department of the university) as well as some more experienced teachers. From the results of the pilot study, it was concluded that administration time was approximately twenty minutes, including instructions. Minor changes were made in wording on some items of the survey to improve specificity. Permission to use the surveys was obtained by the Ministry of Education. The final questionnaire and covering letters were distributed amongst all the schools. The covering letter outlined the purpose of the study and was used to invite participants to take part in the research project by completing and returning the survey instrument. Participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential. Surveys were administered via mail in autumn 2008.

## Results

The first question of the survey was concerned with the main objectives of assessment of students and why these are necessary for the learning process.

CHART 1: The main objectives of assessment are:

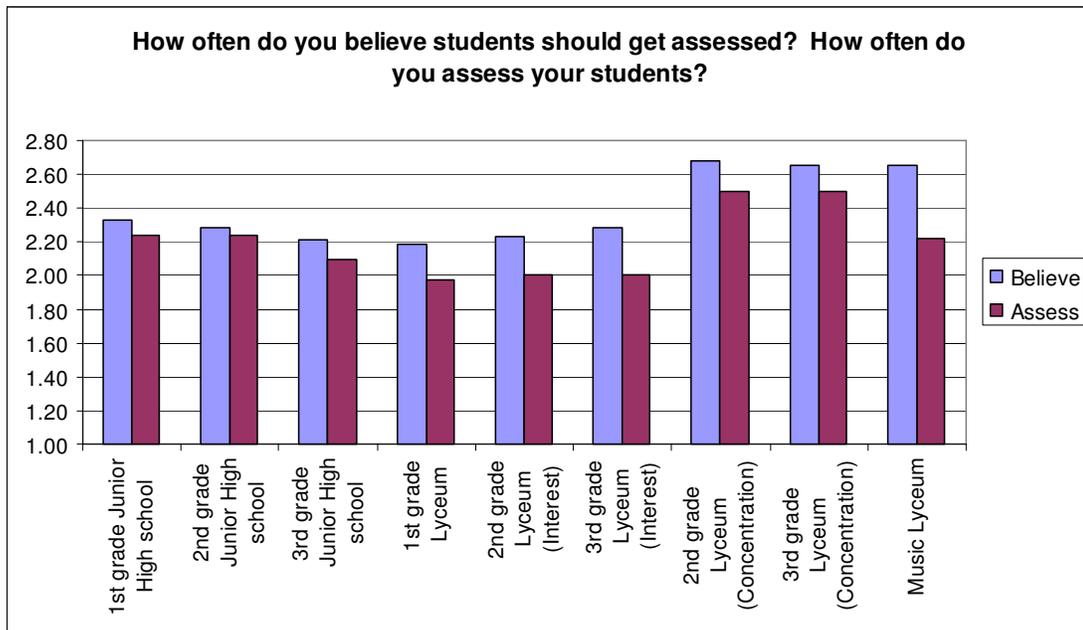


From Chart 1 it appears that the participants consider feedback as the most important aim of assessment. It is realized therefore that, the main aim of assessment for the participants is to help the teacher in the diagnosis of instructive needs of the students, but also to provide information to the students whether they have acquired certain abilities, knowledge and attitudes, something that appears in the literature that it is a decisive factor for the progress of the student with mean score for both factors close to 4.0. Additionally, one of the main interests of the teachers when they assess their students, is to change any teaching strategies that didn't work out, making any adjustments that will be more beneficial for students. Their fundamental concern is the people involved; teachers

and students. The third aim in importance of assessment, according to participants, is the self-assessment of the teacher, the fourth aim is to offer information to teachers and parents so that they compare between grade levels and students and finally the fifth aim that appears to be considered not useful for the music teachers is that it provides information to the government on how well the educational system functions. Concluding, the most important purpose of assessment for the teachers of the sample is not only to help the teacher to point out and diagnose the instructive needs of his students but also to provide information to the student for whether he has respectively developed certain skills, knowledge and attitudes towards the lesson, important for the progress of students.

The second research question examined the frequency music teachers believe is necessary to assess their students, but also how often they assess their students.

*CHART 2: How often do you believe students should be assessed? How often do you assess your students?*



From Chart 2 one can easily realize that, as long as we advance in higher grades the more teachers believe that they should increase the frequency of assessment. A small reduction of frequency of assessment is observed in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of Junior High school and 1<sup>st</sup> grade of Lyceum, as well as in the interest area of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of Lyceum. Perhaps one of the reasons it is that in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of Junior High school and 1<sup>st</sup> of Lyceum the lesson is one-period per week, a factor which can influence negatively the frequency of assessment. As far as practice is concerned, we see that the teachers that teach in the Junior High school and on the specialization area assess 2-3 times per quarter (formally and informally) and they consider those measures enough for the assessment of their students. The teachers of students who have opted Music and in the Music Lyceum however, assess their students four and more times.

In the third question the tools and methods teachers use in assessing their students in music was investigated as well as up to which extent they believe assessment is important for the lesson. In order to group the various sectors of assessment that music teachers use, the Factor Analysis was employed using SPSS and the Principal Components Factor Analysis (Marcoulides and Hershberger, 1997). Factor Analysis created 3 factors, as they appear in the Table 1. The factor traditional way of assessment is observed variable.

Table 1: Descriptive data of the synthetic variables

	N	Items	Mean	SD	% of variance	Initial eigenvalue	Reliability
Tools for authentic assessment (peer assessment, self assessment, videotapes, audiotapes, photos, concept maps)	108	6	2,87	,99	32,14	3,86	,79
Popular and functional tools of assessment (listening logs, quizzes, observation and personal communication)	108	3	3,88	,77	13,98	1,68	,42
Unfamiliar tools for authentic assessment (rubrics, checklists)	85	2	2,81	1,16	11,08	1,33	,72
Traditional way of assessment (written tests)	107	1	2,06	1,13	-	-	-

Studying the way with which teachers stated on how they assess their students, it appears that the less popular way of assessment with mean score 2.06 is the one 45-minute written test, while the most popular way of assessment are the popular and functional tools of assessment with mean score 3.88. The other two factors that have to do with the authentic assessment the mean score is below the central point of scale with 2.87 and 2.81. This shows that the authentic assessment although benefits students more since it gives them direct feedback, it has the lower mean score. This should puzzle the leaders of the Ministry of Education and Culture as to how the Music lessons apply not only in the Junior High school, Lyceum but also in the elementary school and kindergarten. From the results it appears that the most frequent way of assessment for the teachers that participated in the research is personal communication. Listening logs follow with the quizzes, self-assessment, projects, written tests, concept maps, observation, peer-assessment sheets, checklists, portfolios and rubrics. As far as the rubrics are concerned the number of teachers who are not aware of them were 37; the number of teachers who don't know checklists were 25 and the number of teachers who don't know concept maps were 40. Despite the fact that teachers give a lot of attention on the growth of positive attitude towards music, on the enjoyment and appreciation of good music as well as team work and on cooperation, responsibility and discipline, nevertheless these come in juxtaposition with the tools they use since the above domains have to do with skills that cannot be assessed orally, or with the listening logs and quizzes which were the tools of their preference.

The fourth section of the survey aimed to investigate what teachers take into consideration when they assess their students. For this aim 19 statements were constituted, through which it was attempted to determine the importance that teachers give with regard to the abilities, attitudes and knowledge. From the Factor Analysis, 5 synthetic factors emerged, as they are presented in the Table 2. The factor music instrument performance is observed variable.

Table 2. Descriptive data of the synthetic variables

	N	Items	Mean	SD	% of variance	Initial eigenvalue	Reliability
Disciplined and aesthetic choice of music (collaborative skills, responsibility, discipline, enjoyment, positive towards music)	106	3	4,51/5	,56	5,86	1,11	,62
Musical instrument performance	106	1	4,00/5	,99	-	-	-
Appreciation (appreciation of music of other countries, traditional music)	106	2	3,80/5	,84	6,72	1,28	,70
Theoretical knowledge	106	4	3,84/5	,81	32,86	6,24	,84
Performance and Virtuosity (singing, dancing, movement, technology, interdisciplinary approach)	106	4	3,03/5	,89	8,66	1,65	,75
Creativity – Readiness (sight reading, improvisation, arrangement, composition)	106	4	2,88/5	,97	12,08	2,29	,84

From the table of new synthetic factors we realize that the factor with the highest mean score 4.51 is the factor “*Disciplined and aesthetic choice of music*”. This shows that the music teachers in Cyprus place importance in the development of attitudes; in the development of discipline, the ability of exercising aesthetic enjoyment as one of the consequences of artistic expression and creativity. The second element that teachers place emphasis on when they assess the students, is the ability to *perform* a musical instrument with mean score 4.00. This shows that the practical side of music lessons is in the daily schedule of music teachers. The *theoretical knowledge* of children (music theory, analysis, history, reading and writing notation) has mean score 3.84. Following, is the factor “*Appreciation*” with mean score 3.80 which once again has to do with the attitudes. The factor *Implementation and Virtuosity* is found in the central point of scale with mean score 3.03. Unfortunately, the last factor *Creativity - Readiness* has the lowest mean score 2.88. Concluding, when music-teachers assess, as far as the student- skills or content knowledge are concerned, they take greatly into consideration the attitude of children, that is to say the growth of positive attitude towards music, the enjoyment, appreciation and acceptance of quality music so that they seek to listen to it in the future.

The final research question was concerned with difficulties and problems teachers face as well as how they see the reactions of students in their assessment in music lessons. The results from the quantitative research methods show the opinion of teachers as for the reasons they face difficulties during the assessment of their students in Music.

Table 3. Problems/student negative reactions

	Responses	
	Frequency	Percent of responses
Students negative reactions		
Students react because they consider that Music cannot be assessed objectively	9	18,0%
Students react because they get confused for the activities that teachers ask them to do	14	28,0%
Students react because the subject matter does not correspond with their interests and their value system	19	38,0%
Students react because they believe that Music is not so important	46	92,0%
Students react because apart from 1-2 written tests there are no other ways of record keeping	4	8,0%

From Table 3 it appears that the 92% of the teachers that answered that they face negative reactions from students, declare that the students react because they believe that Music lessons are not so important, while second in frequency problem that was reported is that the students react because the subject matter does not correspond to the interests of their value system, while the third reason students react is because they get confused about the activities that teachers ask them to do. Fourthly, children react because they believe that Music cannot be assessed objectively. About 46% of teachers have difficulties between *little -to a great degree* to make an objective opinion about the skills of their students. Very encouraging is the fact that 57.1% of the teachers try *Very Often* to combine different methods of assessment in order to assess objectively. While 83.5% of teachers find it hard to find time in order to prepare assessment sheets. These outcomes agree with the results of other researches such as Patricia Chiodo et al. (1998) where they state the fact that their colleagues are not sure how effective the tools of assessment are, they do not find enough time to assess and do not have tangible examples for what students have learned. Lastly, they believe that apart from 1-2 written tests teachers don't use other ways of assessment.

Nevertheless, 44.9% of teachers face between *very often- few times* negative reactions from their students regarding their assessment in music. It is interesting that 77.0% of teachers discuss the difficulties they face with other colleagues, 4% discuss the difficulties with the inspector and 4.6% with other experts. 48.6% of teachers try *often- very often* to become aware of the recent developments on assessment issues by attending seminars, studying scientific books or using the internet.

In the open questions certain teachers mentioned the followings: *"there are schools that are not equipped with the essentials, like musical instruments etc."*; *"students cannot bring musical instruments from their houses"*; *"students do not want to be assessed with written tests but only practically"*; *"students consider music lessons are only for amusement"*; *"for certain children the assessment is unfair, due to the mixed ability groups, as this presupposes different approach; although students differ they are assessed with the same criteria"*; *"the variety of children in the public schools increase disciplinary problems of children"*; *"the integration of children with mental problems requires time in their comprehension of the lesson and in their creative involvement during the lesson. All these affect the objectives and the activities of the lesson and as a result the assessment. These children could gain more if they had additional supporting hours of music where time, the objective, the planning and each activity would be supported according to their difficulties. Consequently the assessment of those students and of the rest would improve"*; *"the assessment must take place in combination of written tests, oral examination and practical performance of a piece or part of a piece on a musical instrument and always in combination with the attendance and the interest of the student"*; *"I believe that it would be very helpful if students self-assess and peer assess. Only then they will improve"*; *"the Ministry of Education and Culture does not give detailed information to the teachers on how to assess their students during the various activities"*; *"Not many opportunities are given to the teachers in order to be trained on assessment"*. Those comments from the teachers that participated in the research show that teachers either face some problems that disappoint and discourage them or they urgently need support from some experts on assessment or the Ministry of Education.

In the last section *Suggestions for improvement* teachers gave some suggestions on how to improve assessment in a music lesson: *"Reduction of number of students per classroom"*; *"more narrow follow-up of teacher and more guidance by supervisors"*; *"the lesson must become laboratorial with about 10-15 students"*; *"music books for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> classes of High school are urgently needed"*; *"music seminars must take place and in other cities, not only Nicosia"*; *"The teachers of Pedagogical Institute should organize in each city training courses and give new ideas and material for the subject"*; *"more audiovisual material in the schools"*; *"the creation of a Museum of musical instruments and musical library in the cities. This will help society to change its perception about music, it will also influence the attitude of students towards music"*; *"teachers should award the students who spend their time and talent (ex. choir, orchestra, band etc) with an A grade or in exceptional cases B"*; *"the informal assessment of student must take place in the middle of the term according to his contribution in musical activities in the school (band, orchestra, choir) in order to inform colleagues of other subjects"*; *"the assessment of students should be based on a wide spectrum of activities as they can all offer in music, each one in his own way"*; *"assessment should take the form in each subject either individually or in team activities of improvisation, composition with simple self-assessment sheets, listening logs etc. Written tests should test more complicated subjects such as history of music etc."* All these suggestions should be taken into account from the Ministry of Education in order to reconsider.

## **Coda**

The purpose of the present study was to set out and obtain more than just information about the assessment practices of secondary school teachers. The conclusions drawn were based on data obtained from conducting a structured opinion survey with 109 music teachers. The following points constitute limitations of the methodology in reaching these conclusions: 1. The survey was limited only to teachers employed in Cyprus; 2. The content analysis, was conducted by a single researcher and a statistician using survey research to investigate the assessment practices and perceptions of secondary general music teachers in Cyprus on assessment, proved to reveal valuable information and a series of critical findings. It is clear that the 109 music teachers surveyed hold strong beliefs about assessment understand its role in education and recognize its importance within their programs.

The data collected from the survey enabled us to answer the following research questions. The first goal of the research set out to identify the main factors which motivate teachers to assess their students. The second research goal was to determine the amount of instructional time music teachers devote to assessment. All teachers indicated that they spend little time on assessment. Teachers of third and fourth class assess less times than the other classes. The majority of teachers do not use on-going assessment. The third goal set out to identify the tools and strategies that music teachers use in practice. Teachers do use a variety of tools and strategies to assess;

written tests, self-assessment, portfolios, peer assessment and systematic observation as their most used and most effective tools and strategies for assessment. The last research question asked music teachers about the problems they face. It is quite interesting to note that when given the opportunity to comment freely on assessment and how it relates to them as teachers, their students, school divisions and overall programs, many similar ideas resonated throughout the written data: large number of students, limited teaching time, absenteeism, disciplinary issues, extra-curricular pressures which directly influence assessment practices, lack of training, professional development opportunities and resources.

Especially the last research goal leads us to examine teacher perspectives on assessment. Educators are aware that assessment can be based on their personal beliefs and recognize that it will affect their method they will use to assess.

Having established a basic profile of Cyprus secondary music teachers, we were able to determine their specific beliefs and perspectives from the Likert scale responses. Most music teachers agree that assessment plays an important role in their music lesson and the majority of them believe that assessment of music topics are critical to promote music education in the classroom. The information obtained from this study has provided a strong foundation on which to begin addressing the needs of Cyprus music teachers in the area of assessment in music education. Music teachers have determined what changes can be made to improve some of the factors that plague their assessment practices. They have to identify a new support system that can help improve the effectiveness and future success of new improved assessment practices.

Several implications for music education can be drawn from the results of this study. Teachers need to be aware of their beliefs concerning assessment and need to be willing to change current assessment procedures and reform past perceptions and practices when necessary. There is a great need to develop some sort of framework for assessment standards that all could follow. Varied and ongoing formative assessment will be helpful to improve professional development activities. The small body of research that already exists suggests that music teachers need specific professional development and time and space to interact with one another to share best practices and strategies (Conway, in press). The Ministry of Education must provide teachers with an up to date research based information plan which will prepare and help them to teach music more sufficiently, especially during the teacher's training course. The Ministry of Education must establish sustained and on-going collaboration between teachers, cohort groups, mentors, and other organizations. There should be conversation with colleagues concerning collaboration, reflective practice, teaching and learning. It would be more meaningful if teachers could establish a sense of team work via communicating with each other. The Ministry of Education must create materials and models which can be easily replicated, provide frequent conferences, workshops, seminars with related assignments in order to satisfy the professional development needs. A model for student assessment should be established. The need to train teachers in authentic assessment strategies is necessary. Fast and practical ways of assessment should be found and ready-made rubrics and checklists should be given as a starting point. A different layout of the progress report should be made where progress, effort, discipline and attendance is separated from the actual assessment with descriptive details in each section. A web page should be created where teachers have an easy access in order to find tools of assessment. A good web page is the following but unfortunately it is in English and colleagues will spend valuable time in translating the tools: <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php>. The new, reformed curriculum should be viewed as a critical starting point for improving assessment practices. At school level a detailed report card should be a very useful communication tool to provide information on student growth and progress in music.

The truth is that we have a great deal of catching up to do when it comes to the assessment and measurement of student progress. Most of our teachers suggest that the Ministry of Education must find ways to improve assessment practices. Problems will cease to exist if we integrate assessment with instruction more effectively (Brophy, 2000). Assessment should be integrated into our programs. Assessment has to be planned along with instruction from the very beginning because they are interrelated. It would be very helpful to include technology in our lessons since a lot of activities such as performances, compositions and improvisations can be recorded, assessed and revised.

The present lack of assessment techniques in music education in Cyprus decreases the value of the music curriculum standards. Without a valid and reliable assessment method, music instruction suffers firstly because,

educators, in the field of the arts do not have the appropriate method to assess their students' level of achievement in relation to the music curriculum standards and secondly administrators do not have the information to address the educational needs of their students.

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