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# Making the Grade: Authentic Assessment through Music Portfolios

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Making the Grade:  
Authentic Assessment through Music Portfolios

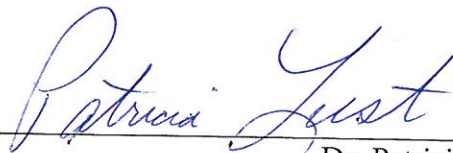
A Proposal for Research to be Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Department of Music at Longwood University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Master of Science in Education.

Teacher Research

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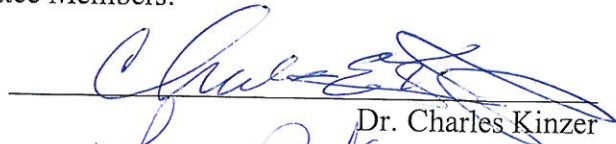
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## **ABSTRACT**

Research shows assessment is an important part of education. However, information on assessment in music is often limited to secondary education leaving elementary music teachers to devise their own systems of evaluating students. This teacher research addresses elementary music assessment by examining the implementation of student portfolios as a way to manage the data that is created in the music classroom. The portfolios were compiled using fourth grade student work which was divided into sections that mirror the MENC National Standards. This research shows that student portfolios provide tangible evidence of student understanding to be shared with teachers, parents, and administrators. Portfolios save time by utilizing embedded assessments and result in more authentic assessment. The portfolios reveal the standards students struggle with as well as the standards in which they show competency. This research also provides suggestions on how to improve the process of creating student portfolios.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

The beginning of the school year marks one hundred and eighty school days of possibility. However, even with careful planning I often find myself cramming to address all of the music standards of learning by the end of the year. My hope is that by having my students create music portfolios throughout the semester we will be able to track their progress and better address all of the standards. With this research project I aim to assess my own teaching. One of my educational goals each year is to create well-rounded musicians who really love music and wish to continue their musical experience beyond the elementary level. I believe that by increasing my students' understanding of music through the development of their portfolios I will greater facilitate their love of music and desire to do better.

I predict that the process of gathering the contents of the portfolios will provide valuable information to guide my teaching throughout the year. I also believe that my teaching will be positively affected by the results of this project. First, I will be more aware of the areas of instruction that are lacking materials and evidence of learning and be able to better address those areas. Hence, I will be able to ensure that my students are receiving a well-rounded music education. I will be able to assess my own teaching of the music standards. I will be able to develop those areas of instruction in which I am weakest. If questioned about a particular grade given to a student, I will have a concrete record of why that student received that grade.

In the past, I had a subjective record from notes that I took while observing my students. While observation is a valuable form of assessment, it should not be the only method. With larger class sizes and teaching many classes during the course of the day,

it is easy to become forgetful, distracted, or overwhelmed with information about students. After observing, one needs time to process what one saw and how to address the problems and move forward. I believe I may miss some of what my students are capable of by using only my powers of observation. I may also miss areas that need improvement by simply observing. With time to digest what my students have to offer through the portfolios, I expect to discover strengths and weaknesses I never knew my students had. I welcome this insight.

I predict my students will become better musicians and gain a greater appreciation of music throughout this process. This is because the students who are involved in creating the portfolios will be more highly motivated to have a finished product that can be taken home or shown off to parents, teachers, and friends. Those who do not do so already may view music as a more academic endeavor after completing this project because they care about how their portfolio is scored. At the end of this research project, both my students and I will have a visible and meaningful record of the work they completed throughout this school year. Then, they can continue to add to this record throughout the next school year. Hence, the portfolio will provide a wonderful tool for gauging improvement from year to year or even semester to semester.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the 1991 article, "Music...Pass It On!," then MENC: the National Association for Music Education president, Mel Clayton, wrote, "One of the primary goals of our profession is to pass along the love of making music to our students and our communities." (Clayton 1). I agree with Clayton. Especially as an elementary music educator, I want to instill a love of music in my students so they continue to participate in and enjoy music throughout their lifetimes. However, I would be remiss as an educator if my educational goal setting stopped there. The following journal articles, books, and online sources support more purposeful assessment in the music classroom.

### Journal Articles

I found numerous articles written about the importance of assessment in music. Most of those articles came from the Music Educators Journal, one of the six periodicals published by MENC: The National Association for Music Education.

Thomas Goolsby discusses the topic of the music portfolio as a means of assessment in his article "Portfolio Assessment for Better Evaluation." Goolsby defines "alternative assessment" as "the most generic term that best describes those methods that differ from traditional standardized, multiple-choice tests for assessing students' achievement." By his definition, a student portfolio qualifies as an alternative assessment. He discusses the timeline behind the introduction of such assessments. He believes the addition of alternative assessments evolved from the pressure teachers and administrators felt from high-stakes standardized testing. Goolsby then considers the positive and negative aspects of creating student music portfolios. Some of the advantages are the benefit of having formative and summative assessments and the ease

by which portfolios can be integrated into a music program. Goolsby focuses mainly on using portfolios in a secondary music education setting. He sees auditions, rehearsals, and performances as easily providing the examples of student work for portfolios. Some of the disadvantages are the lack of standardization, the reliance on teachers to review the materials, and the categorization of student work which may result in decreased creativity. He discusses what could be included in a portfolio such as checklists, audition tapes, and written work including self-evaluations.

The most beneficial information from the article comes in the form of questions Goolsby poses to his readers. Goolsby suggests teachers who wish to integrate portfolios into their classrooms ask the question, "What do I want my students to learn and remember from this class?" I kept this question at the forefront of my thinking as I planned this project. I wanted the portfolios to be filled with work that students would build upon during the next school year. Goolsby also includes the following questions:

"How long should an item remain in a portfolio? Should we put tapes of ensembles in student portfolios? Should we alter our curriculum to attain a better collection of documents in the portfolio? How do we balance the evaluation, for instance, of a pupil who joins choir late and progresses rapidly with one who joins choir late but is already at such a high level that there is little progress? Do we evaluate the entire portfolio or just the final products (knowing that either way will affect the overall evaluation of students profoundly)?"

Goolsby's questions helped shape this research project.

Mitchell Robinson begins his article, "Alternative Assessment Techniques for Teachers," with an anecdote about a music teacher and his trouble with assessment. While Robinson uses a secondary teacher as the main character in his story, he could have easily used any teacher who was in the music classroom with students. His message

of how difficult it was to assess all students with so little time is universal to the music education community.

Robinson introduces the idea of using alternative assessments in music as the solution. He asks teachers first to decide “what kinds of musical behaviors he wants from his students and how best to measure and evaluate their understanding of the concepts associated with these behaviors” (Robinson 6). Then, Robinson suggests the following activities that could be included as part of an assessment: “student journals, rehearsal tapes, aptitude and achievement test scores, playing or singing examinations, listening assignments, ensemble rehearsal critiques, error detection musical scores, domain projects [borrowed from the Arts Propel project], self-evaluations, contest scores, audio- and videotapes, concert reviews, graded items, ungraded items, mid-year and final examinations” (Robinson 6). These materials can be used in product or process portfolios. The product portfolio focuses on the end results of students’ work. The process portfolio “may be thought of as a slide show, photo album, or scrapbook. It differs from the program portfolio in that it includes early ‘and less successful attempts at production’” (Robinson 5). Robinson asserts that it is the deliberate nature of gathering these materials for the specific purpose of assessment that makes them powerful educational tools and not just isolated activities.

In his article, "Enhanced Assessment in Instrumental Programs," Frederick Burrack writes, “Assessments appear to enhance student ownership of the music learning” (Burrack 2). Dr. Frederick Burrack is the chair of Graduate Studies in the Music Education department at Kansas State University. He is an instrumental music specialist, and while he was teaching at the high school level he became involved in

portfolio development. In addition to assessment being important for students, Burrack believes the entire music program benefits by making assessment an integral part of the curriculum. Burrack states, "In order to be considered equal to other academic classes in the school curriculum, music classes need a well-defined grading scheme" (Burrack 1).

Patricia Chiodo adds her support to the importance of assessment in the music classroom. In her article, "Assessing a Cast of Thousands," Chiodo writes, "assessment can develop support for the music program. However, that support will not occur if we continue basing our grades on attendance, attitude, self-esteem, and how hard the student tried." While Chiodo does not mention portfolios specifically, she is calling for music teachers to change the foundation of their assessments. Chiodo continues to say, "It really is not assessment until it is written down" (Chiodo 4). In order to do this, teachers need to adapt methods of assessing that go beyond a check sheet for roll call and material rewards for those who had fun. "Neither will it help to give students high grades in hopes of encouraging them to like music. Teachers, parents, administrators, and others will recognize and respect the value of the music program only if music teachers can demonstrate each student's achievement of a sequential curriculum of musical skills and knowledge based on state and national standards" (Chiodo 3).

The Arts Education Policy Review published an article entitled "Introduction to the Symposium on the NAEP 1997 Arts Report Card" by Paul R. Lehman. In this article Lehman discusses the NAEP Arts Assessment which was first developed in 1969 by the National Center for Education Statistics. The test was designed to test three areas of musical abilities, response, creating, and performing. The test was a voluntary

assessment given to public and private school eighth graders. The most recent NAEP Arts Assessment was given in 1997. The test results gave educators a nationwide view of how students achieved musically, and empowered music programs by placing music in the category of testable subjects similar to those taught in the regular classroom. The NAEP examination showed that musical ability could be measured and therefore be improved upon. This supported the idea “that arts education is for all students, not just for the talented” (Lehman 3).

### **Books**

I purchased a valuable resource at the Virginia Music Educators Association (VMEA) Conference entitled, Assessing the Developing Child Musician: A Guide for General Music Teachers. The author, Thomas S. Brophy, has participated in music research, written journal articles, and presented at conferences. In his book, Brophy provides an all encompassing look at assessment from the perspective of someone who has been very active in the music classroom and outside of it. Brophy states, “One’s commitment to the music education profession is reflected in one’s belief in the importance of assessment” (Brophy 26).

According to Brophy, teachers need to examine six key elements while creating all assessments. They are as follows:

- Determine exactly what is to be measured
- Set criteria for judgment of the assessment results
- Design and prepare the scoring or measurement instrument
- Determine a record keeping strategy
- Determine the materials to be used in the assessment task
- Inform the students of the assessment

(Brophy 24-25)



By following these six elements, teachers can create their own assessments for performing, creating, and critical thinking. According to Brophy, the preparation of these six elements is the foundation for successful evaluation.

To organize the materials from these assessments, Brophy supports the use of student portfolios. Examples of materials placed in portfolios include “written work, tapes, compositions, photos, and diskettes” (Brophy 367). Not all student work needs to be placed in the portfolios. Work which best represents the students’ progress is appropriate to be included. Portfolios can be used to report progress to parents (Brophy 367). He believes portfolios provide music educators with an excellent way to manage music assessment.

### **Online**

In addition to the periodicals they publish, MENC offers many other quality online resources to educators. Many of these resources are available without requiring membership for access. The National Music Standards can be found here. Educators can also find strategies to teach and assess the standards offered through various links on the website. With all of the materials they make available for teachers, it is easy to see the emphasis MENC places on assessment.

Many respected organizations believe in the success of portfolios as a means of assessment. MENC highlights National Board Certification for music teachers on the website. The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards requires applicants to submit a portfolio of teacher work for review. The Virginia Department of Education accepts student portfolios, Virginia Grade Level Assessments, as alternatives to Standard of Learning tests. A description of Virginia Grade Level Assessments as well as who

qualifies to participate and what makes up the various components of the assessments can be found in the VGLA manual on the Virginia Department of Education website. This manual is useful in providing ideas about what kind of materials to include in the portfolios, such as video, audio recordings and written work. It also recognizes that one piece of work can potentially demonstrate a student's proficiencies in more than one standard. This can be useful in a music class where more than one skill or concept is covered in a single lesson. The manual includes a rubric and detailed explanation of the scoring in the rubric which can be used to grade portfolios other than just VGLAs.

The Assessment Resource Library (formerly Test Center) at Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) in Portland, Oregon compiled an annotated bibliography of alternative assessments. The bibliography focuses on articles written about portfolios as a means of assessment in various fields of study. However, even in this one hundred fourteen page document I found only a handful (3) of references to articles specifically concerning music portfolios.

Research shows assessment is an important part of education. A well thought out assessment can show student achievement as well as his/her learning process. Assessments can also provide teachers with beneficial information about what to do next to increase a student's learning. Alternative assessments have become increasingly more popular. Alternative assessments differ from standardized testing by allowing students to showcase their learning in a variety of ways. A student portfolio is an example of an alternative assessment that can aid teachers in evaluating students. However, this method of assessment has not been embraced by many in the music education community.

Hence, there is limited information on the subject of music portfolios. That is one reason I believe this project to be a great addition to the area of music assessment.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The intent of this research project was to determine the viability of creating music portfolios as an alternative means of assessment. The literature showed that assessment is important. However, during my own music education courses I found assessment to be an area that was not well covered. No one told me specifically how to assess whether a child really understood how to listen to and interpret music, a skill listed on the Albemarle County music report cards. Through discussions with other music teachers, I discovered assessment was a common concern. Music teachers have been left to devise their own systems of grading, and therefore assessment in music has tended to be essentially subjective in nature. Upon trying to discuss personal methods of assessment with other music teachers, I have often faced opposition because others do not want their systems to be thought of as incorrect. By creating these portfolios as examples of authentic assessments based on our standards, I wanted to provide other music teachers with a baseline assessment tool from which to work.

The portfolios were compiled using fourth grade student work in a manner similar to the VGLA. The Virginia Grade Level Alternative (VGLA) is a relatively new method of assessment that allows a student to demonstrate proficiency of Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) content for a specific grade level through a portfolio of his/her work. Each music portfolio in this project was divided into five sections. These sections mirror the MENC National Standards and are listed by the following headings: Analyzing and Listening, Composing, Connecting, Performing, and Reading and Notating.

After all the materials were compiled, the portfolios were reviewed and scored by myself and two other experts in the field of music education. The scoring system

mirrored the rubric used by Albemarle County Schools. Through examining the materials collected and the scores received, it was determined that a student portfolio is a valuable tool for assessing student performance and musical knowledge.

## **METHOD OF RESEARCH**

My initial interest was solely in finding resources to facilitate authentic assessment in music. I went to several online encyclopedia sites and looked up “assessment” and “assessment in music.” From there I began searching through the articles published in educational journals online. It was in these articles that I discovered the NAEP Arts Assessment and what it meant for music educators.

The articles prompted two main questions. How would it benefit me and my students to administer this assessment? Was it worthwhile to pursue further development of this assessment? To answer these questions, I requested a number of materials about the NAEP Arts Assessment from the U.S. Department of Education. The documents I received included sample test questions, actual student responses to those test questions, and several NAEP Newsletters.

The articles discussed the advantages as well as the limitations of the NAEP Arts Assessment. The test information was useful for showing the gaps that occur between different ethnic groups and those of varying socioeconomic backgrounds. However, because the test was voluntary and only administered to eighth grade students, teachers received limited amounts and types of data. The test results also did little to give programs useful information because of the way the data was processed by gender and ethnicity rather than by school. It provided little information to help individual programs know what they specifically needed to improve in order to bring their programs in line with the NAEP standards.

Initially, I planned to administer a revised version of the NAEP Arts Assessment. However, the field test was no longer available. Also, administering the

test would have been impractical for a general music class setting. Most of the test had to be given individually. If I had used the NAEP assessment format, I would have had to administer the assessment outside of regularly scheduled music time in order to meet with individual students. The NAEP assessment sections were long and each student was required to complete only one of three portions. Meaning each student would have had the opportunity to complete either the response, create, or perform section. The data I could potentially collect would not reflect all of the standards. Creating a student portfolio was the ideal solution to the assessment problem. I was able to address all of the standards. Students were given the opportunity to demonstrate and document their knowledge of each standard during their regularly scheduled music time.

I chose fourth grade because the National Assessment Educational Progress in the arts was originally created for fourth graders. There were forty-six students in the fourth grade, thirty-two boys and fourteen girls, divided into three classes. The sample size narrowed when five students did not return their permission forms to participate in the research project. Also, two students returned their forms with parents requesting that their children not participate. Hence, the information included in this research project reflects the work of thirty-nine fourth grade students, twenty-eight boys and eleven girls.

The activities were collected during regular music classroom time over a period of three months from the beginning of March to the end of May. This showed that work could be collected and evaluated even in a short amount of time. Each class was scheduled to receive two thirty minute music class periods each week. However, sometimes regular classroom activities took time away from music class time. Still, all students were able to complete and include work for each section of their portfolios. The

portfolios were divided into five different categories or standards: Analyzing and Listening, Composing, Connecting, Performing, and Reading and Notating.

### **Analyzing and Listening**

We worked on the first music journal entry together. The class was asked to identify the bare minimum components needed to make a song. We created a list together and then narrowed the list through class discussion. It was interesting to hear their different perspectives. Some of the answers included: instruments, music, melody, rhythm, people, notes, beat, and sound. The next student journal entry was “What I know about music.” Students continued to work on their journals in class and at home. There were no limits or expectations placed on students for the length of their entries. The music journals were intended for free writing about selected musical topics.

Next, we began listening logs. This was difficult to do as a group because some students needed to hear the piece played once and others needed to hear the piece multiple times. I did not have the equipment to let them do it individually, though that would have been ideal. The logs included questions such as what instruments or voices were in the piece, what was the dynamic of the piece, and what feeling the composer was trying to convey. I also asked them to make entries about the music they were listening to at home. I looked forward to reading those entries to see their own music choices.

During the next Analyzing and Listening lesson, students listened to “Spring” and “Winter” by Vivaldi. Students were then given a Venn diagram to compare the two music pieces. Students were familiar with Venn diagrams from using them in their



regular classroom. While they had been asked to compare different music in the past, they had never used a Venn diagram in music before. Students were surprised a Venn diagram could be used as an analyzing and listening tool in music.

The main objective of the “Form through Movement” lesson was for students to demonstrate they could recognize the form of a particular piece of music. For this activity, students were placed in groups. The students were then asked to listen to a piece of music. As they listened they were asked to describe what they heard and determine the form of the piece. Then, students were asked to create a movement to correspond to each section of the piece. Students then performed their movements for the class as the music played. Each group created a written document that included their comments about the music, the form, and descriptions and drawings of their movements. These were photocopied and included in their portfolios.

### **Composing**

Next, students created their own music compositions. The students were really excited about writing their own music. I noticed in years past that students have an easier time working in 4/4 meter. So, we started with 4/4. They were writing music for their recorders so they could use the notes B, A, and G. I have also noticed that students who want to impress me or their peers think they need to use more notes instead of perfecting their three-note melodies. Those who are unsure tend to repeat the same measure. Most students are able to identify the parts of a staff. We constructed the first staff as a group. For this activity a properly setup staff included a treble clef, time signature, key signature, at least four measures, and a double bar line at the end of the piece. Students could use eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, whole notes, quarter rests, and the notes

B-A-G. Many students wanted to create more than four measures. I made copies of several of the student compositions and distributed them. The class played and edited the pieces as a group. Students didn't have to tell which was theirs, but most did. They were very proud of their work even after receiving feedback including corrections.

The next lesson was called "Create and Play." Students were asked to compose a four measure piece in 4/4 time for the xylophone. Again, students were expected to set up their staves correctly. However, they were allowed to use the entire scale of C Major to compose their pieces. The purpose of the "Create and Play" lesson was to allow the students another opportunity to compose original musical works, but with a greater number of variables. I wanted them to have another chance to showcase their creativity.

After composing pieces in 4/4 time, we began writing music in 3/4 time. The same expectations were set for composing in 3/4 as in 4/4 time. Students were able to setup their staves, but they had trouble writing in 3/4. Some students still wanted to include whole notes in their compositions, and the use of dotted notes created some confusion. Students who had trouble were paired with someone who did well writing in 4/4 time. When paired with partners, students who were struggling were much more successful. I could see a difference in students' final products and in their motivations.

I wish there had been more time to spend on writing music. The students really enjoyed it. They were interested in learning about and including all the different musical aspects in their works. They wanted to play their music too. We discussed sharps and flats, which lead to a discussion about different keys and modes. They didn't have enough time to experiment with all the things we discussed. However, I saw the discussion leading to further work with composition.

## Connecting

The class met in the computer lab to work on their composer timelines. A direction sheet was distributed so I could assist more efficiently. Students went to [www.dsostudents.com](http://www.dsostudents.com) where they read about composers and listened to their works. Students used the information from the website to create music history timelines. Students labeled a timeline with Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Modern titles and included the approximate dates of each period. Students then cut out paper pictures of composers and placed them in the correct music history time periods on their timelines. Afterwards, students discussed why composers' musical works fit particular musical periods.

The "Composer Timeline" lesson was used to connect music and history. It was also used to connect music and technology. Because of the added element of technology, there were extra teacher responsibilities. The computer lab had to be reserved, working headphones had to be provided for each student, and the program students were going to use had to be checked to ensure it was operational and appropriate for the lesson.

The "Create Your Own Instrument" and "Music as Art" lessons both connected music and art. Students were asked to draw their interpretations of a music work in the "Music as Art" lesson. The "Create Your Own Instrument" was a lesson that incorporated music, art, and writing. Students created plans for original musical instruments on paper using various art supplies such as feathers, fabrics, paints, and pipe cleaners. After designing the plans for their instruments, students wrote about their instruments. They included information about the timbres of their instruments, the

instrument families their instruments would belong to, and what types of music their instruments would be used to play.

### **Performing**

Students made at least one recording to include in their portfolios using GarageBand. Students were asked to record themselves singing the Woodbrook School Song, a song that was familiar to all the students. They were also asked to record themselves playing a song of their choice containing the notes B-A-G on the recorder. This was the first year the students played the recorder.

Logistics were the biggest concern when making the recordings. The recordings had to be completed during regular music class time, and the music room was the only space available for recording. This meant recording with a room full of students. To make use of this time, I provided the students who were not recording with quiet alternative activities that could be incorporated into their portfolios.

### **Reading and Notating**

While one student recorded others worked on one of several written activities to go in the Reading and Notating section of their portfolios. The activities included creating an ostinato, working with melodies traveling up, down or repeating, and recognizing and notating the pitches B, A, and G. Students finished these activities at different times. Hence, it was important to have each activity ready and to have explained the directions before the recording began.

## **Reviewing the Portfolios**

I deviated from my initial plan of creating an original rubric to evaluate the portfolios. I chose instead to align this project with the grading rubric utilized by Albemarle County Schools for elementary music report cards. This was a numeric scale. Students received scores of 1, 2, or 3. A score of 1 indicated that the student “needed support,” a 2 indicated the student was “developing,” and a 3 indicated the student was “meeting expectations.” No score was given for students exceeding expectations because that score does not exist in the Albemarle County rubric. I chose this system so the grades assigned to the portfolios could be used as students’ report card grades.

I wanted each activity to be evaluated on its own merit. I did not want the scores to be skewed up or down because of scores given to previously evaluated activities within the portfolios. So, I deconstructed the portfolios placing like materials together. The materials were then examined by the two outside evaluators and me. We referenced the MENC music standards and the Albemarle County Schools’ report card rubric (Appendix B) as we assigned grades. The evaluators were instructed to take the student work at face value, and not to make any inferences as to what a student understood or meant to portray with his/her work. If the work was sloppy or unclear, it did not meet the expectations and therefore received a lower grade. Finally, I reconstructed the portfolios to assign report card grades.

## RESULTS

The results of this research were based on the work from thirty-nine fourth grade students, twenty-eight boys and eleven girls. Student work was evaluated in five areas which corresponded to the National Music Standards as described by MENC. Each of the five areas included between two and four activities. The activities were evaluated based on the expectations given by the Albemarle County Schools Arts Report Card grading scale. The table of results may be found in Appendix A, and samples of students' work may be found in Appendix C. Each student had the potential to complete a total of fifteen activities for his/her portfolio. Some did not complete activities because of absences. Other students who were present had a difficult time and did not finish some activities. A student did not receive a grade for an activity if he/she was absent. For the students' who were present but had difficulty completing their activities, the work was still evaluated.

The Analyzing and Listening section of the portfolios included the most activities. With three of the activities, the listening logs, music journals and understanding form through movement, most students met the expectations. To meet the expectations for their listening logs students listened to selected music works and correctly answered questions about what they heard. For their music journals, students were expected to listen to the music of their choosing outside of the music classroom and make comments about what they heard and how the music made them feel. Students who met the expectations for the "Form through Movement" activity included information about what instruments they heard, the dynamics, and the timbre of the music in their descriptions. They correctly identified the form of the piece. They also created and performed

movements in time that reflected the feeling of the music. However, when asked to use a Venn diagram to compare two musical pieces by Vivaldi, most students demonstrated only developing skills.

Composing a piece in 4/4 meter appeared to be the easiest task for students. More than half of the students met the expectations for composing in 4/4 time. Meeting expectations meant a student accurately setup the staff before composing, placed the pitches B, A, and G on the correct line or space and depicted the notes and rests (whole, half, quarter, and eighth) correctly. When asked to compose a piece in 3/4 time with the same expectations, the number of students who met the expectations dropped from 22 to 16. The Create and Play activity, where students had to compose a melody to play on a xylophone, appeared to be the most difficult. A greater number of students were still developing the skill or needed support to complete the activity.

To demonstrate the connections between music and other disciplines, students were asked to construct a composer timeline, create their own original instruments using various art supplies, and visually depict a musical work. In each case, most students met the expectations. No students needed support to complete the Music as Art activity.

In the Performing section, 16 students met the expectations by singing in tune with a clear tone with two or fewer mistakes. Ten students received a score of 2 meaning their singing skills are still developing. Two students received a score of 1 and would need support in addition to regular instruction to make improvements. Fifteen students met expectations when playing a song of their choice that included the pitches B, A, and G on the recorder. Twelve students were still developing their playing skills. Five students needed support to make any significant improvements.

In the Reading and Notating section of their portfolios, more than half of the students met the expectations for each of the activities. The activities included creating an ostinato, working with melodies traveling up, down or repeating, and recognizing and notating the pitches B, A, and G. The Up, Down, Repeat activity was the easiest of the three activities. Most students met the expectations for this activity.



## CONCLUSIONS

The portfolios created in this study were summative assessments. They provided a final grade and gauged students' understanding of the music standards. They showed me who was ready to move on to more difficult material and who needed additional support (see Appendix A for the number of students who needed support, were developing, or met the expectations). This year students did not have enough material in each standard to gauge growth. With more time, student portfolios can be used as formative assessments where student work from the beginning of the school year is collected and compared with work from the end.

Mitchell Robinson calls the formative portfolio a process portfolio. Robinson describes the process portfolio in his article, "Alternative Assessment Techniques for Teachers." Robinson states, "the process portfolio may be thought of as a slide show, photo album, or scrapbook. It differs from the program portfolio in that it includes early 'and (perhaps) less successful attempts at production.' The element of reflection... is of primary importance in the process portfolio. Students are encouraged not only to create, but also to revise, reevaluate, and refine" (Robinson).

### **Increasing Student Understanding**

Many students enjoyed writing in their journals and completing the listening logs and gave a better quality of work because of it. The journals showed that students had a wide range of ideas concerning what music is and how it is written. The listening logs encouraged students to hone their listening skills and validated their musical preferences because they could listen to the music of their choosing. This was shown in the data with at least 50% of students meeting the expectations for these activities. Often students are

assessed as a group because of the lack of time to interact with each student individually. These activities enable students to share their personal thoughts and musical expertise.

Students need more opportunities to compose their own music. Year after year, students have had difficulty with composing in 3/4 time as compared to composing in 4/4 time. My colleagues confirmed their students exhibited the same problems with composing in 3/4 time. I believe this phenomenon is cultural in nature. Much of the folk music, pop music, rock, and rap American students listen to is written in 4/4 time. Students relate better to 4/4 time because it is the time signature that surrounds them. It is the time signature with which they are familiar. Also, all students would benefit from having more time to practice the mechanics of writing notes and rests. However, the composition lessons brought to light that some students are timid about taking risks in their music making. They did not want to be wrong. They repeated the same rhythms and melodies because they knew those rhythms fit a particular time signature or the melodies were similar to ones they have heard before. Specifically asking for more creativity in their compositions may help. Providing more time for students to play their music so they can make judgments about editing could also be beneficial. Also, finding time to meet with each student to discuss his/her composition could boost a student's confidence in his/her music writing ability.

Students tend to have more experience with group music making than with solo performances. Students sometimes feel more comfortable participating in an ensemble because the other members of the ensemble offer security. During the audio recordings, a number of students had stage fright when asked to perform in front of their peers even though they were competent musicians. All students would benefit from additional solo

performance opportunities. However, some students, who have never had problems singing or playing alone and were eager to perform solos previously, hesitated when it was their time to record. The actual recording seemed to be what worried them. Taking the time to get students comfortable with making recordings is important. Recording and listening to a performance is a valuable tool for developing better musicianship.

Recording and listening to their performances allows students to hear what sounds good and what needs to be improved upon. Having students record themselves more often or taping regular class time instead of just special performance could increase a student's comfort level.

### **Observation vs. Portfolios**

I knew my own observations and reflections would be of great value to this research project. Using a simple yellow note pad, I was able to keep my thoughts organized. I kept the pad on a music stand by my chair at the front of the room and made sure I always had a pen available. By making quick notes during class I could go back later and recall what happened or stood out to me at the time. This method worked for me. Each teacher needs to find his/her own way to track his/her ideas and observations. I expected the student portfolios to be a better method of assessment than observation. Instead, the student materials collected during this process supported my observations. I expected some students to show me they were more musically knowledgeable and do better on their portfolios than when I evaluated them only by observation. I expected some students to show me that they did not understand as much as I initially perceived. I was surprised the scores students received on their portfolios were comparable to those they would receive based on my own observations. Students who I observed previously

as being musically knowledgeable provided evidence of such. The only area where I saw a slight variance was in the grading of the audio recordings. The portfolio grades for their recordings were lower than I know my students are capable of achieving. However, the quality of the recordings could vary due to students being nervous about performing in front of their peers. Overall, the grades students received on their portfolios aligned with the grades they had received previously through my observations.

### **Embedded Assessment**

When time is limited teachers need an efficient means of assessing their students. Chiodo writes, “Embedded assessment is the solution to making time for assessment because it improves the efficiency of both assessment and instruction. To embed something is to make it an integral part of a surrounding whole. Assessment is embedded when it takes place during the regular instructional activities in the classroom” (Chiodo 4). Teachers can assess students without taking time for special tests. Instead, students can use the work that comes from their everyday music lessons as material for their portfolios. This saves time when time is limited, and results in more authentic assessment. Because of this, embedded assessments also benefit the student. Students can perform better on assessments when they do not need to worry about performing tasks with which they are unfamiliar. There is no test anxiety. The materials collected for the portfolios were embedded assessments. They were not given as separate tests of knowledge or skills. They were used to teach as much as they were used to determine what the student learned.

Embedded assessment was the key to completing the materials for this project. There would not have been time to teach and then assess; they needed to happen simultaneously. This process made me more efficient. I made better use of my planning time because I knew exactly what I had and had not covered. I was also aware of what I did not cover well. Hence, I was able to return to those standards for additional reinforcement and ensure that my students' grades did not suffer because of my shortcomings.

### **Questions to Consider**

There are many benefits to creating student portfolios for music assessment. There can also be many questions about using portfolios. Thomas Goolsby provided a list of questions teachers commonly have about portfolios in his article, "Portfolio Assessment for Better Evaluation." These questions are useful to consider when designing portfolio assessments. The following are my answers to Goolsby's questions based on my experience with this teacher research project:

#### **How long should an item remain in a portfolio?**

Ideally, teachers would begin collecting materials for a student's portfolio in kindergarten or earlier, if applicable. These materials could remain in the portfolio throughout the student's entire school career. By keeping the materials in the portfolio the student, teacher, parents, and administrator can easily recognize growth and problem areas. Often elementary and middle school music programs do not work together closely enough to know where one program left off and where the next should pick up. When

music educators at each level work together, students experience music education as one connected curriculum.

Students can also help decide when items should no longer remain in their portfolios. Involving students in the process of evaluation enables students to make decisions about what their best work looks and sounds like. Allowing students to make these decisions gives teachers greater insight into their students' thinking and understanding of what is being assessed. Also, students and teachers goals may change in respect to what students are trying to achieve, and the materials in the portfolios can reflect those changes. Hence, the length of time items remain in the portfolios can be different for each student depending on the circumstances. There is no set time frame.

### **Should we put tapes of ensembles in student portfolios?**

MENC states in their Performance Standards for Music: Assessment Strategies, "most strategies that require singing or playing instruments must be administered individually, though strategies requiring written responses may often be administered in groups." However, being a good musician is not limited to the ability to give good solo performances. Demonstrating the ability to successfully participate in an ensemble is required by the Virginia Music Standards of Learning. Students need to learn to work together and to listen to each other. They deserve opportunities to be part of a musical community and create the kind of music that cannot be accomplished by one person playing alone. If the explicit purpose of the assessment is to evaluate a student's ability to play in an ensemble, including a recording of an ensemble in a student's portfolio is necessary.

**Should we alter our curriculum to attain a better collection of documents in the portfolio?**

During curriculum development, the goals of the curriculum guide the design. When the goals fail to address the intent of either the administrator or the educator, the goals of the curriculum become obsolete. Assessment provides data that can be quantified and analyzed and illuminate if the goals are being met. Both curriculum and assessments are meant to be adapted. The real question is *what should students be learning?* If the curriculum or the assessment does not address that question, then one or both should be altered.

Curriculum and assessment must be in alignment with each other. They should reflect the program philosophies, desired program and student outcomes, available and necessary resources, and teaching strategies (Conway 1). In order for this to occur, teachers need to be involved in the writing process and with the implementation of curriculum. Though involving the people that are going to be using the curriculum the most seems to be a practical step, it is often overlooked. Curriculum that is conceived without the input of the teachers who are expected to utilize that curriculum is set up to fail (Conway 1). By participating in the design of the curriculum teachers are more prepared to create assessments which compliment the curriculum.

**How do we balance the evaluation, for instance, of a pupil who joins choir late and progresses rapidly with one who joins choir late but is already at such a high level that there is little progress?**

Portfolios are extremely beneficial in situations where teachers have students with a wide range of abilities. This is because portfolios may be used to assess a single student on his/her own merit, or they may be used to assess many students as a

standardized assessment. When using portfolios for individual students, teachers and students can set goals for the year which address the specific needs of each student. It does not matter that a student is already achieving at a very high level; there is always room for improvement. Portfolios exceed regular standardized tests in this capacity. Standardized tests put a ceiling on achievement. Portfolios can grow with the student.

**Do we evaluate the entire portfolio or just the final products (knowing that either way will affect the overall evaluation of students profoundly)?**

The decision of how to evaluate student portfolios ultimately rests on the teacher. Each teacher must determine the purpose of the assessment and of what works best for him/her. Portfolios may be used as summative or formative assessments. There are benefits to both approaches. As a summative assessment, portfolios showcase students' best works. These portfolios can behave as students' musical resumes. They can also provide teachers with a quick way to see if all students have achieved the same goal, without taking into account how or the length of time it took each one to do so. While evaluating only the final products can be useful, evaluating the entire portfolio can a more powerful tool in uncovering the learning that is taking place.

Evaluating the entire portfolio demonstrates that understanding is not an all or none phenomenon. The way students construct relationships and make connections give meaning to newly learned ideas and importance to the old ideas that are replaced. By extending and applying their musical knowledge, students learn new concepts through building upon the musical knowledge they already possessed.

Reflection also plays a major role in assessment. By evaluating the entire portfolio students and teachers are able to reflect on their thinking and share how their



thinking affected their knowledge. Reflection allows students another mode of articulating what they know. It also makes the educational experience personal and gives students ownership of their learning. Progress is not defined in terms of completing a series of lessons. Rather, it is defined for each student in terms of the process the student uses to come to greater understanding. This allows students at all levels of achievement to participate in meaningful ways and to be assessed.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Why Use Portfolios?**

This study shows that a student portfolio is an excellent method of documenting student understanding. Portfolios provide organization for the data that is naturally being created in the music classroom. While using observation of students as a primary source of information may provide similar data, portfolios contain tangible evidence of student understanding that can be shared with teachers, parents and administrators. Portfolios reveal the standards students struggled with as well as the standards in which they showed competency. Student portfolios offer music teachers assessment options and can be tailored for any program and any student. Portfolios can also travel with students from year to year and even from school to school. Because of this, portfolios can provide teachers, students, parents, and administrators with valuable information about student achievement and guide further instruction throughout students' school careers. Finally, one of the greatest incentives for using portfolios is students take more responsibility for their own learning.

### **Potential Improvements**

The prospect of managing portfolios for students grades Pre-K through fifth is daunting. However, the fourth grade students enjoyed creating the portfolios. They were proud of what they accomplished by the end of the year, and were excited to share their learning with their parents, teachers, and peers. I will continue to create portfolios with my students. However, before beginning, there are several adjustments I could make to improve the process.

An organizational system needs to be in place before students begin working on their activities. Written materials are best kept to letter size. This allows them to fit more easily in files or hanging folders. Milk crates may also be used to hold materials. Providing a crate for each class and dividing the materials by standard within each crate would also help keep students' work organized. Using re-recordable CDs for audio recordings will reduce the number of materials and the cost. Adding one re-recordable CD to the kindergarten supply list will enable its use year after year.

Technology makes it possible for portfolios to be completed and contained on a computer. Programs such as SmartMusic allow students to record practice sessions. The program will even score the recording. This program can also be used to record sessions for later assessment by the teacher. Finale and GarageBand give students the opportunity to compose and play back their compositions. "Students can hear their compositions immediately; they can reassess their work and make revisions with relative ease through the computer's MIDI capabilities" (Robinson). With Finale, students are able to print out their compositions to keep or turn in. Students are even able to send the files to the instructor electronically if the instructor so desires. Of course, teachers need funds to purchase the programs, computers to run the programs, and printers to print the final products. It may be necessary for the music teacher to show the value of such a program before being allocated the money to purchase one. In this case, downloading the free version of Finale called Finale NotePad can be a suitable alternative, or teachers can apply for a grant to cover the cost.

The physical space available can be a determining factor in what types of activities students are able to complete. Students were to record themselves at least twice

during this project. Having the use of a conference room or some other comparable space would have made it easier to achieve this goal. Gaining the support of the regular classroom teacher and administrator can help make this possible. They may be willing to allow students come to the regular classroom to record during music time or during a free period. Administrators sometimes enjoy the opportunity to interact with students and offer space in the office for recording. Parent volunteers are also another option. They may be able to supervise students in a hallway, in the cafeteria, or on a stage while they record.

Finally, the portfolio of a pre-kindergarten student will look much different from that of a fourth grader. For example, the pre-kindergarten portfolio will contain less written work and more video and audio recordings. The collection process will also vary. Volunteers and additional teacher support would be more important in managing the younger students' portfolios. However, to get the most from student portfolios, student work needs to be documented from the very beginning of students' school careers. That is where I see this research heading. I will take what I learned from this project and apply it to the coming years creating student portfolios.

### **Working Together for Better Assessment**

The stigma of teaching to the test has caused music teachers to shrink away from supporting a formalized assessment. Chiodo wrote, "I was surprised to encounter a certain degree of hostility to the idea of assessment among veteran music teachers" (Chiodo 2). This hostility comes from a combination of a fear of change and the prospect of being held accountable to someone other than ourselves. I hope that my fellow music educators will benefit from my research. The research shows that music portfolios are an

excellent measure of student understanding if the student is given adequate opportunities and time to complete the required activities. The activities must also be thoughtfully planned out in order to address the standards, engage and teach the students, and be able to translate into a tangible measurement of understanding. By presenting my findings, I hope others will feel less threatened to discuss assessment and how they are addressing it.

Instead of fighting assessment, teachers should embrace it and get involved in shaping the future of assessment in music. We need to help each other create assessments that work specifically for our subject area. Assessment can be used to empower music programs and ensure students receive a well-rounded musical experience. With the amount of material a general music teacher covers, it is impossible to be an expert in every area. Sharing portfolios during staff development events could increase the effectiveness of our teaching and aid in helping each other in areas that we struggle with. One of the benefits of using student portfolios is that they allow the teacher to tailor the contents to suit the needs of each class and individual student. Even if this particular assessment does not fit our needs, this project can open the lines of communication concerning the importance of assessment in the arts.

## **CODA**

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) labels Music as part of the core curriculum. It also makes testing and assessment top priority in classrooms across the United States. The Arts are often at the bottom of a long list of priorities for administrators and regular classroom teachers. They are more concerned with their students passing their Standards of Learning (SOL) examinations and the school making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Hence, teachers have become increasingly more concerned with covering the material tested in the Standard of Learning exams. “As more class time was spent on reading and math, less time was available for social studies, science, art, music, and physical education” (Thomas 2). Another reason the Standard of Learning tests are so important to administrators and regular classroom teachers is that they provide the school with concrete data concerning how their students are achieving in relation to the standards that are being taught. Unbeknownst to many regular classroom teachers, there are Music Standards of Learning, and many music teachers struggle with how to assess student learning in relation to these standards.

The Arts are areas that are typically not formally assessed and may fall by the wayside with administration. I do not believe most music programs are ignored because they are thought of as unimportant. Music programs give students a safe outlet for self expression. Music programs enhance school spirit and bring the community together. When music programs are ignored I believe it maybe from teachers’ and principals’ lack of understanding or knowledge of the subject. Hence, teachers of the arts have often been left to their own devices and may tend to over-address the sub-areas of their specialty. They stick with what they are most interested in or are most comfortable

teaching. By creating portfolios, teachers, students, administration and parents have a tangible way to track progress and understanding. I believe that by creating music portfolios that are “readable” by those who may not be well-versed musically, we can facilitate greater understanding between music teachers and other teachers, parents, and administrators. I believe if these people better understood the expanse of knowledge we are addressing with students they would be more apt to support the arts and teachers of the arts. Regular classroom teachers would also be able to see how our curriculum and theirs intersect, and we could use the portfolios as a means of facilitating greater collaboration. Music teachers should use this valuable, authentic assessment to their advantage. They should tailor the portfolio to suit their programs’ individual needs and highlight the learning that is taking place.

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### Appendix A – Portfolio Scores

The data is divided first by which National Music Standard it relates to then, it is listed by activity. The number in each column labeled 1 needs support, 2 developing, and 3 meets expectations, represents the number of students who received that score.

<b>Analyzing and Listening</b>	<b>1 needs support</b>	<b>2 developing</b>	<b>3 meets expectations</b>	<b>Total # of Students Participating</b>
Listening Logs	7	4	28	39
Music Journals	3	12	24	39
Venn Diagrams	3	10	8	21
Form through Movement	3	14	22	39

<b>Composing</b>	<b>1 needs support</b>	<b>2 developing</b>	<b>3 meets expectations</b>	<b>Total # of Students Participating</b>
4/4	2	15	22	39
$\frac{3}{4}$	6	15	16	37
Create and Play	7	19	13	39

<b>Connecting</b>	<b>1 needs support</b>	<b>2 developing</b>	<b>3 meets expectations</b>	<b>Total # of Students Participating</b>
Composer Timeline	5	11	23	39
Create Your Own Instrument	2	8	23	33
Music as Art	0	5	18	23

<b>Performing</b>	<b>1 needs support</b>	<b>2 developing</b>	<b>3 meets expectations</b>	<b>Total # of Students Participating</b>
Singing School Song	2	10	16	28
Playing Recorder	5	12	15	32

Appendix A cont.

<b>Reading and Notating</b>	<b>1 needs support</b>	<b>2 developing</b>	<b>3 meets expectations</b>	<b>Total # of Students Participating</b>
Create an Ostinato	1	15	21	37
Up, Down, Repeat	4	1	28	33
B-A-G	4	14	20	38

Appendix B – Music Report Card

County Public Schools

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: 04

HR Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

School Year: \_\_\_\_\_

EVALUATION OF STUDENT - MUSIC

Teacher:		
Kendra Aylor	Semester 1	Semester 2
Student demonstrates appropriate level of singing skills.		...
Student demonstrates rhythms appropriate to grade level.		...
Student demonstrates ability to analyze listening selections appropriate to grade level.		...
Student demonstrates ability to perform prescribed movements and shows creativity in movement where appropriate.		...
Student demonstrates instrument playing skills appropriate to grade level.		...
Student strives to do his/her best (cooperates, shows respect, exhibits initiative and responsibility).		...
Semester 1: Semester 2:		

3 – Meets expectations

2 – Developing

1 - Needs support

# Writing MUSIC

Maddie 4<sup>th</sup> grade

3/3/08

MUSIC

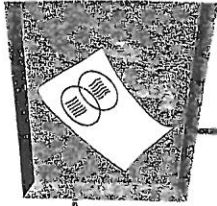
What I know about writing a song is you can have different notes like: ♪ ♫ ♪ ♫ ♪ ♫. I know that the higher the note the higher the space or line. But the lower the note the lower it is on a space or line. I know that a drum can have 2 sounds depending on where you hit it. I know there

ran out of time

Appendix C – Samples of Student Work (cont.)

Name Hogan  
 Grade 4

The image displays five musical staves with handwritten notation. The first staff contains a sequence of notes with labels: A, F, F, A, A, F, D, F, A. The second staff contains notes G, A, B, C, D, E. The third staff contains notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C. The fourth and fifth staves are empty.

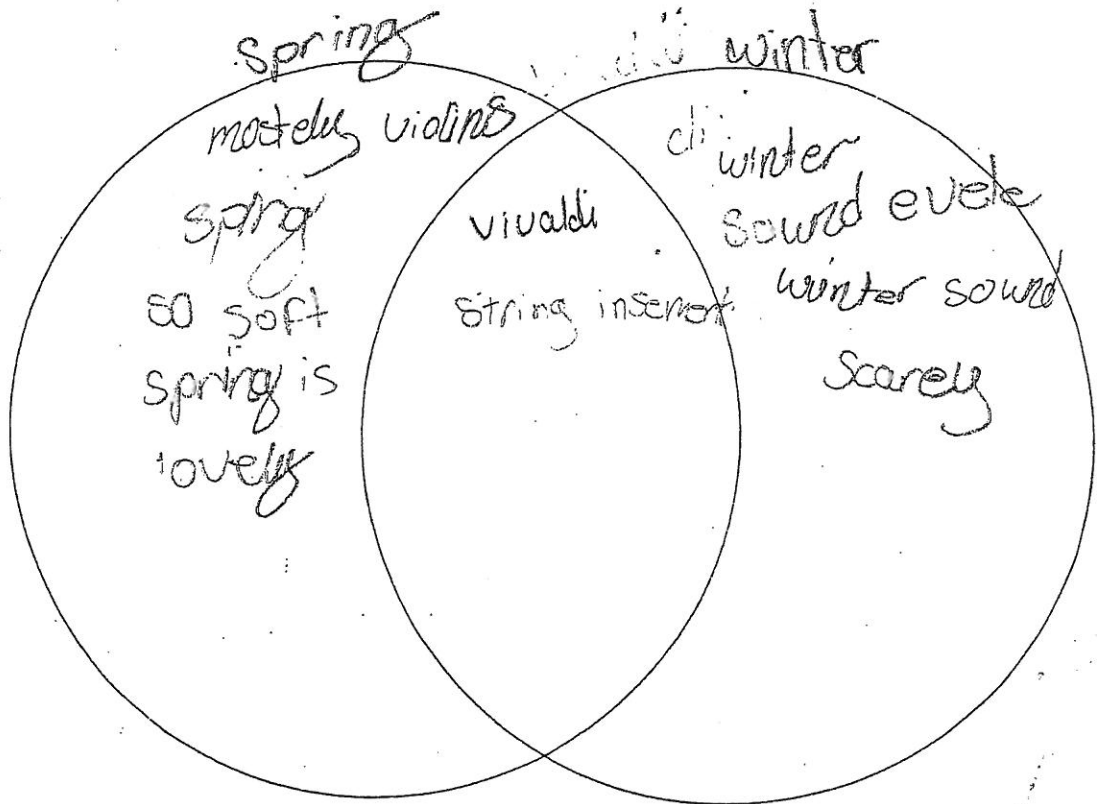


Name Shantara

Class 4th



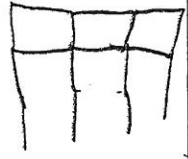


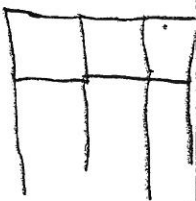



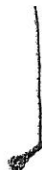










GRAPHIC ORGANIZER 7

**Venn Diagram**





## Make up your own OSTINATO

Names	Beat 1	Beat 2	Beat 3	Beat 4
Drum				
maraca				
triangle				
sondbucks				
Jingle bells				

Name: Joshua

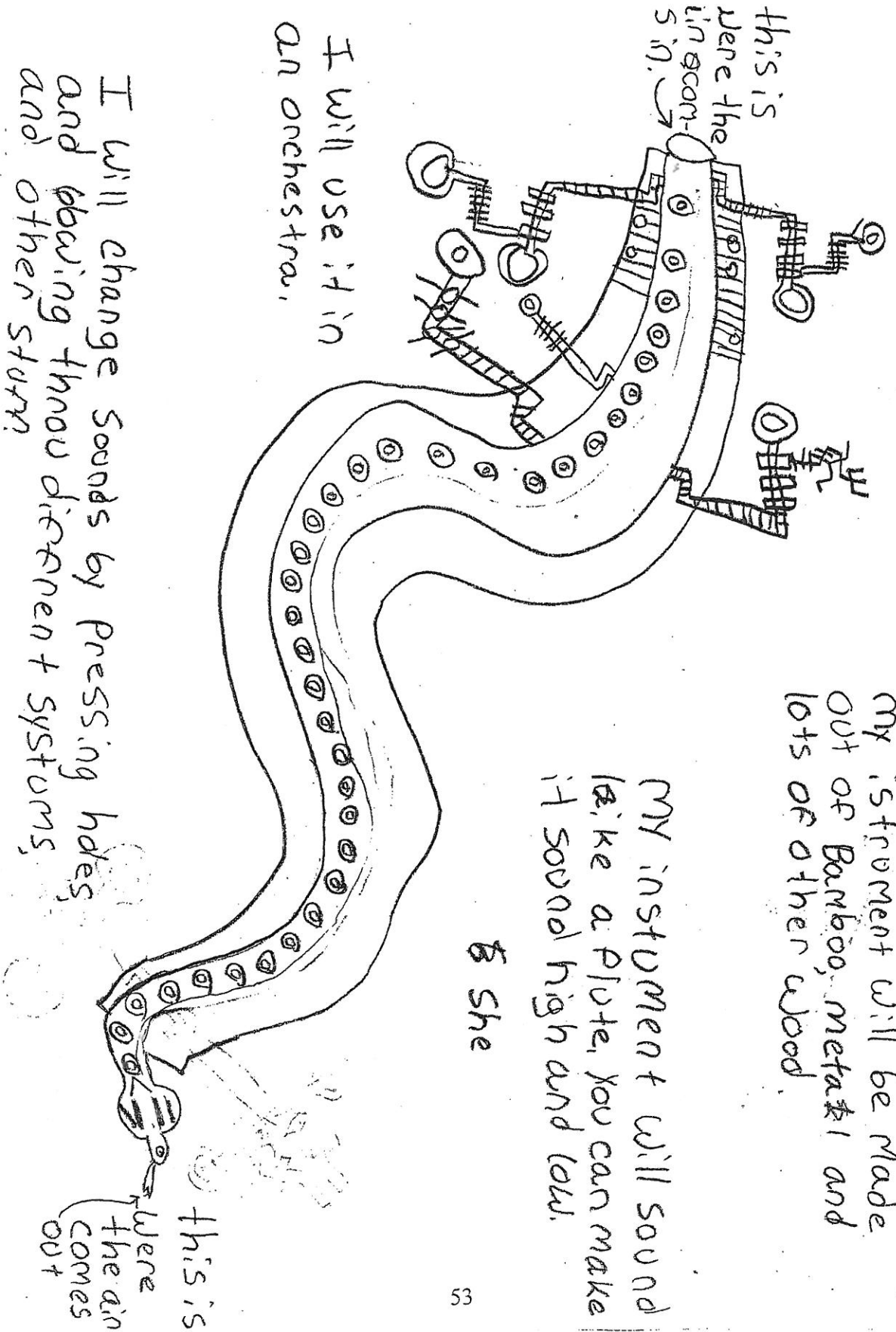
Class Code: E4

# Eel Psybber

My instrument will be made out of Bamboo, metal and lots of other wood.

MY instrument will sound like a flute. You can make it sound high and low.

She



I will use it in an orchestra.

I will change sounds by pressing holes and blowing thru different systems, and other stuff.

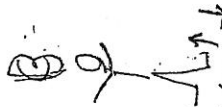
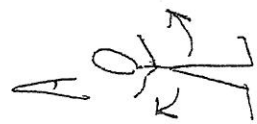
this is where the air comes out

5 A: swinging back and forth  
 with arms swinging too, when  
 soft go forward, load go forward  
 quickly

B: bounce up and down on your  
 tip-toes

4 H: Goes w/ beat  
 Doesn't use dynamics

3 B: Started on one beat  
 ended going faster -  
 but music stayed same  
 Good mvmt thought



starts fast  
 and loud  
 then, became  
 staccato

B's  
 different 3  
 because it  
 is shorter  
 and the notes  
 are longer

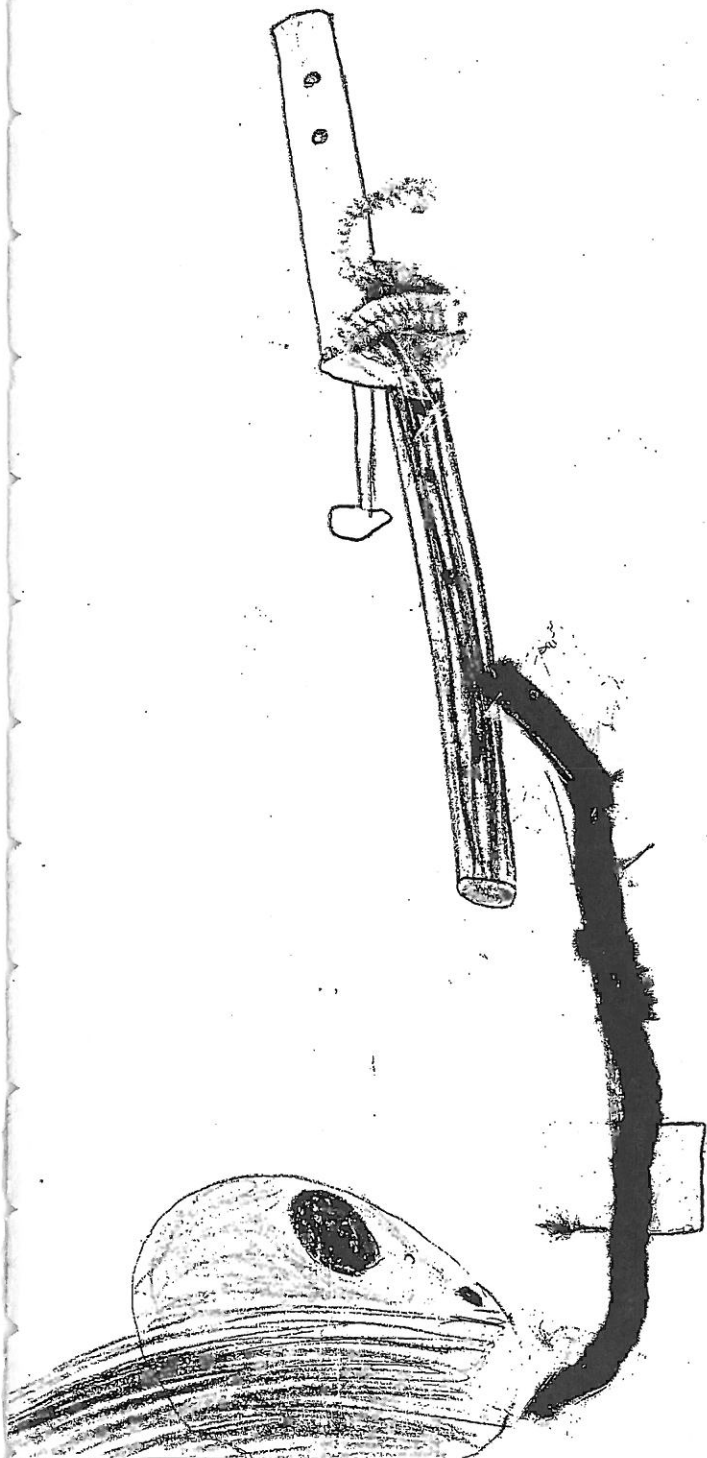
Charlie  
 Austin  
 Luke

The  
 Conchita

But go back to  
 the beginning

Appendix C - Samples of Student Work (cont.)

I will call my Instrument Pasta. It will be made of wood and metal. To change the sound there will be holes. It will sound like a bird. Very high sound. I will use my instrument in an Orchestra. Ms. Aylor is asking us to design our own instrument because it will help us know more about them. on the end there is a yellow spring. When you play it bounces



# Writing Music

Elizabeth

Music

3/3/08

I have written music before. First I thought of a name. Say I picked The Bee. Then I think "What does a bee do?" Is it fast or slow? High or low? A bee is fast and High.

So I write a song with pen and paper. I normally would need the instrument. I play a couple of notes, write it down.

You also need articulation. You need your staccatos and legato's (?). You need quarter notes and half notes.

Decide how long you want your song should be.

Ran out of time.

Appendix C – Samples of Student Work (cont.)

Elizabehn #2

Handwritten musical notation for guitar, showing chord diagrams for G, A, and G chords.

3/7/05

Handwritten musical notation on a single staff in G major, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piece is divided into four measures, each with a measure number (1, 2, 3, 4) written below the staff. The notes are: Measure 1: G4, A4, B4, G4; Measure 2: A4, B4, G4, A4; Measure 3: A4, G4, B4, G4; Measure 4: G4, A4, B4, G4.

A G B G

A B G A

A G B G

G A B G

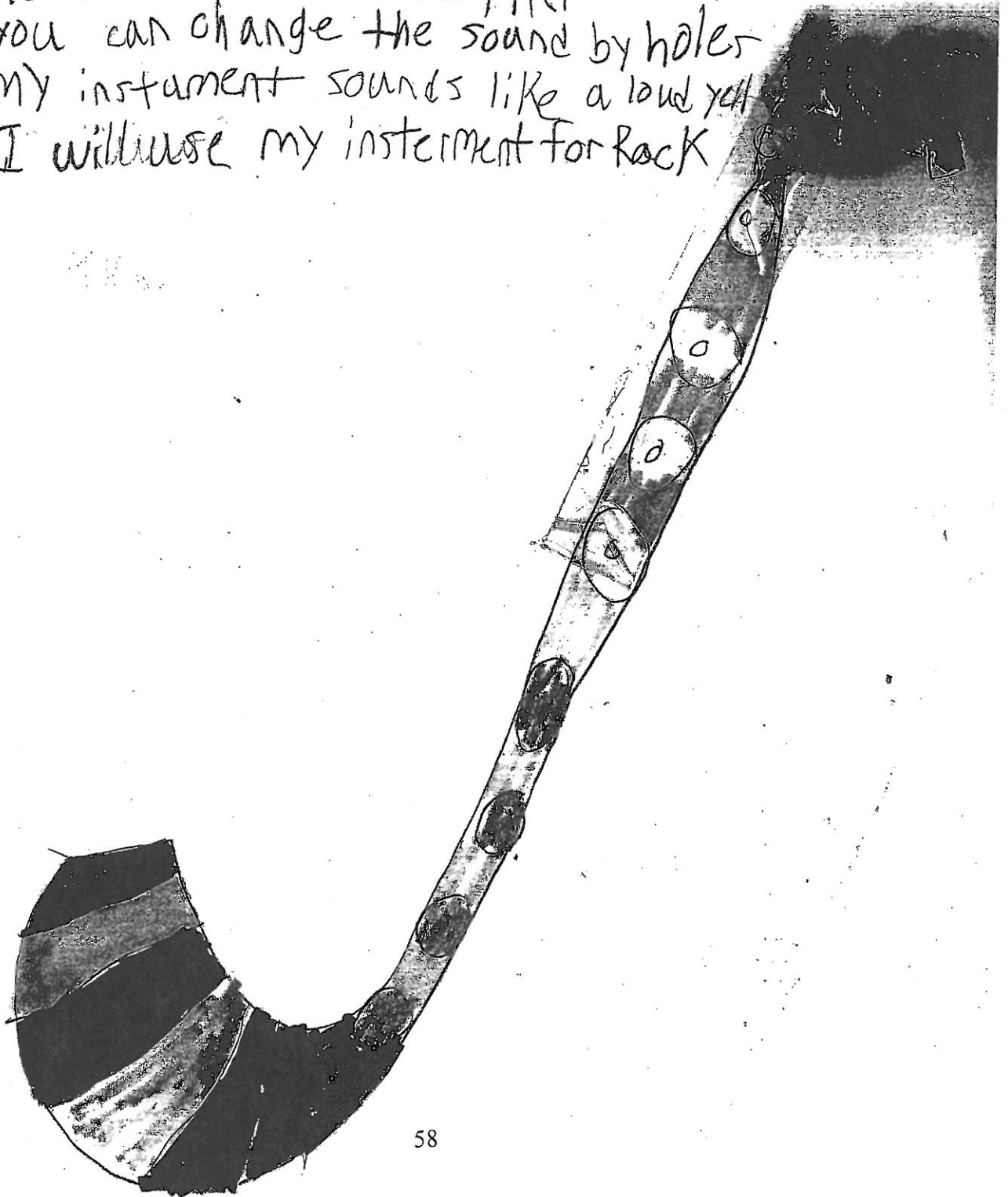
Handwritten musical notation for guitar, showing chord diagrams for G, A, and G chords with fingerings and a 'noorm' (no) instruction.

- Chord 1: G (fingerings: 1, 2, 3)
- Chord 2: A (fingerings: 1, 2, 3)
- Chord 3: G (fingerings: 1, 2, 3)
- Instruction: noorm (no)

Appendix C - Samples of Student Work (cont.)

I will call my instrument Burpet.  
it will be made of gold.  
the wind comes out the pipe.  
you can change the sound by holes  
My instrument sounds like a loud yell  
I will use my instrument for Rock

Chris. B #4  
Elsie



Battens

A B C D A  
A B C A

The A section loud and bouncy, joyful, violon  
The B section soft and high bassoon  
The A section high, loud, bouncy again  
The C section

A

B

4 - movement description

A Bouncing, Opening and closing hands and feet  
B. rocking, tippey toes and swaying with hands

what are your hands doing?

movement  
everyone  
together,  
but movements  
went with music