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## Special Research Interest Group in

# *Measurement and Evaluation*

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## **Arts Education Assessment**

What's Happening at the  
National and State Level

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### *The Role of Arts Assessment*

Most good arts educators understand the importance of assessment in the arts. They recognize that what is valued in our society and in the school curriculum will be tested; what is tested will be taught, and consequently, receive additional resources. They understand arts educators have more to fear from not being part of the conversation about assessment than they have to fear from suppressing creativity or "numbing-down" the arts curriculum.

Good arts educators also recognize the importance of the assessment development process: the clear and thoughtful definition of what students should know and be able to do in the arts at certain ages; the determination of what would constitute reasonable evidence of achievement; the development or selection of engaging tasks and activities for children that produce the evidence; and the application of fair and sensitive methods to

score student achievement. These arts teachers presumably would also understand the difference between meaningful use and potentially harmful misuse of assessment outcomes. No doubt they would value and make use of assessment results to inform the student, the parents, and the teacher about the child's progress in learning. They would also use that information to modify their instructional procedure or program and improve the curriculum.

Just as they might reject assessments that inappropriately compare children, they would be wary of efforts to use the assessment system to inappropriately compare educational programs or to mete out rewards and punishment. They would know that while student assessments can be a valuable part of a school accountability process, they should not be the sole arbitrator of a school's performance.

But not all teachers have reached this level of understanding and wisdom; nor have most lay persons, politicians, school board members or school administrators. Regrettably, most people in our society view student assessment through the lens of their personal experiences in school,

the dreaded test. More often than not, their memories are of a multiple-choice or true and false type test that emphasized the student's ability to memorize facts and which ultimately categorized them as smart or dumb. Life seemed simple then; the simple score determined the simple grade and the simple grade stood for the degree of success or failure and that, in turn, determined a vast array of not-so-simple rewards and punishments in life.

**"What is valued  
in the school  
curriculum and in  
society is that which  
is tested."**

While those perceptions of assessments from the past still linger in the minds of many, the reality of student assessment has changed. Thoughtful assessments in the arts now ask students to demonstrate their achievement by constructing meaning from basic information. They engage the student in tasks that are important processes in the arts. These applications of student knowledge and skill can help determine progress toward high expectations. They give form and substance to achievement beyond the simple grade or score, and because they are measured against a set of expectations, they help to place the learner on a continuum of his or her personal learning potential rather than merely comparing them to other learners.

However, not all assessments and assessment systems are the thoughtful ones described above. Assessments, like most

things in life, vary in quality. Some are good, some bad, and some are just plain ugly. Some are used effectively for all the right educational reasons, some are used poorly. Some are used for making economic, managerial, and political judgments outside the sphere of teaching and learning. While the uses may have a wide range on the legitimacy scale, they all have a serious and definable impact on what happens in schools.

The impact is a result of increasing public distress about the effectiveness of our educational systems. It has been nurtured by a growing dissatisfaction with high taxes, perceptions of government waste, and an aging population with a declining interest in supporting public schools (only about 27 percent of voters have children in the public schools.) The combination of all of these and a concern for higher standards and the need to measure progress in achieving them, has created a new environment for accountability in education with student test scores playing the leading role.

And who can argue with the desire for higher test scores? If the assessments were fair and rigorous; if they were appropriate and used multiple measures to assess important subject matter and skills; if they contributed to the teaching and learning process rather than limiting it; and if they were always accompanied by support for teachers and students to improve, it would be a difficult argument indeed. But this isn't always the case.

### *High-Stakes and Accountability*

In any student assessment environment where accountability is tied to high stakes, raising student test scores becomes the primary objective of the schools. The emphasis of the curriculum becomes learning the content being tested at the expense of other areas.

In a high-stakes, competitive accountability model, low scores from an assessment might deny funding, affect the control or leadership of a school, deny a diploma, or in some way result in extreme, negative consequences for the school or student. Any technical problems in a high-stakes assessment are usually magnified in direct proportion to the increase in negative consequences and often become the subject of a lawsuit.

Most assessments cover or test a small percentage of the total expectations for the learning experience and to some degree assume the score for the portion tested represents what might be expected if all the expectations were tested. Given the broad range of knowledge and skills in any subject, if all the questions that could be asked were asked, the assessment would take longer than the instruction. High stakes assessments, because of the possibility of negative consequences, must be explicit and precise about what will be tested. This need tends to narrow the curriculum to the particular knowledge or skill called for in the assessment and the test becomes the de-facto curriculum of the school.

Today the nation is preparing for a national (though voluntary) test in reading at the fourth grade and mathematics in the eighth grade. Unlike the NAEP which can not report individual student or school scores, the proposed national tests *will* report an individual student's score as well as the scores for the school, the district, and the state. Many individuals see these tests as a means to achieve high standards, others see them as a threat to the broader vision of

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individual school  
scores."**

educational expectations found in the Goals 2000 legislation which included the arts.

### *Arts Assessment at the National Level*

Until the idea for a national test in reading and mathematics was suggested by the President in his "State of the Nation" speech, the concern for student achievement at the national level was addressed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or the NAEP test as it is known.

NAEP is often called "The Nation's Report Card," because it is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's

students know and can do in a variety of subjects. Operating since 1969, the NAEP has been conducted periodically to provide objective information on student performance for policy makers at the national, state, and local levels.

Rather than testing every child in all the schools, NAEP uses a sampling process that tests a small fraction of fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade students across the country. Because the sample is carefully drawn and statistically balanced, the results of the assessments can be generalized to the whole population. NAEP is a project of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a part of the US Department of Education, and is mandated by Congress.

The arts have been a part of the NAEP assessment from its inception.

In 1972-1973 NAEP assessed music using 15 performance exercises administered to approximately 37,500 students aged 9, 13, 17, and young adults, aged 26 to 35. The results were reported in 1974. In 1974-1975, NAEP assessed visual art with performance exercises administered to 27,000 students aged 9, 13, 17, and young adults, 26 to 35. The results were reported in 1978.

In 1978-1979, NAEP assessed both visual art and music for the second time. The music assessment was administered to 67,000 students aged 9, 13, and 17, but no performance exercises were used due to budget restraints. The visual art assessment was administered to 33,000 students at the

same age levels and included performance exercises. The results of both assessments were reported in 1981.

In August 1991, after ten years of benign neglect, the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), which provides the direction and oversight for the NAEP, authorized the arts as one of the subjects to be assessed in 1996.

The structure and content of the new arts education assessment, the NAEP Arts Education Assessment Framework and Specifications, were developed under contract by The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in 1993 and 1994. In 1994, Educational Testing Service (ETS) of Princeton, New Jersey received the contract to develop the operational assessment based on the accepted Framework and Specifications. WESTAT of Rockville, Maryland was engaged as a subcontractor to facilitate the implementation of the assessment and National Computer Services (NCS) of Iowa City, Iowa was engaged as the subcontractor to score the assessments.

A field test of exercises in four arts areas (dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts) was completed at the fourth and eighth grade in the winter of 1995. Due to budgetary restraints, the full assessment was rescheduled for 1997 and reduced in scope.

The NAEP arts education assessment was implemented in the winter and early spring of 1997. It consisted of a national assessment at the eighth grade level with a reduced sample

size (referred to as a "probe") and a field test at the twelfth grade level.

The probe at the eighth grade involved a national sample of about 6,500 students in 279 schools: 2,000 students in music, 2,000 students in theatre, and 2,500 in visual art.

Schools and students participating in the assessment were identified through a sampling process that reflected a cross-section of the country's schools. The Grade 8 probe used a random sample of students in music and visual arts and a "targeted" sample of students in theatre. About thirty students in each school were tested. For the music and visual art assessment, students were assigned either visual arts or music. For theatre, the sample was drawn from a list of students enrolled in theatre courses or those who had received instruction in theatre.

The differences in the samples were due to the actual numbers of students enrolled in the various arts areas as determined by the field test information on arts programs in the schools. From data gathered in the 1995 eighth grade field test, NCES found that only 23-24 percent of Grade 8 schools have theatre. NCES also found that fewer than 4 percent of the schools taught dance. Because the numbers for dance were too small to produce a representative sample using the NAEP sampling model, dance programs were surveyed rather than assessed.

The Grade 12 field test involved 4,400 students at the grade 12 level in 135 schools

across the nation. The targeted sample of students currently enrolled in an arts course included 800 students in dance, 1,200 students music, 1,200 students in theatre, and 1,200 students in the visual arts.

Theoretically, testing in all four arts could have taken place in one school. Some schools in the sample were regular high schools with dance. Others were magnet schools. Still others may have offered only art or music. Because the sample size was too small for generalizing from the results, the field test will only be reported in a "process report" that does not provide student achievement data.

In both the probe and the field test, the assessment consisted of a block of paper and pencil items completed at the student's desks lasting from 60-90 minutes for the entire class, and a block of performance exercises administered to a subset of the students lasting approximately 120 minutes.

For music, visual arts, and theatre the results of the eighth grade national assessment will be reported as achievement levels similar to the "National Report Card" in other curricular areas. There will also be a report on the process of implementing the national assessment. In place of reporting dance achievement results, NAEP will report the results of the survey on dance instruction conducted at the time of the eighth grade assessment in music, theatre, and the visual arts. The type of information gathered in the dance survey

will also be gathered and reported for the other arts disciplines.

The results of the 1995 field test in grades 4-8 and the current grade 12 field test will be published in a "process report" in late 1997. It will include how the test was developed, which exercises and implementation measures worked and which didn't, how well the scoring worked, the challenges and benefits of videotaping and what was learned from it, and how facilitators were used.

### *Arts Assessment at the State Level*

Constructing a simple picture of the arts assessment environment at the state level is difficult. It's more like the changing images in a kaleidoscope or examining a strip of movie film. The variability and complexity of a single state is intimidating; multiplying that times 50 is daunting.

The actual number of states assessing in the arts is small, the levels of sophistication in arts assessment are many, the range of types of assessments is great, and the plans, schedules, and intentions are constantly changing due to political and economic forces.

Yet there is a general similarity in the various patterns. Each pattern is created from a small number of common variables such as: the state constitution's design for education; the political structure and priorities; the available leadership and vision of the leaders; and the state's particular traditions, needs, and available resources. Most states

produce materials for describing or directing the curriculum, some have created frameworks for measuring student achievement.

According to a 1996 study by Larry Peeno for the National Art Education Association, only six states assessed to any degree some area of the arts. Eight additional states are engaged in plans to assess the arts within two years.<sup>1</sup>

A study of State Student Assessment Programs completed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) and released in May 1997, did not list or analyze arts programs due to the small number, but did report on trends in the different types of assessments being used in the state programs.

The survey found that 46 states currently have statewide assessment programs. Of the remaining four states, Colorado and Minnesota are developing assessment programs leaving Iowa and Nebraska as the only two states not presently administering or developing a statewide student assessment program.

Mathematics and language arts are assessed by 45 and 44 states respectively. Writing, is assessed in 34 states, science in 30, and social studies in 26 states. As for the types of assessments used, 36 reported using some form of a writing assessment, 33 used criterion-referenced tests as part of the assessment program, 29 used norm-referenced testing, 23 used some form of perfor-

mance assessment, and four used some portfolio formats.

When asked about the different types of assessment items administered, 41 states indicated they used multiple choice items, 36 states used extended written responses, 24 used some short answer, 10 used actual examples of student work, only nine reported performance tasks, and four used student projects.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, the vast majority of states have no arts assessment components in their state assessment programs and, for the subjects they do assess, rely heavily on "traditional" assessment measures that are simple, affordable, and quick. "Traditional" assessments such as multiple choice formats require students to select a "right" answer from among several "wrong" answers. These assessments are comparatively easy to administer, fairly inexpensive to produce, implement, and score, and yield a broad sample of data in a relatively short period of time. However, they simply can not be used to assess more complex applications of student knowledge and offer few clues to the teacher about why the student gave a correct or incorrect answer.

Though more states are employing more "nontraditional" assessments such as performance or portfolio formats each year, the progress toward using better assessment practice is slow and hindered by resistance to change as well as many economic and technical obstacles. Nontraditional assessments are typically more expensive and time consuming

to develop, administer, and score. Ensuring the reliability of these assessment results has also proven costly and difficult, although some states find the benefits in improved assessment of complex skills and the modeling of good instruction to be worthwhile.

Generalizability is another difficulty with many nontraditional assessments. Different performance tasks evoke different levels of skill from the same students. This difference limits the likelihood that a given performance on a small sample of tasks will be strongly indicative of the student's overall ability.

While these problems are found in all content areas including mathematics and reading, they are especially acute for the arts. The arts must use visual, auditory, and kinesthetic languages in conducting the assessments. The use of performance assessment is often the only reasonable way of collecting the evidence of achievement in the arts where temporal, spatial, or visual elements of the stimuli or prompts and student responses are not easily converted to verbal-linguistic modes.

But in spite of the impediments, some states are working together to address those challenges and opportunities as part of the State Collaborative on Assessments and Student Standards (SCASS) Arts Assessment Consortium.

In October of 1991 the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) convened a consortium of states interested in

developing large-scale, state-level assessments in arts education. For the past five and one-half years, the SCASS Arts Assessment Project has been developing and refining arts education assessment instruments (classroom, large-scale, and portfolio) that address the voluntary National Standards for Arts Education.

The design parameters for the assessment exercises are based on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) *Framework and Specifications Documents* developed by CCSSO through a contract with the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). The assessment exercises will be used in the member states in a variety of ways from state level assessments to instructionally embedded classroom assessments.

In April, May, and June of 1994, CCSSO organized and conducted a series of arts education assessment development workshops in 15 states to write exercises for the 1997 NAEP. Each state formed teams of teachers and state department of education personnel to construct the exercises according to the NAEP specifications.

This year, 1996-97, the SCASS Arts Assessment Consortium consists of fifteen member states: California, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin. Each state contributes a participation fee of \$10,000 which supports the travel expenses for two representatives (one

content specialist and one assessment specialist) to attend quarterly meetings and work sessions. Support has also come from the Getty Education Institute for the Arts for exercise development, implementation, and innovative use of technology in the assessment process.

In addition to developing over 800 draft scorable units, SCASS Arts Education Assessment Consortium members have collected over one hundred exemplary assessment prototypes from states and districts. Their work has also produced the planning for a comprehensive professional development model and materials in arts education assessment to be used by states and local districts for teachers and other educators.

Last year, the consortium conducted a professional development survey in 15 member states and field tested the assessment exercise sets with 3,400 students in 76 schools. This year, additional field tests further refined the sample exercises for the professional development component.

During the 1997-98 project year, the consortium will complete the professional development program and begin field testing the components. The group has found that one of the best approaches to learning about assessment is to have a group of teachers cooperatively score student art work. As teachers discuss the work, virtually every important point about curriculum development, instruction, assessment, and reporting may be raised. The scoring will move

from the simple "What evidence of achievement do you see?" to "Is that particularly important to know or be able to do?" proceeding to "How might you teach that concept?" and on to "What evidence of student achievement would you accept as proof of learning?" In the end, the teachers need to consider the broad range of possible student responses and how to scale those responses for scoring. The assessment process becomes a strong lens for reviewing what we do as teachers and, more importantly, what the learner does as a result of this teaching.

The consortium plans to develop and use emerging technology to convert all forms of student responses from the assessment work to digital formats for use in the development of remote scoring techniques and arts assessment training for teachers through CD-ROM formats or the Internet. The use of new CD-ROM technology will also allow the consortium to assemble examples of student work that exemplify responses to the National Standards expectations. The ease of retrieving these "benchmark" examples will be a valuable asset in the development of scoring rubrics and in teacher training applications.

The consortium will use the digital imagery in other ways as well:

1) to construct the best possible set of prompts or stimulus materials for assessments that make use of the best of the arts from around the world.

2) to capture the best response to the stimuli from the student focusing on the essence of the behavior or the specific exhibition of the knowledge or skill.

3) to transport the images electronically for scoring, processing and transmitting results to the student and teacher. The technology available today can help the group to address some of the challenges that inhibit the use of performance assessment in all areas of assessment.

However, the use of technology will not solve all the problems of increased cost and time associated with the development, administration, and scoring of nontraditional arts assessments. Nor will it address all the challenges of rater reliability or generalizability. Beyond the technical concerns are less sophisticated but just as persistent challenges—the simple need to reach teachers with new ideas and support them as they assimilate the new concepts and incorporate them in their teaching.

Until we can prepare new teachers with the knowledge and skill for creating and using arts education assessments effectively, our success in becoming part of the broader discussion in education reform will be marginal. Until we can inform a generation of practicing teachers who have had little or no experience in sound assessment practice, we will probably continue to reinforce the public perception that the arts are not a serious or worthy subject to include in every child's curriculum.

And so the circle comes back to the teacher and the need to recognize the important role of assessment in arts education. Ultimately, the significant changes in education happen because of what teachers do in the classroom and their recognition of the compelling connections between what is valued in the school curriculum—what is assessed—and what is taught.

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*In 1992, Dr. Philip became the consensus coordinator for the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) project to design the 1997 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) arts education assessment in Washington DC. He presently coordinates the State Consortium on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS) program for CCSSO that cooperatively develops assessments and professional development programs for 11 state consortia in a variety of subject areas.*

### References

1. Larry Peeno, *Status of Arts Assessment in the States*, National Art Education Association, Reston, VA, 1996
2. Linda Bond, Edward Roeber, David Braskamp, *Annual Survey of State Student Assessment Programs, Fall 1996*, Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington, DC, May 1997

*The following article was written as a response to four presentations at the Kansas City National Inservice Meeting. Dr. Myford's presentation appeared in the last newsletter. Dr. Philip's is in this issue with Scott Shuler's and Brent Sanden's contributions to appear in the fall.*

*- Richard Colwell*

Some Observations on  
**Designing Large-Scale  
 Assessments in Music:**  
 Current International, National,  
 and State Efforts  
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*Let me acknowledge my credentials for offering the following observations on these assessment projects as 1) I have taken a course in measurement and evaluation in music and 2) I currently teach such a course (which, despite my attempts to be passionately interested in the field, make connections to students' past experience as well as to the promise for their future practice, and highlight the unceasing, often controversial conversation about educational assessment in general, seems not to strike these students as a concern to our work as teachers).*

### **Observation 1**

What's behind each of these efforts is a *good struggle* about what's important to teach and learn in music and how that can be assessed validly and reliably. Encouraging, too, are the new roles that students and teachers are playing in both decision making and the process.

### **Observation 2**

The attempts to *align efforts* - local, state, national, and international - seem to be an indication of our growing maturity and, perhaps, portend of more conversation and less monologue. This alignment generally relates to the same standards and the assessment folks are learning from one another.

### **Observation 3**

Our willingness to *learn from other fields*, e.g., writing and visual arts, is a welcome turn of events.

*As is practiced by humanist adjudicators and studio faculty, the positive observations were offered first. The remaining four remarks are shared as questions or cautions.*

### **Observation 4**

Despite all of the hard work and careful thinking that went into the creation of these standards, *who values them*: the academics, music teachers, general public?

### **Observation 5**

When the assessments are tied up into standards that surpass instructional capacity, *what do we learn* when so few students are proficient? We know what students don't know but *what do they know*?

### **Observation 6**

In reflecting on our history with standards and school improvement, Resnick and Resnick (1985) present a strong argument for the need for *parallel initiatives in curriculum study*. This study, in their minds, goes well beyond some opportunity-to-learn indicators or questions related to school policies, teacher preparation and student background.

### **Observation 7**

In both taking and teaching a course in measurement and evaluation, the concepts of validity, reliability, usability, and usefulness are central to the discussion. The NAEP, the grandfather of these assessments being discussed and a test which is about to be administered for the third time in music, is not a project of which most music teachers are aware which suggests something regarding their current usefulness to teachers.



*In addition to pinning hopes of reform on the behind of assessment, Robert Linn, in his William H. Angoff Memorial Lecture (1995), reminds us that tests are of special "interest and value to policy makers and politicians."*

A large part of the appeal of tests to policy makers comes from their use to demonstrate the shortcomings of education. The Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) report, *Testing in American Schools: Asking the Right Questions* (1992), provides a brief recounting of this history of testing in American schools from the time that Horace Mann introduced written examinations in the mid-

nineteenth century. The OTA report summarized the view that tests could support reform by documenting the need for change as follows: "The idea underlying the implementation of written examinations . . . was born in the minds of individuals already convinced that education was substandard in quality. This sequence - perception of failure followed by the collection of data designed to document failure (or success) - offers early evidence of what has become a tradition of school reform and a truism of student testing: tests are often administered not just to

discover how well schools or kids are doing, but to obtain external confirmation - validation - of the hypothesis that they are not doing well at all [US Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, 1992, p 106] (p.7).

### References

Linn, R. (1995). *Assessment-Based Reform: Challenges to Educational Measurement*. Princeton, NJ: ETS.

Resnick, D. & Resnick, L. (1985). "Standards, Curriculum and Performance: A Historical and Comparative Perspective." *Educational Researcher*, 14(4) 5-19.

## Operation Music: New York State Teacher-Based Student Learning Estimation

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Achievement assessment based on local, state or national standards will be the currency of education politics for several years, perhaps longer, especially at K-12 levels. Test development time will be short, but standards advocates contend that the content validity has already been established by the groups that wrote the standards. Content need not arise from extant curriculums, they say, nor from surveys of teachers. In the face of this premise, music educators fear that control over content is shifting to others.

Local curriculum leadership can be assumed quickly and best through a variation on the "traditional" curriculum development and assessment processes. Sound testing programs are based

on sound curriculums (or, at least, on known curriculums) while most music teachers keep their curriculums in their heads. Music educators have traditionally given curriculum reform a low priority. The task now is to raise curriculum development and assessment efforts to high local prominence at the school-district level and do it quickly. We can, at the same time, incorporate national and state standards in this process without letting them drive local curriculum development.

The purposes of this article are (1) to suggest that the urgency of assessment based on national and state standards requires a long-overdue paradigm shift in teaching and (2) to update music educators elsewhere on a New York State School Music Association

(NYSSMA) project in standards-based curriculum assessment in K-12 music. This project supports the suggested paradigm shift. NYSSMA's approach is also driven by the importance of improving both the resources for and the results of music instruction at the local level. It links individual teachers and their students with national or state standards, accelerates the development of publishable local curriculums, initially injects assessment planning into the process from the start and puts the teacher in the driver's seat.

### *Toward a New Role for Music Teachers*

Standards are teacher-neutral. That is, they describe what the *student* ought to know and be able to do in a discipline, *not* what the teacher should teach. American teachers, for whatever reason, have come to standards-based assessment with the bureaucratic belief that "If I haven't taught it myself, in my program, students don't know it." They rightly concern themselves with resources to deliver instruction based on the standards, but they concern themselves too early with time and budget. These premature discussions of Right-to-Learn standards are part of a bureaucratic teaching paradigm. We are beginning to discover that the standards speak to students through the teacher, and students can be led to discover that they are at the center of the message.

Teachers, however, must send the message to students and taxpayers that standards are expectations for students. The teacher will be assisting, but

more importantly, assessing and overseeing the students' progress not only toward existing standards but also toward additional standards of importance to the teacher. Developing curriculum and assessment concurrently begins the New York process. This is not new news. It has, however, new urgency and provides the potential to improve the chances that music teachers can be credited for the future musical health of American society.

The New York paradigm shift amounts to a new monitorial stance by music teachers, not the old bureaucratic stance. Coupled with human musical action, it is the core of a professional agenda. The content of the music curriculum is broad and deep enough to contribute to many uses and functions in life. Musicians and their patrons are rationally focused on their own unique interests: Symphony orchestra managers and performers want the school to develop symphony patrons. Recording company producers want customers. Street musicians want donations. Barbershoppers want an audience. Church musicians want music that contributes to worship. Film music composers want to enhance the effect on the screen so that they can keep their careers going. Arts Center planners want audiences from clearly-defined segments of the population. Piano technicians and instrument repair people want customers. None of these is musically or simultaneously in contact with the whole, messy, heterogeneous population. Instead, they knowingly select their popula-

tions by type, or the populations select the providers by choosing the event or service that interests them.

The K-12 music educator isn't so lucky, and, ironically, herein lies music education's power. In a general music teacher's week (or six-day cycle) she meets a community's future lawyers, garbage collectors, teachers, carpenters, legislators, and industrial tycoons; and roughly half of her week's students are potential mothers and the other half are potential fathers. The criminals are there, too, and the saints and the social workers. We touch the students with music, even after they graduate, and through them we can improve the musical life of the community they will eventually create. Kodály was right: We are teaching the grandchildren of the students before us, and that fact gives our work both a sense of permanence and a sense of responsibility. Only the public school music educator has a professional interest in the musical health of all of a community and all of its people.

The key to this paradigm shift is a good assessment of *students'* knowledge and skill, regardless of where they attained the knowledge and skill. No one else in the community has the professional interest or qualifications to do this completely. We do.

### **OMNYS**

*Operation Music: New York State (OMNYS)* is a two-question preliminary achievement assessment procedure that I,

aided by several groups of teachers, developed for NYSSMA. It uses the teacher's estimate of student knowledge and skill as the basic unit of measurement along with a report on assessment techniques used. Its validity is grounded in the teacher's instructional practice of estimating the percentage of students in a group who have accomplished a task sufficiently well for the teacher to "go on," to initiate the next instructional procedure rather than to reteach the prior one. This decision is made many times in each class period. There has been no attempt yet to establish assessment reliability, but it would be a simple matter to compare teachers' estimates on OMNYS with test results on the same item (once a valid and reliable test based on the standards is developed).

NYSSMA's primary purpose in sponsoring this project, however, was to involve teachers with the standards in a meaningful way and to provide teachers with a standards-based impetus for local curriculum and assessment development efforts. The OMNYS Inventory asked teachers to relate the Standards to what their students were achieving. Early in 1995, about 2000 OMNYS Inventories were sent to New York music teachers, color-coded by level. Few Inventories were returned for tabulation, but obtaining a high rate of return was not the primary purpose. The OMNYS Inventory was to quickly raise the awareness of active New York music teachers about National Music Standards. Subsequently, I developed an OMNYS Inventory for New York's *State Achievement Stan-*

*dards in the Arts* and I continue to use it in in-service clinics and workshops.

Directions for responding to the National-Standards OMNYS Inventory, in its current edition, appear in Figure 1. It is substantially the same as that used in the earlier project. A sample of OMNYS Inventory items, showing the two-question response mechanism, appears in Figure 2.

Demographic and teaching-load data were requested. The responses were geographically representative, although the return percentage was extremely light. Because of the low response rate, results will not be published. The Inventory achieved its purpose of stimulating an awareness of the National Standards, and sessions on the OMNYS Inventory at the 1995 NYSSMA State convention were well attended.

The OMNYS Inventory will be most successfully used when the teachers of one district, for example, complete the Inventory at the same time. Group administration time of the OMNYS Inventory is about 30 minutes, including time for instructions and questions. Tabulation is a clerical chore, but simple. Percentages of the *n* for each response are computed for each item at each level: Question 1 (achievement estimates) response percentages must add up to 100%; Question 2 (assessment procedures) need not, since respondents are permitted to register more than one assessment procedure for any item.

### *Future Directions Can Take Advantage of Our Past Successes*

The funding squeeze is permanent and that is why we cannot ignore our own professional history. Assessment played a key role in the inclusion of music in the schools of the 19th and early 20th century, especially performance music. Music contests and festivals, with participation or honors based on performance assessment procedures, helped music educators consolidate these gains. Lowell Mason and other professional ancestors used assessment in addition to high quality performances to make their point about music education. In New York, local taxpayers in all but the five largest school systems vote yearly on a proposed school budget. New York music educators understand, firsthand, the necessity of every year "proving" the effectiveness of school music to their voters.

Assessment has provided our profession with additional advantages, and the content of American music education has never had more governmental legitimacy than it has now. We must use the place of the arts in *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* to bolster local claims to our place in the school program. The history of music education in America tells us that we succeed when we couple the accomplishment of our best students with a systematic assessment of all of them. National Standards, Goals 2000, state achievement standards - we must recognize these as advantages and they must be used correctly the first

time. Their influence of standards on policy makers may fade, but there is ample indication that taxpayers are interested in results. Goals 2000 funding directed through SEDs in New York may be used for standards-based assessment.






This is a complex business and success won't happen either uniformly or overnight. We use the motto "Start With One"- one grade level, one do-

main project for a portfolio, one teacher, one building, one standardized test, one class musical profile, one *something* to move assessment more thoroughly into the instructional process. Starting small is the consistent advice of teachers who have traveled farther than others down the assessment road and have seen its benefits in student achievement. By using a standards- and learner-based estimate, teachers can

compare notes, and successes in aggregate can follow.

Assessment by itself is not enough. But, it's a crucial strategy in this generation's opportunity to raise American musical standards. We did it for standards in performance, now, we must also raise the musical standards for the rest of society.

Figure 1. Directions for completing the OMNYS Inventory

O	M	N	Y	S
OPERATION MUSIC: NEW YORK STATE		NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL MUSIC ASSOCIATION		
<p><b>OMNYS Inventory - National Standards</b>  <b>NYSSMA Curriculum Committee</b>                  Winter 1997</p>				
<p><b>Here is your personal OMNYS Inventory. In this Inventory you'll use Achievement Standards* in Music, from <i>National Standards for Arts Education</i> to answer two kinds of questions:</b></p> <p>(1) What proportion of your own students meet your school's achievement expectations for each Music Achievement Standard in the <i>National Standards for Arts Education</i> ?</p>				
Up to one-third		Between one-third and two thirds		
Over two-thirds		Nearly all		
I don't assess this standard.		N/A		

(2) How do you assess your students' achievement on this Standard; i.e., how can you tell?

Paper & pencil tests (quizzes, finals)	T E S T S	Performance observation (lesson evaluations, etc.)	P E R F
Portfolio assessment (all types, including tapes)	P O R T F	I don't assess this.	N O N E

**IMPORTANT:** You are estimating what YOUR students know and are able to do in music, regardless of how or where they learned it. Use the same mental process you use every day in teaching something new: you decide when to go on to the next part of your plan by estimating what proportion of your class learned what you just had them do. In this Inventory, however, your students may have learned the content either from you or learned it somewhere else.

**Work Through the Inventory.** Read the top of the Answer Sheet. Choose one Grade Level and one Program in which you teach students and check one of each at the top of the Answer Sheet. If you teach in more than one program, start with the one in which you have the most students and do the Answer Sheet for that group of students only. Use separate sheets for other programs or levels. Because the number of Achievement Standards varies, you may not need all the numbers on the Answer Sheet. It is essential that your responses reflect only the students in the program you check in the box at the top of the Answer Sheet. Do this even though you might also teach in other programs and at other levels. You may be assessing only part of what you do on each sheet.

**IMPORTANT:** Comparing your estimates with other teachers can be a great way to start a curriculum review. However, compare Answer Sheets only at the same Grade Level. Similar items are numbered differently between Levels.

\*Achievement Standards used in this OMNYS Inventory are found in the *National Standards for Arts Education* (published in 1994 and available from the Music Educators National Conference). K-4 standards for music are on pp. 26-29; Grade 5-8 on pp.42-45; Grade 9-12 on pp. 59-63. They also appear in chart form, K-12, on pp. 97-109. In Grades 5-8 and 9-12, a distinction is made for students in performing ensembles and other specialized courses such as music theory, history, composition, etc. These students are expected to achieve basic standards (labeled as Proficient in 9-12) as well as advanced standards. These are identified on the Inventories.

*For further information write:  
Terry Gates, NYSSMA Curriculum Chair  
c/o Department of Music, 222 Baird Hall, SUNY at Buffalo  
Buffalo, NY 14260*

Figure 2. Sample items from the OMNYS Inventory

Respond by filling in the "bubbles" below. See figure 1 for directions.

**Answer Sheet - OMNYS Curriculum Assessment Inventory - National Music Standards**

**IMPORTANT! This Inventory is only for my students in the Grade Level and Program checked below.**

**1. Grade Level**

Check the GRADE LEVEL at which you teach the most students and read which Inventory to use.

- Primary grades, up to Gr. 3, 4, or 5 (Use Grade K-4 Inventory.)
- Intermediate grades, up to Gr. 7, 8, or 9 (Use Grade 5-8 Inventory.)
- Secondary grades, up to Gr. 12; performing ensembles, Music In Our Lives or equivalent general music course, music theory, etc. (Use Grade 9-12 Inventory.)

**2. Program**

Check the one in which you teach the most students at the level you checked on the left and answer for it only.

- Band and/or wind/perc. instruments
- Chorus and/or voice
- Classroom music, MIOL, etc.
- Orchestra and/or strings

**Content Standard 1: Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.** (Achievement Standards from Level K-4):

1. Students sing independently, on pitch and with appropriate timbre, diction, and posture, and maintain a steady tempo.
2. Students sing expressively, with appropriate dynamics, phrasing, and interpretation.
3. Students sing from memory a varied repertoire of songs representing genres and styles from diverse cultures.
4. Students sing ostinato, partner songs, and rounds.
5. Students sing in groups, blending vocal timbres, matching dynamic levels, and responding to cues of a conductor.

Proportion who meet the standard:					Assessed by:			
					T	P	O	N
				n/a	E	R	R	O
					S	T	T	N
					S	F	F	E
1.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Music Assessment in Vermont:

Where Music Stands as Part of the Vermont  
Arts Assessment Project

**Tony Pietricola**

Charlotte Elementary School, Charlotte, VT

*The following report is taken largely from the most recent document compiled by Fern Tavalin, Vermont Arts Assessment Project Coordinator.*

The work of the teachers in the in the Vermont Arts Assessment Project has been in progress for almost four years. Teachers came to the project for a variety of reasons. Some began participating because they wanted to raise the standards of arts education. Others were interested in advocacy for arts in general and thought assessment would be a means to do that. Some teachers wanted to tie into the general portfolio initiative of the state of Vermont. Many sought involvement because they desired to improve the quality of their own instruction.

Fern Tavalin, the coordinator of the Vermont Arts Assessment Project, makes the following observations. "From a base made up of arts teachers, the project expanded to include the input of artists, community members, classroom teachers, and students. Through conversations with all of these groups, both separately and together, it is clear that arts assessment and the standards movement contain both serving and disturbing elements.

The artistic process needs to come first and foremost when considering standards and assessment. Too frequently, the pursuit of good assessment techniques has led us all into conversations far away from the creating, performing, and responding that brought us together. This point was poignantly raised by artist Sally Warren of Grafton:

I think your asking me to talk to you about my view [of group critique sessions] as an artist came as a surprise because I had been thinking of this as 'arts assessment.' I completely lost [the fact] that the whole point was to help people become artists! And if I'm losing that as a professional, how much greater can the rift be for teachers?

How then, can assessment and teaching to standards play a crucial role in the development of artistic expression? When standards are used to raise the level of awareness about what is possible, they serve. When standards are used as a checklist of items to be mastered, they disturb. Working through the com-

plexities of assessment, let us not eliminate the passion that comes with artistic creation."

### *Music Assessment*

Although this article is specifically targeted to music, it is important to know it can be applied to all the arts. The Vermont Arts Assessment Project speaks to Dance, Theatre, Music, and the Visual Arts.

One of the goals of music assessment has always been skill development. Here is where students can exhibit the elements and techniques of the arts forms they use, including expression, that are appropriate to the intent of their projects. Originally, Vermont Arts Assessment Design Team members wished to differentiate between the process of making art and the products or performances that result from that process. They established a category called "Quality of Product" and another called "Quality of Process." After working with these categories and consulting Vermont artists in regional meetings held during the winter of 1995, it was decided to drop the split product/process way of viewing and look instead at four major areas of assessment: Skill Development, Reflection and Critique, Making Connections, and Approach to Work.

### *Skill Development*

The shift from Quality of Product to Skill Development merits explanation. Vermont artists voiced a concern that Quality of Product leads to highly biased judgments because re-

sponse to products or performances depends upon the interaction between viewer and maker. Concern for the valuing of product over artistic process was also expressed. Skill Development as one of four dimensions puts the role of product into perspective.

With the clarity of a category called Skill Development, Design Team members looked at work that had been previously done, took into consideration input given by the arts community, and cross-referenced this with the National Standards for Arts Education to create a tool for assessment. Together they developed a rubric for Skill Development in order to make consistent scoring decisions. The Vermont math and writing portfolios use rubric scoring to assess student learning in those areas. It is important to note that the arts rubrics are not meant to assess all of the dimensions of learning in the arts. The rubrics are appropriately applied to Skill Development, which is only one of the four assessment categories. These rubrics are generic; their purpose is to take an overview of development.

They should be used periodically to determine overall proficiency. A more specific rubric should be developed at the classroom level to assess student learning of a particular lesson or skill.

These rubrics are designed as tools for professional development and student self-assessment. They communicate progress in a very general way and are dependent upon the benchmark examples that go along with the help of professional organizations and arts groups throughout the state. A beginning example of the rubrics and accompanying benchmarks is available on computer for those who have access to high speed Macs. A videotaped version of the benchmarks and IBM computer disk examples became available in late spring of 1996. Work is currently underway by the WEB Project through the Montpelier, Vt. School District and the Vermont Council on the Arts to place benchmarks of the rubrics on the World Wide Web.

The music rubric is a holistic rubric meant to assess ensemble development in the el-

ements and techniques of music. It is a developmental rubric that spans beginner to distinguished levels of performance. As such, students are not expected to attain the highest levels while still in high school. In thinking about a level of achievement that would be appropriate for all students, the Music Design Team recommends as rubrics "Advanced Beginner" to denote basic communication.

Elements and Techniques for "Advanced Beginner" include:

- Accurate Pitch and Rhythm
- Characteristic Timbre
- Articulation
- Rhythmic Fluidity

This music rubric is not meant to encompass all of Skill Development; it shows only those aspects of ensemble performance that can be heard during a performance. Other elements which complete the area of Skill Development include: Reading and Notating Music; and Composing, Arranging, and Improvising. An assessment has been developed for sight reading and ensemble performance in conjunction with a Council of Chief State School Officers project called the States Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards. This assessment is available to any teachers or schools wishing to use it.

The music rubric was benchmarked during the winter of 1996 with the help of the Vermont Music Educators Association. *See figure 1 p 17.*

Jeff Leonard of Lexington, MA High School is collecting rubrics on the standard that will measure competency in singing. Teachers who have descriptors of basic, proficient, and advanced (along with a sample of the possible music) that describe any or all of the competencies of the singing standard are encouraged to send them to Mr. Leonard at 19 Davis Road, Acton, MA 01720. Rubrics received will be published in the fall edition of the SRIG Newsletter.



Figure 1.

GENERIC MUSIC RUBRIC ASSESSING ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE - VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL					
ELEMENTS AND TECHNIQUES OF VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC					
Beginner	Advanced Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced Intermediate	Advanced	Distinguished
<p><i>When playing or singing simple songs, ensemble shows:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- little demonstration of pitch, rhythm, or technique</li> </ul>	<p><i>When playing or singing simple songs, ensemble shows evidence of:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- accurate combination of pitch and rhythm</li> <li>- characteristic timbre</li> <li>- articulation that is appropriate to piece</li> <li>- rhythmic fluidity</li> </ul>	<p><i>When playing or singing pieces, ensemble demonstrates:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- accurate combination of pitch and rhythm</li> <li>- characteristic timbre</li> <li>- articulation that is appropriate to the piece</li> <li>- rhythmic fluidity</li> </ul> <p><i>And ensemble shows evidence of:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- combined use of pitch, rhythm, melody, and harmony</li> <li>- intonation</li> <li>- blend</li> <li>- balance</li> <li>- phrasing</li> <li>- dynamic contrast</li> </ul>	<p><i>When playing or singing increasingly complex pieces, ensemble demonstrates the elements and techniques of the previous levels plus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- well developed ensemble skills</li> </ul>	<p><i>When playing or singing increasingly difficult pieces, ensemble demonstrates the elements and techniques of previous levels plus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- advanced ensemble skills as demonstrated by a cohesion of tone, technique, and rhythm</li> <li>- employment of all aspects of musical expression to communicate an intended musical outcome</li> </ul>	<p><i>When playing or singing increasingly difficult pieces, ensemble demonstrates the elements and techniques of the previous levels plus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the entire ensemble functions as one</li> <li>- goes beyond the basics to create a unique, expressive voice</li> </ul>
<p><i>Elements and Techniques - Elements of music are the raw materials which form the basis of a musical language. In Western music they include: rhythm, pitch, melody, harmony, dynamics, timbre, texture, form, tone quality, and phrasing. Technique means showing the ability to translate musical ideas or notation into purposefully organized sound.</i></p>					

There is another use for the skill rubric. The audience was asked to join in the evaluation at a recent Charlotte Central School band concert. On the back of the regular concert program (with a glossary of terms) we had the parents use the rubric to evaluate the performance. Feedback from parents was very positive. They especially liked it when the concert, normally an emotional event, took on an intellectual tone as well. The principal of the school, Monica

Smith, told the audience after the concert that she couldn't wait until the spring concert, given the quality of this one. She couldn't remember the band sounding so "polished" in December. The band by no means sounded perfect, but working with the rubric helped the students in their self-assessment. The idea of clear and public criteria applied to both students and audience; it helped to train everyone in the content of our discipline.

**Reflection**

Student reflection and critique of their own work and that of others is one of the more significant changes in arts education in the recent reform movement. Typically, the word "critique" carries a negative connotation. However, an approach to critique that includes student involvement changes this negative relationship and helps students to improve more quickly. There are many forms of reflection and

critique and it is essential to match the type used with the needs of the students participating and the demands of the teaching situation.

The Arts Vermont Assessment Project has explored aspects of reflection and critique in individual classrooms and through two pilot projects: the Visual Arts Study Groups and MIDI Distance Learning. The information generated by these projects has pointed out some important considerations for reflection and critique, namely that helpful critique for student improvement work cannot come without knowing a student's intent. Furthermore, discussion of work by others, when it includes consideration of an artist's intent, leads to comments that go beyond personal likes and dislikes.

MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) is a language which translates music into computer talk and vice versa.

In the fall of 1994, the Vermont legislature allocated funds for to foster music composition in the classrooms of 13 teachers. When the students believe they are ready for an evaluation, they can send their compositions (online) to other schools and to Vermont composers for comments.

The type of reflection and critique that occurs in the MIDI Project is similar to that of the Visual Arts Study Group. Students make music and then ask for specific comments about what others hear in their work. They consider the suggestions for improvement as time allows. The students who send

Figure 2. Written by J.J.M., Founders Memorial School, Essex Junction, VT. 3/95.



- J.J.M., you have shown an ability to start with an idea and play with it. You take a short phrase and mirror it. Or keep the same rhythmic idea and move it up a step or change it completely. Waiting to bring in the eighth note pattern until later showed that you still had that idea in mind. It was really effective when you changed the rhythm, added the rest, and held that 'E' (measure 26) after your ascending (19) and descending (23) chord pattern. It was good to see use of rests. Check your time in measures 12, 28, and 29.

compositions online for evaluation define the type of feedback they would like to receive. Figure 2 shows a group composition by three third graders at Founders Memorial School and the response given to them by a Vermont composer.

The following is an individual classroom practice used at Charlotte Elementary School to teach instrumental music and electronic keyboard/music composition.

Building upon the Arts PROPEL Project in Pittsburgh, PA, band rehearsals are recorded and students are asked to listen to their playing and give comments for improvement. This approach is helpful because students seem to improve faster when they correct themselves than when they listen exclusively to input from the band director. A balanced mix between teacher input and student self-assessment seems to be critical.

Students' responses are guided by keying their attention to the skills they are developing at the moment. For instance, the middle school band had learned a lot about rhythm and pitch, but needed to work on balance and dynamics. So, balance and dynamics became the focus for critique in the next rehearsals. Directing responses to certain areas helps reinforce the students' abilities to listen in a focused way.

Taping rehearsals for group critique also allows students to gain a sense of the "full" sound. As one student mentioned, "I really like listening to the whole group on tape. I can already hear what I'm doing when I play, but I can't always tell what is going on around me."

Even though reflection and critique is used in classrooms to improve student performance, I offer the following cautions:

- Keep the length of discussion short (5 minutes per class is enough) so that the talking does not override the doing.

- Time the critique so it is productive. It is not a good time for critique when first beginning work on a new song because the music has not had a chance to develop.

- Use critique when it matters. Students are ready to critique their work a week or two before a public performance or when sections are joining for the first time.

There are many types of reflection and critique. Each can stand alone as qualitative assessment if the feedback being given is full of detail and specific reference. Often, when teachers and students begin with reflection and critique either in written or verbal form, responses are vague. A simple three point scale can help students and teachers improve upon the input they give. This scale can also be used to grade open-ended reflection journals. The following is such a scale.

Generic Rubric for Assessing Student Responses:

Level 3: Accurately describes the area being discussed. Gives detailed examples, references, connections or responses to general insights. Uses music vocabulary.

Level 2: Accurately describes the area being discussed. Uses a mix of music vocabulary and general terms.

Level 1: Gives general comments that could apply to other situations as well as the discussion.

The work begun by the Design Team members of the Vermont Arts Assessment Project does not end the conversation about arts assessment in Vermont, rather it begins it. The Vermont Common Core Framework for Curriculum and Assessment gives the arts a solid place in the curriculum. To know whether or not the standards in the Framework are being met, however, requires assessment systems at the local and state levels. The Arts Assessment Project has provided a foundation for those assessments and Design Team members serve as local resources. In order to survive and thrive, the conversations we have begun and the shared notions we hold need to be assessed.

Without the input of artists across Vermont who came to various sessions held throughout the state, our current thinking would not be as strong. As individual schools embark upon developing local assessment tools, it is important to remember to include area artists.

*For more information about the Vermont Arts Assessment Project contact:*

*Vermont Council on the Arts 136 State Street, Drawer 33 Montpelier, Vt. 05633-6001*

**Editor's  
Desk**

The editors of your SRIG Newsletter wish to be informed of research on the construction and/or use of assessment instruments in music. With the recent emphasis on educational outcomes, we are dismayed at the apparent lack of systematic evaluation research by doctoral students, professional organizations, and individuals in the field. The president of the American Evaluation Association, Leonard Bickman, recently focused his presidential address on the lack of interest in evaluation. He reports that the percentage of articles in psychological and sociological abstracts on evaluation is 7% and dropping. He conducted a study of the quality of these articles and found it also was in decline. Membership in the association was about 2900 in 1987 and has dropped to about 1700. Student membership is also dropping. He found no decline in the membership of the American Sociological Association, his "control" group. The question raised is, "Where Do We Go From Here?"

We are posing the same question to the readers of our MENC SRIG Newsletter.

*The University of Maryland has recently published papers from 3 colloquia held on campus in 1993, 1995, and 1997. The colloquium has been renamed in honor of Charles Fowler who was such a strong advocate for arts education.*

A Festschrift in honor of Bennett Reimer was presented in June of 1997. Information on the publication entitled *Musings: Arts Education Essays* is available from Dr. Peter Webster, Director of Music Education at Northwestern University.

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*Address Correction  
Requested*



**Attn: Dr. Richard Colwell and John Tully**

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