

Lessons Learned While Piloting a Fifth-Grade CBPA

Choose one assessment that will fit with your curriculum and determine what time of the year will work best for your school and your program.

by Janie Anderson

Most of us have many questions about how the Classroom-Based Performance Assessments (CBPAs) will affect us as we move closer to the 2008 implementation date. When I agreed to attend the OSPI scoring workshop for Fine and Performing Arts in the spring of 2006, I felt that while I was not totally sold on the idea of assessing the arts in a WASL format, I did want to understand the CBPAs as proposed and have the opportunity to give feedback on the assessments and rubrics being developed. This article highlights some of the insights I gained while piloting a fifth-grade assessment in spring 2007.

As music educators, we have our Washington state EALRs to help guide our curriculum, but I know that many districts still don't have a defined curriculum (scope and sequence), nor is there consistency in terms of student contact time, resources and training available. Perhaps the CBPAs can add credibility to what we are already doing and help support our future requests for funding and support. If we look at the CBPAs as a means of strengthening our programs statewide, rather than worry that they will be used to judge us personally or see them simply as taking away from instructional time, perhaps we will reap more of the benefits from this process.

Initially, my students showed a great deal of anxiety and not much enthusiasm when I told them we were piloting an assessment similar to the WASL. However, once assured that they were "testing the test," that they could give feedback to make it better and that their scores would not be reported, the students relaxed. As an aside, I was surprised to find that several students did not realize that WASL scores are not used to determine grades for report cards.

After looking at the choices available for grade 5, I piloted the "Cartoon Soundtrack." In this assessment students are presented with the following scenario:

The director of a cartoon studio has developed a new character for an upcoming movie. The director is looking for a piece of music with interesting rhythm and dynamics for the movie's soundtrack. You want to be selected to compose music for the soundtrack. The director has asked that you create and perform a rhythmic piece that is four measures long. The director is interested in your use of rhythm and dynamics. You will have time to practice before performing the piece on an unpitched percussion instrument. The performance should be played without stopping. You will have two chances to perform the selection while being videotaped.

Once the assessment project began, I found that the class wanted to do more than the CBPA asked for. The students' response gave me an idea. I suggested that first they do what the test asked of them. Then we could do a project where students had greater freedom to expand on the length of the piece, rhythms they used etc. As a result, the CBPA served as an introduction to a subsequent project that asked the students to compose a rhythm rondo in small groups. This worked well and made me realize the CBPAs do not need to take away a great deal of instructional time. The key is to consider the assessment options and decide which

one best fits your teaching scope and sequence for the current school year.

Three lessons

Lesson 1 of the CBPA created energy in the classroom as students began to write their four-measure rhythms and think about the instrument they might use to perform their piece. I found it helpful to have them work only on the writing during the first lesson. Before leaving, I asked them to write down 2-3 instruments they would like to try using for their piece during the next lesson. This step encouraged them to narrow their choices and allowed me to have the instruments available.

When students returned for lesson 2, they were given time to try out the instruments and decide which one worked best for their piece. Once they had done this, they returned to their seats to work on their final draft. Final drafts needed to be finished by the end of lesson 2 in order to use their time in lesson 3 to warm-up and prepare for their performance.

Lesson 3 began with a quick group overview. I introduced the adult who would operate the video camera in an adjoining room and gave a short explanation of the taping process. Attached to the music stand was a sign that asked the student to state his/her first name only and class number. Students were also told they could redo their performance one time, if they wished.

Once a student was warmed up and felt ready to perform, the student wrote his/her name on the board. As each student finished recording and returned to the music room, the student's job was to send the next person who was waiting "on deck" in to record, erase his/her name from the top of the list and notify the next person "on deck." We were not able to record all students during this one lesson because of time constraints and absences. During the second day of recording, I found it important to either allow students to bring a book or have a written lesson ready for them to complete. As students finished their projects, I was more likely to see disruptive behaviors surface.

Time adjustments

As the process unfolded, I found the suggested time frame for each portion of the project inadequate. For example, students were told they would have 15 minutes to create and write out a four-measure rhythm. None of my students was able to accomplish this task in the allotted time. As with other state assessments, students are allowed as much time as they need to complete the project. I think this could be a challenge with the number of music students each of us is responsible for and the rigidity of our teaching schedules. I chose to follow the students' pace and was able to complete this CBPA in four 45-minute lessons rather than the recommended three sessions.

Student feedback

Once the project was completed, students were asked to give feedback on the assessment. A common response was that they wished for more time to practice their compositions. The performance aspect of this project, versus the writing, was the most difficult for them both in terms of their skill level and anxiety. Students appreciated the fact that they were able to record their composition without the class watching.

Since I did not return the compositions or share scores with students, I made sure to give the class compliments and suggestions during the next few lessons in order to help prepare for our

upcoming rondo composition project. I pointed out some of the details, such as choosing an instrument that could successfully perform what was written, in order to build on previous learning and make the upcoming rondo project more successful.

Teacher concerns

The next step in the CBPA process was the difficult part for me as a teacher. It took me approximately six hours to view 85 student performances while applying the two rubrics (Creating and Performing). I did appreciate the fact that rather than only having one time to hear a student's performance, like when we judge/grade a live performance, I was able to review the tape multiple times if I was uncertain how to score it. On the other hand, this is a huge demand on a teacher's time outside of class and in addition to regular lesson planning and performance preparation. Though I found the scoring time lengthy, I am more personally concerned about the wording and weighting used on the two rubrics.

Fortunately, three colleagues in my district also agreed to pilot the CBPA's at the fifth-grade level. When we met and brought video and written samples of our students' work to score, we often had to watch them several times to agree upon a score. My colleagues and I shared our concerns about the rubrics; for example, the way *piano* and *forte* were scored separately and, as a result, outweighed the use of correct rhythm. While we appreciate the countless hours that have been put into the creation of the rubrics, it is our hope that they will be reworked before the implementation phase, taking into account what we've learned during the pilot. We also found that sometimes the student's instrument choice made it difficult, if not impossible, to earn full credit on the performance rubric. For example, it is quite challenging to play a quarter note at the *piano* dynamic level on the gong! An additional concern was the validity of scores. Validity may be compromised if each teacher is expected to score them on his/her own. The time I spent working with my colleagues was extremely valuable and should be a part of the implementation process for all of us.

Suggestions for implementation

In addition to the rubric suggestions, my colleagues and I suggest the following for districts as the state begins implementation of the Fine Arts CBPA's:

- Teachers need access to good quality videotaping equipment.
- Prior to this assessment, students need to become comfortable being recorded in the music classroom.
- The use of adult volunteers or school assistants to videotape students outside of the regular classroom is preferred. This best utilizes student practice time and reduces distractions for the performer.
- Teachers should be provided compensated time to meet and score student work together. (Ideally, there would be a trained group of scorers from around the state doing the scoring in order to increase the validity of the test. Since no funding is currently provided for scoring, it is extremely important that we as educators take the time to meet and score together.)

In the future, the final step of the CBPA's will include reporting students' scores to the state by an implementation verification report. To date, this report has yet to be developed and implemented by the OSPI. Whatever format this report takes, I hope it will be quick and easy to use and that the scores will not be used to promote competition between programs.

Try one this year

In closing, if you haven't visited the OSPI website to examine the CBPAs available for grades 5, 8 and 10, I encourage you to do so as soon as possible. Choose one assessment that will fit with your curriculum and determine what time of the year will work best for your school and your program. Remember, unlike the WASL, you can choose from a variety of assessments and determine when you will administer the test to your classes. Do yourself a favor and commit to test at least one of the CBPAs during this school year. This is the chance for each of us to work out the kinks, provide input and impact the final product.

To access the Fine Arts CBPAs, visit the OSPI website at:
<http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/WASL/Arts>

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