

Criteria, Composition, And Compliance: Concert Band Directors' Perception of Concert Band Publisher Grading Systems

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Committee Acknowledgement

Thank you for serving on my
committee, being a mentor,
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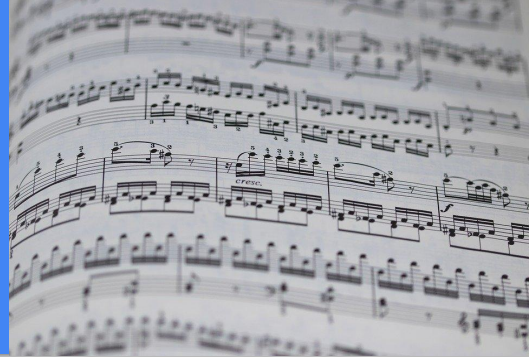
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Repertoire Selection Quote



“The selection of repertoire is the single most important task that music educators face before entering the classroom or rehearsal room. Through the repertoire we choose, we not only teach curricular content to our students, but we also convey our philosophy in terms of what we believe students need to learn to achieve musical growth.”

Hilary Apfelstadt (2017)

Associate Director at The Ohio State University School of Music

[illegible]

- Balancing composition difficulty with students' skills (Saville, 1991)
- Perceptions of a composition's difficulty level (Madsen & Yarbrough, 1985)
- Compositional elements (Sheldon, 1996)

Statement of the Problem



- No standard difficulty scale (Hagg, 1986; Saville, 1991; Wareham, 1967)
- Grade-appropriate repertoire selection (Apfelstadt, 2000; Del Borgo, 1988; Forrester, 2017; Intravia, 1972; Madsen & Yarbrough, 1985; Reynolds, 2000)
- Understanding difficulty (Ralston, 1999)
- Publisher list inconsistencies (Beckwith, 2018; Hagg, 1986; Miller, 2013; Stevenson, 2003)
- Research is scant and only focused on quality literature (Gilbert, 1993; Ostling, 1978; Towner, 2011)

Purpose & Research Questions



The research addressed the following questions:

1. Does a discrepancy exist between performance difficulty levels assigned through publishers' grading systems and concert band directors' and music administrators' personal perceptions of this music's difficulty level?
2. What criteria do instrumental music educators use to select level-appropriate music for their ensembles that is at an appropriate performance difficulty level?

Significance & Rationale



The current study aimed to:

- Verify the existence of discrepancies between the assessments of music by publishers and music educators
- Analyze the magnitude of these discrepancies
- Identify potential causes of these discrepancies

Theoretical Framework



- Flow Theory (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009)
- Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1987)

Literature Review



Ability-Appropriate Pedagogy and Effective Student Learning

- Student learning and progress (Mochere, 2016; Steiner 2018; Toyosi, 2018)
 - Methods
 - Materials
- ZPD: Proper learning materials are necessary to scaffold learners meaningfully (Sarker, 2019)
- Music selection and achievement goals (Steiner, 2018)

Importance of Repertoire in Music Pedagogy

- Teacher's repertoire choices (Forrester, 2017)
- Repertoire quality (Gilbert, 1993; Ostling, 1978; Towner, 2011)
- Repertoire selection is about defining a curriculum for students' overall music education (Kirchhoff, 2010).
- "Effective music education experiences depend on the quality of musical materials used to facilitate instruction" (Sheldon, 2000, p. 10).

Concert Band Literature Grading Systems

Concert Band Publishers use general approaches to grade young band music.
(Hagg, 1986)

1. Curriculum-based
2. Criterion-based grading
3. Standards-based grading - Related more to method books

Global Concert Band Literature Grading Systems

Concert Band Literature Grading System Example from Dissertation

Band Music Guide (The Instrumentalist, 1996)

Grade Level	Definition
1	Mainly for the first-year instrumentalist
2	For those beyond the beginning stages
3	For those who have acquired some technique
4	For more advanced instrumentalists
5	Mostly for college players
6	For the skilled professional

Music Publisher and Retailer Rating Systems

Belwin	FJH	Hal Leonard	J.W. Pepper
5 Difficulty Levels	6 Difficulty Levels	6 Difficulty Levels	7 Difficulty Levels
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grade ½• Grade 1-1 ½• Grade 2-2 ½• Grade 3-3 ½• Grade 4+	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grade .5• Grade 1• Grade 1.5• Grade 2-2.5• Grade 3-3.5• Grade 4-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grade 1• Grade 2• Grade 3• Grade 4• Grade 5• P-Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• B• VE• E• ME• M• MA• A

Methodology

Research Design

Quantitative
Research Design

Recruitment

Three-month
recruitment period

U.S. elementary-
college band
directors
($N = 171$)

Data
Collection

Google Forms
Survey

Instrumentation

Survey Sections

Section 1:

Demographic
information

Section 2:

Repertoire selection
perceptions

Section 3: Difficulty
perception of music

Data
Analysis

Response
comparisons



Participant Demographics

70%

Had 11 or more years of experience

65%

Earned a Master's Degree

52%

Were high school band directors

79%

Stated their state had a prescribed music list

20%

Were trumpet players (largest percentage of participants)

50%

Taught in MD

- Years of Experience
- 16% - 6-10 years
- 13%: 2-5 years
- 1%: ≤ 1 year

- 26% Bachelor's Degree
- 9% Doctorate

(N=210)

- 46% Middle School
- 15% Elementary School
- 15% College
- 3% Professional

- 11% No
- 10% Do not know

- 17% Percussion
- 14% Clarinet & Saxophone
- 10% Flute
- Less significant results for other instruments

- 19% PA
- 9% VA
- 2% DE, NJ, TX
- 1% for 20 other states

Compositions and Participants' Difficulty Perception Ratings

Published Band Compositions

Selection	Title	Composer	Year
#1	<i>Conviction</i>	Clark	2012
#2	<i>Ballade</i>	Jenkins	2003
#3	<i>Africa: Ceremony, Song and Ritual</i>	Smith	1994
#4	<i>Circus Maximus</i>	Corigliano	2006
#5	<i>Ghost Fleet</i>	Sheldon	2001
#6	<i>In a French Garden</i>	Meyer	1998
#7	<i>Invictus</i>	Balmages	2000
#8	<i>Corps of Discovery</i>	Owens	2010
#9	<i>Pablo!</i>	Meyer	2002
#10	<i>Contempo</i>	Story	2004

Descriptive Statistics for Example Compositions (N = 168)

Selection	Grade Level	Mode	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
#1	1	2.00	1.76	0.75
#2	3	3.00	3.01	0.68
#3	4	4.00	4.36	0.73
#4	6	6.00	5.76	0.58
#5	3	3.00	3.07	0.65
#6	2	2.00	2.02	0.74
#7	5	5.00	5.15	0.64
#8	1	2.00	1.77	0.70
#9	4	4.00	4.36	0.71
#10	2	2.00	2.11	0.58

Note. Ratings were based on a six-point scale: 1 = *Very Easy* to 6 = *Very Difficult*.

Grade Level Difficulty Perceptions Example

Participant's Repertoire Selection Category Perceptions



Frequencies: Category Ratings Explaining Grade Level for Composition #1 (N = 163)

Category	<i>n</i>	%
Rhythm Complexity	125	76.7
Tessitura	119	73.0
Part Independence	91	55.8
Wind Instrumentation	65	39.9
Key Signature	37	22.7
Musical Density	26	16.0
Percussion Instrumentation	23	14.1
Tempo	20	12.3
Articulations	18	11.0
Time Signature	5	3.1
Cross-Cueing	4	2.5
Composition Length	1	0.6

Important Musical Elements

98%

Tessitura

- 50% stated that trumpet tessitura is extremely important
- 28% emphasized clarinet and French horn tessitura
- 26% emphasized low brass tessitura
- Flute and double reeds tessitura considerations were moderately important
- Percussion tessitura was not considered important

Rhythmic Complexity

- The role of rhythmic complexity in repertoire selection (Millican, 2019)

Part Independence

- The more independent lines a piece of music has, the more challenging it will be for less mature players to perform (Watson, 2013).

Wind & Percussion Instrumentation

- The more individual parts within a section, the more difficult a piece will be
- Number of percussion parts vs. number of percussionists (Millican, 2019)

Perceptions

Research Question #1:

Does a discrepancy exist between performance difficulty levels assigned through publishers' grading systems and concert band directors' and music administrators' personal perceptions of this music's difficulty level?

● YES

- Lack of standardization among the rating systems. (Saville, 1991; Wareham, 1967)
- Has existed, and been previously documented (Saville, 1991; Wesolowski et al., 2016).

Perceptions

Research Question #2:

What criteria do instrumental music educators use to select level-appropriate music for their ensembles that is at an appropriate performance difficulty level?

- Primary criteria for appropriate performance level ensemble music selection:

In alphabetical order...

- Part Independence
 - Rhythmic Complexity
 - Tessitura
 - Wind & Percussion Instrumentation
- Cross-cueing suggested the largest number of varied opinions
 - Composition length was not a factor

Discussion



Interpretation of the Findings



- Current music grading system deficiencies
 - Lack of a discriminating repertoire selection method
 - Global ratings
- Profusion of music (Kirchhoff, 2010)
- Need for an objective rating system

Implications for Music Educators



- Publisher difficulty ratings effectiveness
- Industry-wide standard difficulty rating system need
- Inclusion of level-appropriate repertoire selection in undergraduate curricula
- Musical elements inclusion in lesson planning (Sheldon, 1996)
 - Part Independence, rhythmic complexity, tessitura, wind & percussion instrumentation, etc.

Limitations of the Research



- State list difficulty assessment data
- National sample limitations
- Whole and half level grade levels
- Two similar questions caused varying results.
 - “My perception of grade-level ratings is mostly the same as publishers’ ”
 - “My perception of grade-level ratings is mostly different from the publishers”
- The composition sample size was small with only 10 excerpts.

Suggestions for Future Research



- Use full band compositions
- Expand the number of total publishers' compositions
- Use state and regional lists to determine geographical trends
- Include string and full orchestra repertoire
- Increase the number of participants
- Add additional open-ended questions
- Socioeconomic status (SES) differences
- Match students abilities to produce improved learning outcomes
- Determine why discrepancies exist

Conclusions



- There **IS** a discrepancy between concert band publisher difficulty grading systems and band directors perceptions.
- There **ARE** inconsistencies between publisher, national, state, and regional graded music (Saville 1991; Wareham, 1967)
- Part independence, rhythmic complexity, tessitura, and wind and percussion instrumentation **ARE** music educators' main criteria in selecting level-appropriate repertoire.
- **MORE** novice teacher resources are needed
- **MORE** investigation is necessary to understand the rationale for the importance of music selection criteria

Thank you!

Questions?



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