

PACE: The *Performance Achievement Cumulative Evaluation* Background information and basic description

PRELUDE –

When I was an elementary student in a 4-room schoolhouse (no kidding!) in 1960s rural Pennsylvania, our classroom included a collection of reading supplements lining the shelves in colorful boxes. The “SRA Reading Laboratory Kit” was, and is still, meant to encourage students to move at their own pace. Its individualized instruction allowed the teacher to manage and motivate an entire classroom of readers at different levels of ability simultaneously. The readings are engaging and enjoyable, and the design allows students to score their own work. I didn’t recognize it at the time, but as a curious 4th-grader (imagine *Young Sheldon*, I suppose), my interest in the program was driven at least in part by a latent competitiveness: I wanted to achieve. And it was especially motivational to me because the program was “available” rather than required. Colorful boxes on a shelf, just enticing me toward mastery at *my own pace*. I never forgot the joyful feeling of quiet personal accomplishment I gained through working independently, and through being able to check off a skill-level, only to move onward, upward to the next more advanced challenge.

Fast forward a few years and I was a new Band Director, wondering how to motivate my own students. My recent undergraduate training had left me very excited to work with the “*top*” kids ... but they were more motivated already, and many of them would be taking private lessons from a specialist anyway. The students in the middle of the bell-curve – those with *average* skills – were easy to deal with, or so I thought, and there were plenty of them. So of course the challenge was at the lower end of the skill-spectrum. Truly the difficulty was not “what to teach them” because I surely knew the lower-end of the required techniques on every instrument. No. My obstacle at the time was *balance* in my teaching; that is, I struggled to find ways to engage *all* students. My focus toward the middle could cause boredom for the advanced students, and frustrations for the less-skilled players, without great care from me, the teacher. Just a few years later, I’d clearly recognize this universal and complex problem: the Band Director has to know how to motivate, teach, assess, and especially *bond with* students ... with *all of them* – equally – regardless of their strengths and weaknesses, or their aptitudes and attitudes. We are the most effective when we discover how to reach each student, even if that requires great care and personalized modifications.

THEME –

I made some recurring observations about my students – and about my own teaching – even in the early years of in my career. And because we’re more similar than different, I’m pretty confident that you, too, sometimes observe problems like these:

Some students *love* Band, but they are only comfortable playing in groups. They simply don’t want to play alone. They dislike – and therefore avoid – playoffs, auditions, skill-tests, and solos of any kind. “*Don’t ask me to improvise in Jazz Band!*” ~ So, how can I assess their skills, especially to assign fair and accurate grades, if I can’t

hear them alone? How can I break the ice to help them gain *confidence* in their playing, without causing undue anxieties? How will I ever get them to understand the joy of playing solos?

Students with poor or irregular lesson-attendance fall behind the achievement level of their peers ~ How can I get them ‘caught up’ without asking the other students to sit and wait, idle?

There are *lots* of disruptions, so my “perfect” lesson-plan is often impossible to complete ~ How can I (and how can my students) meet specific performance goals in a shortened amount of time?

Of course I need the students to complete Make-up lessons, but the situation is almost *never* conducive to effective teaching/learning ~ When do I *schedule* the sessions? How do I *organize the content* to meet the goals of a mismatched set of students? How can the make-up be *effective* in a much shorter time span?

Record-keeping is a constant challenge ~ Even though I’m confident that I’ve worked hard and have been a good teacher, how can I accurately answer these “simple” and obvious questions? ...

- *Exactly what can each student do, and what skills have not yet been mastered?*
- *What are the strengths and weaknesses for every individual student?*
- *How can I follow up to create the best possible music education for everyone individually?*

That is, “*Can Josey play the D-flat major scale, two octaves up and down from memory, in articulated 16th notes?*” I thought so, but I just wasn’t sure.

And because “*necessity is the mother of invention,*” these observations led directly to the project. I created **P.A.C.E.** as a pedagogical component to help me ...

- ... **solve some of these recurring concerns**
- ... **motivate students**
- ... **provide a logical, organized, and understandable list of skill-goals**
- ... **objectively assess students’ performance skills**
- ... **complement any type of curriculum** *with a plan for developing fundamental skills & technique, but without consuming excessive time. Thus, this plan works even when the “lesson group” is a Brass Quintet working on performance repertoire.*
- ... **recognize students’ innate talent in order to focus on their rate of achievement,** *regardless of their level of ability*
- ... **inspire students to practice for results,** *rather than for an amount of time*
- ... **encourage students to learn the “boring” parts** *(scales, arpeggios, scales-in-3rds, etc.) as well as the more enticing parts (their ensemble literature, and solos)*
- ... **teach students to assess the quality of their own performance,** *independently, without my assistance*

- ... **keep thorough records efficiently**, *even in years when I have a very large number of students*
- ... **provide a pathway for the innately-competitive students to meet that inherent need**, *while also protecting the students who would rather remain anonymous*
- ... **provide some incentive for students who enjoy the ‘extrinsic’ symbols of motivation**, *with a careful eye to include recognition for the less-skilled players who make the very best of their limited abilities.*

Think again about the **record-keeping** problem described above. In my case, I used a hard-copy collection device during the classes and lessons; it was a simple paper record that I designed for ‘portability’ before tablets came into being. Then later, at my leisure, I transferred the students’ results into an Excel file that I had designed with *formulas* to keep running totals for everyone. That way, I had a complete record for myself of every skill that each student developed, and to what level-of-excellence. That is *very* handy in June for planning, report comments, student recommendations, awards, seating-order, literature-selection, and much more.

The **P.A.C.E.** Program might best be described as a device to organize, educate, motivate and reward student musicians of *all levels of ability* ... but without affecting students’ *grades*, and without changing the bulk of a teacher’s curricular choices and goals. It includes a set of its own rubrics which have been carefully designed to provide guidance and targets/goals for students’ learning.

An important feature *for me* (remember that I invented it *for me!*) is that it can be used in only moments of a small-group lesson period: it consumes *very* little teaching time, and does not interfere with my students’ artistic development, nor does it stand in the way of their enjoyment of music performance. Simultaneously, however, **P.A.C.E.** can provide an entire “curriculum” to drive the full year’s instruction for programs where no written plan exists. In all cases, it is *adaptable* to match any band director’s needs.

My **P.A.C.E.** program ~ **P**erformance **A**chievement **C**umulative **E**valuation ~ assesses and tracks the data of the following skills ...

- Scales (of all kinds), Arpeggios, and other basic figures
- Rudiments for battery percussion
- Sight-Reading as an objectively-measured skill
- Level-of-success on the performance Ensemble Music (the student’s individual part in ensemble repertoire from Band, Jazz Band, or any Chamber group)
- Solos

NOTE: I’m currently working to finish development of *add-on* plans to address other music performance categories (e.g. Intonation; Musicianship/Artistry; Vocabulary; Critical Listening skills; Range/Rhythm/Articulation skills; *and more*)

The last paragraphs, below, are cut-pasted from the Parent Letter that accompanies **P.A.C.E.**, and it should help to fill in some gaps if my description has been incomplete.

The **Performance Achievement Cumulative Evaluation** Program is designed to encourage student musicians to *progress at their own best possible rate*. With the **P.A.C.E.** Program, students earn points – rather than grades – for their performance skills. The points are earned by matching the quality of the student’s performance to a description on a rubric. These points accumulate throughout the school year, making participants eligible for a variety of awards and honors. The **P.A.C.E.** Program works as a supplement to our normal course of musical study, yet without consuming too much time from the Lesson or Band Rehearsal periods. While students will be given all the details in school, the purpose of this letter is just to communicate the main points:

How does the P.A.C.E. Program work? Each student performs a specific assigned skill. The performance might be during the small group lesson, the large ensemble class, or at an individually scheduled time. The evaluation of the performance is very short – sometimes only *seconds* in length. The instructor simply listens to the performance and chooses the point-value from the description (from a careful rubric) that *best* matches the performance.

What performance skills are evaluated?

- ◆ Key Signatures (scales/arpeggios) and Percussion Rudiments are evaluated fifteen times during the year. This plan allows the study of all *fifteen* key signatures (including enharmonic equivalents).
- ◆ Band (large-ensemble) literature is evaluated for every Concert. This evaluation might use *all* of the concert music, or excerpts of any length, depending on how much time is available.
- ◆ A Solo (of appropriate difficulty) is evaluated *once* during the year.

Does P.A.C.E. affect the student’s grade? This program is designed only to *motivate, guide, organize* and *assess* students’ musical progress, and is not intended to affect grades. The only grade deduction is taken when a student *does not attempt the performances*. I believe that incentive will help players become more comfortable with individual performance.

How does P.A.C.E. differ from normal music instruction and assessment? This program doesn’t replace lessons, rehearsals or personal practice. It *does*, however, act as an “outline” for students to know exactly what to practice and how to progress. In some respects, it can be thought of as a contest for musicians to compete *against themselves* as well as others. Some unique features of the **P.A.C.E.** Program include:

- ◆ *Many of the awards are designed specifically to recognize students for their rate of achievement, rather than simply for their innate talent.*
- ◆ *It is designed to be as anonymous as possible so that, when results are displayed, students will never feel embarrassed or singled out.*
- ◆ *It creates a detailed listing of exactly which skills each student has developed, and an objective description of the quality of that student's performance (i.e. what can the student do, and how well can he/she do it?)*
- ◆ *The **P.A.C.E.** Program generates a chart that allows students to compare themselves to other individuals and sub-groups of musicians, anonymously.*

POSTLUDE –

RW10.3b offers a more thorough look at the **P.A.C.E.** Program, including some examples of the rubrics, the assignments/syllabus, the comparison chart, a sample award, and more.

If you feel the **P.A.C.E.** Program might offer some help to you or your students, please accept the invitation to contact me at r200lina@gmail.com