

A holistic perspective of peer assessment implementation in a music performance class

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## Introduction

In recent years, many attempts have been made to investigate the benefits of student-centered learning methods, and particular interest has been placed on alternative forms of assessment as a way to improve student learning. Among these alternative forms of assessment, peer assessment in particular has been widely implemented in classrooms, as it has been shown to facilitate students' development of various learning and life skills, including learner responsibility, metacognitive strategies, evaluation skills, and a deeper approach to learning (Mok, 2011). In addition, peer assessment strategies in the classroom have also been found to increase social interaction and develop trust in others (Noonan & Duncan, 2005). Most importantly, as students take on the role of both the assessed and the assessors during this process, they are able to gain a more personal perspective on the way they and their peers learn through these critical interactions. This diminishes the need for teacher guidance and strengthens student independence in the classroom, thus bringing more awareness and ownership into a students' education.

Despite the seemingly endless potential benefits of peer assessment strategies, there are still several areas of concern, including the need for proper psychological preparation for the sudden increase in student autonomy (Dickinson & Carver, 1980; Holec, 1981). Baeten, Dochy, and Struyven (2013) explained that ideally, learning should gradually shift from a teacher-centered approach (i.e. lectures) to a student-centered approach to adjust their learning styles to adequately guide and support autonomous motivation and overall achievement in the restructured class. In addition, teacher concerns include the overall lack of guidelines and support in teacher training for its implementation in schools (Yuen, 1998). It is also important to note that this method can

backfire due to the lack of self-confidence in students when rating their peers, as they often feel that they are not competent enough in the learning task to take on the role of the assessor (Mok, 2011; Wen & Tsai, 2006). One can imagine how these problems may become amplified in the music classroom, since musical performance is extremely personal to each musician. Music students may find it even more difficult to comment on peer performances due to concern for insulting personal interpretations, or because they do not feel as adequate as their peers to be able to provide thoughtful feedback. Others might prefer not to give or receive comments from peers for self-esteem reasons, and knowing that they will be receiving critiques from others might heighten overall feelings of performance anxiety.

Given that there are still these major concerns on both the part of the teacher and the students for the implementation of peer assessment strategies, it is imperative to gauge these feelings further and investigate already existing models to learn about how to succeed with using this strategy. This case study seeks to do exactly that, with the goal of providing an example of a peer assessment model for instrumental music teachers to follow and an opportunity for students to voice their opinions in this endeavor. The overarching purpose is to assess student and teacher perceptions on their experience with peer assessments to rate its overall effectiveness and address any lingering concerns for teachers to consider. The guiding questions for this project are:

1. What contributes to the successful implementation of peer assessments in the music classroom?
2. What are the perceived benefits for both the teacher and the students of using peer assessment in the classroom?

3. How do students feel about giving and receiving peer feedback?
4. How do peer assessments affect classroom climate?
5. How do peer assessments affect student motivation and sense of self?

### **Method**

This article is based on an explanatory case study design for the purpose of linking peer assessment implementation with subsequent effects. The research sample is based on the representation of both student and teacher voice in order to gain a holistic view of perceptions about the system in question. To protect the identities of those involved, the names of both the school and the professor will be replaced with pseudonyms when used throughout the paper. The researcher chose a strong example of peer assessment implementation to examine the possible outcomes of a successful model. The study examines the student and teacher perceptions of the peer assessment system of the saxophone studio at the Hayward School of Music. The Hayward saxophone studio is an exceptional example, as this studio is highly focused towards long-term performance- and career-driven goals. Whether they are strictly performance, music education, or music production and technology, the entire studio is composed of only music majors.

Led by Professor Cara King, students of the Hayward saxophone studio receive a unique education with many opportunities for cooperative learning. King leads her studio in a manner that facilitates student relationships and collaborations, inspired by a democratic pedagogy. Students undergo a rigorous curriculum, where they are required to participate in a saxophone quartet, be involved with the school's saxophone ensemble, attend a weekly class focused on saxophone technique, and receive weekly hour-long

private lessons. In addition, all members of the studio are required to attend a weekly two-hour studio class where students perform repertoire for each other, which serves as the main focus of this study. In partial requirement for this class, students are required to give both written and verbal comments on their peers' performances from the perspective of an active audience member. In the written comments, students are asked to provide at least three positive observations and at least three points for improvement. King will often vary this by having students follow a musical score, asking for only general comments, or asking for specific comments. Then, at least two to three students will be selected to make verbal comments after each performance. She organizes it in a way so that every student has at least one chance to make verbal comments in each class, and so that everyone provides written comments for each performance.

In this article, the researcher focuses on peer assessment outcomes by presenting an in-depth case study of the student and teacher perceptions of peer assessments that happen in this studio class. Four students of the studio volunteered to participate in answering an online open-ended questionnaire about their perceptions and experiences with the peer assessment model in their weekly studio class. The researcher conducted a phone interview with a fifth student, which was structured in the same way as the online questionnaire with some ad-libbed questions based off of the student's responses to collect more detail. King also volunteered to fill out a different online questionnaire, which was more geared towards the teacher perspective of the peer assessment experience. These questionnaires and interviews served as the source of all of the quotations found in this article. The questions in all of these interviews focused on the specific perceptions of the participants concerning the peer assessment model to judge the

overall outcome of its implementation. King was asked how she initially implemented the peer assessment system, the purpose of its implementation, her experience with it over the years, and the lessons learned from these experiences. The students were asked to describe what they typically experience and how they use it, what they like and dislike about their experience, and how their experience affects themselves and their relationships with their peers. The online student questionnaire with responses can be found in Appendix A, the phone interview with one voluntary student can be found in Appendix B, and the answers from King to the teacher questionnaire can be found in Appendix C. The student names are not used in this article in order to maintain anonymity of quotations. Data from these interviews were collected and interpreted to identify emergent themes and to relate back to the study's guiding questions.

### **The Teacher Perspective**

As a seasoned teacher, King has only used her current peer assessment practice in her pedagogy for about a decade. Having taught at two other universities before working at Hayward, she had only used peer assessments for her two years at the previous university she taught at, and then went a few years without them at Hayward before fully implementing them into her program. According to King, the system that she uses has morphed throughout the years, becoming more organized and formalized as a class requirement. King explained, "I initially sought written feedback by using a standardized form, which was more formalized. This proved too limiting for most purposes."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, one might find it difficult to include all of their thoughts if they do not exactly align with a standardized form given to them. The open-ended nature of the assessment model that

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix C, Question 4.

King uses now is much more inclusive to the student thought process, and avoids the student getting bogged down with having to answer specific questions that might detract them from their organic reflections. The semi-structured criteria of providing at least three positive comments and three points for improvement prove to be structured enough to guide her students in making these assessments.

King's motivations for implementing peer assessments in her classroom are multifold. She recognizes the potential benefits for the students receiving the assessments, the students making the assessments, and for herself as a teacher as well.

King wrote:

1. The student receiving the assessment receives input/feedback from multiple sources. This allows the student to compare sources. Options for receiving this information include being able to observe whether they receive similar comments multiple times, possibly warranting greater attention.
2. The students creating the assessment/offering feedback and observations are asked to listen more critically when they are accountable for offering useful/pedagogical information.
3. It allows me as the instructor an additional opportunity for assessment of the assessors! Where students place their attention is what grows. They often choose to comment on areas that they themselves are addressing in their own practice. It allows me to find out what they hear, and also what they are not yet capable of hearing. This helps me further individualize their curriculum by offering insight into whether an element that is not showing up in their own playing is because

they aren't hearing it, or can't physically do it.<sup>2</sup>

Her third point is of particular interest. In fact, one of the identified themes throughout King's responses to the teacher questionnaire was the ability to use the students' peer assessments for teacher assessment purposes. In other words, being able to hear what students comment on directly reflects their own musical abilities because it indicated their awareness of certain musical concepts that show up in their own playing. This acts as an open window into each student's mind, allowing her to calculate student awareness and directly implement those concepts into their individual lessons. King later mentioned, "Regarding overall assessment, as you know, I combine individual improvement with set standards and believe this is extremely important."<sup>3</sup> Individual improvement can directly relate back to this concept of gauging student awareness through their peer assessment comments. If the awareness grows in their comments, then the student will most likely work to implement that new musical concept in their own playing.

Another theme that has appeared throughout King's responses is the idea of student engagement as a necessary piece to this puzzle. In her responses, student engagement was described as a necessary criterion for having this peer assessment system be successful. When asked whether or not having peer assessments be a class requirement as opposed to being optional changed the dynamic of the process, King responded:

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C, Question 2.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix C, Question 10.

Yes, I think it changes the dynamic. I think less experienced, younger, or even just shy students may not participate if it wasn't a requirement, and I think it's necessary for 100% participation for all the reasons I state above. In addition, if a student knows they may be called on to offer useful information, they're more inclined to pay attention in more detail!<sup>4</sup>

The key takeaway is in the latter part of this statement. In order to get students to fully engage, it has to be a set expectation. If students know they will be called on, they will listen more critically for fear of having the “deer caught in the headlights” feeling when it does happen. While this may be extremely effective, King does note that she still has problems with this, stating, “I feel like I'm constantly asking for more specific feedback - both observations and possible solutions. Some students make valuable observations but cannot offer well-sequenced pedagogical solutions. I always want to see more depth of observation and more detailed and sequenced solutions.”<sup>5</sup>

The other side of this issue is that while a greater amount of student engagement is needed to really make these peer assessments work, the nature of the activity itself creates more opportunities for engagement than there might have been otherwise. Having students critically listen to their peers can open up more room for discourse among the class, and allows much more room for student voice to be heard. King also inadvertently made reference to class size as something that can affect this. In previous years, the Hayward saxophone studio has been much larger than it is now. However, with only seven students in the studio this year, there were some unexpected benefits. King stated,

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix C, Question 5.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix C, Question 8.

“This year, we had more opportunity for verbal discussion, and more opportunity for actual peer teaching.”<sup>6</sup> With fewer performances in each class due to the fewer amounts of students than in previous years, there was most likely more room for verbal comments to follow each performance. This also allows for deeper discussion in which students can come to realize key concepts together that may benefit everyone.

The final key theme throughout King’s responses to the teacher questionnaire concerns a concept that is vital to the peer assessment process in order to be successful. Throughout the questionnaire, King repeatedly refers to the concept of trust as something that is needed to move this process along smoothly. There are two sides to this concept, and the first is that there needs to be a certain level of trust between the teacher and the students in order to make peer assessment implementation work. King wrote,

I think when students know I trust them, they respond by being trustworthy. I think they know when I believe in their ability to help each other, they help each other to the best of their ability. I've always had wonderful students, but once a positive environment has been established, students understand this is an expectation from early on. It's not infallible, but when I give students room to grow, and keep expectations high, they usually respond. In other words, you get what you expect from your students!<sup>7</sup>

This idea of building a positive environment is really her key advice to making peer assessments work. One of the main concerns about peer assessment implementation is its

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix C, Question 9.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix C, Question 11.

effect on classroom climate. King nullifies this concern by explaining how it does affect classroom climate, but for the better. That isn't to say there have been negative outcomes, but King has described how she works to overcome and avoid those:

When it's as open ended as it is, I could get anything, but I work hard to set it up in a way that comments are offered respectfully and I think most students really believe in each other most of the time. When I feel a line has been crossed I try to address it right away. Obviously, it's only my opinion about when the line has been crossed, and even though I like to think I "read" everyone well, of course I'm not perfect. ;-) So, in other words, I work to create an open environment that also is "controlled" to stay constructive and safe at all times. Everyone has the right to grow and learn in an educationally conducive environment.<sup>8</sup>

The other side to this concept of trust lies within that quotation, when King notes that students really do believe in each other most of the time. While trust should be established between the teacher and students, it also must be established between the students themselves. It is easy enough for a student to take another's feedback and brush it off because they feel that their comments are not informed enough to match the teacher's. However, when students trust each other enough to listen to what they have to say and work to implement that feedback into their practicing, then the peer assessments really are making a great impact. In relation to this, King reflects back on her experiences with peer assessments as a student herself:

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix C, Question 9.

I wish I had had them as a student! I can tell you that we rarely performed in studio class at Michigan. Just before I was there students were making destructive comments and creating a negatively competitive environment, so Sinta just trashed the whole process. This was too bad as I would have benefitted and I think not taken so long to overcome some of the things I had to overcome. So I guess I'd say when approached in a positive and somewhat controlled way, it creates the opportunity for greater growth in a shorter period of time!<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, King has seen the negative outcomes of peer assessments and has worked to greatly improve them for her own students in a way that is much more positive. Students need to be able to trust each other to not make destructive comments and to take their feedback seriously. The goal of peer assessments is not to create a competitive environment, but to create a cooperative environment where students work together to reach similar goals. This cannot happen without trust between each other, and this is why King advocates for a semi-controlled structure to guide her students towards the right path in their peer assessments.

### **The Student Perspective**

Composed of students of multiple ages and a variety of experiences, some students of the Hayward saxophone studio are more accustomed to the practice of peer assessments than others. Despite the differing experiences, there were some significant trends among the answers to the student questionnaire that also fell in line with what King had discussed in her answers to the teacher questionnaire. All of the five students

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix C, Question 13.

who participated agreed that they enjoyed the experience of receiving feedback from their peers for various reasons. One of the most common reasons given was that having peer assessments allowed for multiple audience perspectives. Students wrote:

Instead of getting one point of view, you get 10 or 12. Then you can combine them and take the best, leave the worst. It also lets you see how other people are thinking - which transfers over to what an audience might be thinking.<sup>10</sup>

Yes, It provides valuable information from multiple perspectives. Because the studio is so diverse in age and experience, all of the feedback helps in different ways.<sup>11</sup>

I like receiving feedback from my peers because it can give a different perspective from our teacher. Also, if they worked on the same piece, they'll have bits of advice that our teacher as a more polished player may not think to mention.<sup>12</sup>

When asked what their peers typically comment on, participants reported frequently receiving feedback on general artistic concepts. This included vibrato choice, phrasing, dynamics, articulation, style, shaping, and color. While all students reported that this is the type of feedback that they most appreciate, there was crossover with some

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix A, Question 1, Response 4.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix A, Question 1, Response 2.

of these concepts appearing in reports of what students *dislike* about the feedback they receive. For example, when discussing feedback that they dislike, two students described:

Certain critique of musical ideas such as rubato, phrasing, color change, etc. unless prompted by the performer or instructor is a matter of personal opinion and should be left up to the intended expression choice of the performer.<sup>13</sup>

I don't particularly like when people comment on tempos. I think tempos are an artistic choice, and a lot of people are really concerned about hitting the exact tempo it needs to be at. I think they are good to have in the music so you have an idea. But I don't think there's one tempo that works for everyone all the time. I know Cara often has the metronome going during auditions....I guess in that situation, it's good to be on tempo to show that you are being precise and accurate. But even then, as an audition, you want to play musically and with your own artistic interpretation. They can very much be artistic. There is also a push and pull within one tempo mark.<sup>14</sup>

The researcher interpreted this as a clear divide between general artistic comments and more specific artistic comments that challenge musical interpretation. This is more evident in the second explanation, where the student described tempo as an artistic choice. In general, students seem to agree on liking feedback about these artistic concepts so they know if they are implementing them enough into their performance to get their

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix A, Question 4, Response 1.

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix B.

intended interpretation across to the audience. However, students generally dislike when peers try to get them to change their overall interpretation of the music, especially when they passionately disagree.

Surprisingly, even though all of the students were in agreement that they generally liked *receiving* feedback from their peers, over half of the participants reported feelings of distaste for *giving* feedback to their peers. The reasons were multifold, but the majority of them fell into a theme centered on student self-efficacy, which paralleled the research of Mok (2011). Students reported:

Sometimes I feel as though I would prefer to listen and enjoy the performance rather than comment on it, especially if I don't know the piece because in that case I am often forcing comments for the sake of commenting rather than to help the performer because if I am unfamiliar with the piece I don't feel knowledgeable enough to comment and it takes the enjoyment out of listening.<sup>15</sup>

It can be more difficult when a performer is much more skilled than me - there are many times that I don't even know what to say, because if there were any mistakes, I didn't notice. It can be frustrating because I know their performance probably wasn't perfect, but I'm not sure how they could make it any better because they're already at such a high level of performing.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix A, Question 7, Response 1.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix A, Question 9, Response 2.

I kind of find it difficult to find the words sometimes. Like I find it difficult explaining what I want to say.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, all of the students above report feelings of inadequacy in taking on the role of the assessor. This was mostly mentioned in reference to the familiarity of the assessor with the piece being performed and the difference in skill level between the students. One of the prominent themes throughout the responses to the student questionnaire was the effect of the age difference between students on their experience with the peer assessments. In general, the younger students appreciated the more mature and experienced perspective of their older peers when receiving comments, and the older students reported enjoyment in getting to help out their younger peers. One older student explained, “It's nice to give feedback to younger peers when you feel you actually have things to say that can help.”<sup>18</sup> This indicates that the older students feel a greater sense of self-efficacy when they know that they are helping their younger peers through their feedback. The downside about the age difference is that younger students reported feelings of low self-efficacy when they were asked to give feedback to their older peers, as evidenced in the quotations above. However, the students generally acknowledged their appreciation of the benefits of having such a diverse studio, which possibly outweigh the disadvantages.

While the studio reported feelings of low self-efficacy in relation to giving feedback, there was one theme that actually resonated as a positive outcome from it. In general, students reported that they were very aware that they often commented on things

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix A, Question 7, Response 2.

in peer performance that they are currently working on themselves. This suggests that making peer assessments have actually made these students more self-aware about their own playing. For example, one student commented on the feedback that they make, stating, "I usually notice specific things, whether good or bad, that I am working in my own playing."<sup>19</sup> While this doesn't immediately appear to have any relation to a student's overall self-efficacy, a closer examination clarifies that students may receive validation in their own playing by making these comparisons between their own performances and their peers' performances. This directly relates to the additional finding that students feel a greater sense of self-efficacy in regards to their musicianship when they *receive* feedback from their peers. Students reported:

Studio class comments often validate elements of my playing that I have been working on as well as provide me with specific aspects of my playing to improve upon which motivates me to work to become a better musician.<sup>20</sup>

They've improved my sense of self and motivation, because they'll comment on something, and I'll be like, "Oh I didn't even think of that!" But that makes me interested in how it works and how I can improve my sound and my playing. It makes me want to go and practice and try it out to try new things. It helps me to know when I agree with what they say - whether or not I agree. It helps me to know, "Oh yeah, this is MY playing, rather than THEIR playing." If I play

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix A, Question 8, Response 1.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix A, Question 10, Response 1.

something and they say, "What if you play it like this?" And if I try it out, then it helps me to know, "No, this is not how I feel it."

[...] If someone else has a way of playing something that helps them get their emotion out through music, it may not necessarily be how I do it. Especially hearing other people play pieces that I'm playing and how they interpret it and try to emote that to the audience, I get how they're trying to reach me. I reach other people a different way. It lets me know, "This is how I am, this is how I get my emotion out, and this is how I connect with people."<sup>21</sup>

With this in mind, it is obvious that students who have this peer assessment system receive a fulfilling education. There is clearly an act of self-discovery that happens when students get the chance to be assessed by peers and when they are asked to be the assessors. The student responses indicate that peer assessments improves their sense of self, as it validates their playing abilities and allows them to learn more about themselves through the eyes of other people. It also helps them to develop their own opinions about the music that they play and listen to, which ultimately shapes their approach to how they implement new ideas into their performances and increases their overall motivation in musical study.

Finally, the students mentioned an obvious effect that peer assessments had on classroom climate that relates back to King's theme of trust among the students. Four of the students claimed that having peer assessments in their studio class had actually helped to strengthen their relationships with other people in the studio, which naturally leads to greater trust among the students. One student mentioned, "Their feedback shows their

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix B.

connection to your performance in that moment.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, when student audience members share in the process of discussing musical ideas with each other, the student performers feel adequately supported on a social level. Another student mentioned how the peer assessments have affected student relationships and continued outside of their normal studio class:

It has better strengthened my relationship with the studio - It's not necessarily always in studio that peer assessments happen. A lot of the times it's like, "Hey I'm practicing, can you come hear me play?" It happens in a social setting too. I think it's also good because in studio class, we're not necessarily playing a final product - we're playing works in progress and it's important to share that. A lot of times people think, "it has to be perfect!" but sharing works in progress with others lets you know that we're all working on something together, and that everyone goes through this process of learning together.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, peer assessments have drawn studio members closer together even outside the classroom and helped them to relate to each other on a personal level. It certainly is not easy for a young performer to get up on stage and spill their heart out to reach an audience, let alone have to do it for an audience full of peers who are purposefully critiquing everything that they play. However, having these peer assessments actually allows students to share in the common growth process that happens during such an intense musical education, making them realize the common ground that they all share.

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<sup>22</sup> See Appendix A, Question 11, Response 3.

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix B.

The fact that students often choose to comment on things in peer performances that they are currently working on themselves is prime evidence of this. When students begin to realize that their peers are going through similar things and are actively supporting each other throughout the learning process through peer assessment strategies, trust among the students forms and students get the support that they need on a psychological level directly from their classroom environment.

### **Discussion**

The researcher has presented the outcomes of the Hayward saxophone studio peer assessments as a successful strategy for student-centered pedagogy. These experiences illuminate the necessary techniques for successful implementation and possible outcomes of peer assessment activities in a tertiary music performance class. More student benefits emerged than teacher benefits, indicating that peer assessment techniques are successful in promoting student-centered learning. Among these positive outcomes, themes of both introspective and extrospective behaviors emerged. Introspectively, peer assessments lead students through a process of self-discovery. In thinking critically about peer performances, students related ideas back to their own performances, inspiring metacognitive habits that led to a greater sense of self-awareness. The validation that students received when they were forced to challenge their opinions about musical interpretations from their peer's feedback also greatly helped to improve their self-efficacy by establishing musical identity. Extrospectively, peer assessments helped students to satisfy Maslow's (1970) concept of transcendence in his Hierarchy of Needs by helping others to achieve self-actualization in their peer assessments. This was evident

in their sincere desire to help each other improve through providing detailed feedback for each other. In addition, peer assessments helped students to develop meaningful relationships with others through establishing common goals and experiencing similar struggles, as supported by Noonan and Duncan (2005). Recognizing these commonalities helped students to develop trust between each other, which further aided the process of the peer assessments and also helped to satisfy important social need supports in the classroom. Overall, the alignment of these outcomes suggests that peer assessment activities can foster positive assets to a performance-based music class.

A major limitation of the study was that these reflections apply only to this group, meaning that this is not generalizable across populations. While each student's voice weighs heavily on the perceived outcomes, it is important to analyze the ideas of a larger population in order to better reflect a true holistic view of the peer assessment system. In addition, a revision of the open-ended questions in the student and teacher questionnaires would be needed to better focus on the guiding questions without generating response bias. Further, developing broader guiding questions might allow for a more natural emergence of themes throughout the participant responses. Personal relationships between the researcher and participants might have also affected response outcomes. It is important to note that although this study was highly reflective of the perspective from those in the Hayward Saxophone Studio, these may not reflect the opinions of students or teachers elsewhere. Future research might consider a method other than a case study design to determine if these views are shared in a larger sample size. Future research might also consider measuring these concepts in a pre- and post-data collection strategy to better determine the influence of peer assessment implementation on the music class.

Although this study was reflective of specifically a tertiary music performance class, there is potential that these emerged outcomes may be transferrable to other music class settings. The opinions of the student participants at the Hayward School reflect common human concerns, needs, and desires. Therefore, even students in younger age groups may benefit from experiencing peer assessment strategies earlier on, as they can have the chance to develop skills that are transferrable to outside the classroom. The question remains of how to enable such contexts for younger students to support student-centered learning strategies in different settings. Further research is needed in order to understand the contexts specific to music education that could encourage the positive outcome of peer assessments as a student-centered learning technique for students of all ages.

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## APPENDIX A

## RESPONSES TO ONLINE STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

*PART 1: Receiving Feedback*

1. Do you like receiving feedback from your peers? Why or why not?

**Response 1:** Yes, as a freshman, my peers provided insight from a more mature and experienced perspective that is valuable to my improvement as a musician

**Response 2:** I like receiving feedback from my peers because it can give a different perspective from our teacher. Also, if they worked on the same piece, they'll have bits of advice that our teacher as a more polished player may not think to mention.

**Response 3:** Yes

**Response 4:** Yes, It provides valuable information from multiple perspectives. Because the studio is so diverse in age and experience, all of the feedback helps in different ways.

2. What aspects of your performances do your peers typically give you feedback on? Cite any examples if possible.

**Response 1:** Everything: all aspects of playing including but not limited to tone, intonation, articulation, dynamics, air, style, vibrato, shaping, color, etc. as well as peripheral performance aspects not pertaining to sound such as body movement, verbal introduction, posture, performance decorum, etc.

**Response 2:** Interpretation/phrasing, presentation (speaking before playing, posture, height of stand), overall sound quality, dynamics

**Response 3:** Physicality, Mentality, Technique, Intonation, Tone, Vibrato, Musicality

**Response 4:** A lot of the time, peers will comment on things that they are working on. Vibrato, Dynamics, Intonation, Articulation.

3. What type of feedback do you feel is most beneficial? Why?

**Response 1:** Negative feedback is much more beneficial than positive feedback as it provides insight to areas which the listener was distracted from enjoying the overall performance that can later be improved upon or eliminated through practice

**Response 2:** I think feedback about interpretation is most beneficial, because even though you can interpret a phrase many different ways, talking about it will at least make you think about it and affect the way you choose to shape it.

**Response 3:** Feedback that addresses and attempts to fix problems in performance because that's the purpose of getting feedback.

**Response 4:** I love feedback that is about aspects of the performance. Feedback that addresses concepts that may not appear in a practice room during individual practice.

4. What type of feedback would you like to see less of? Why?

**Response 1:** certain critique of musical ideas such as rubato, phrasing, color change, etc. unless prompted by the performer or instructor is a matter of personal opinion and should be left up to the intended expression choice of the performer

**Response 2:** It can be frustrating when someone mentions the notes that you miss, though luckily this doesn't happen often, since everyone else usually realizes that you know about those mistakes already.

**Response 3:** Feedback that is uninformed because it doesn't help the study reach the proper level of performance.

**Response 4:** comments on missed entrances or wrong notes/ rhythms are rarely beneficial. We usually know if we make mistakes like that.

5. Do you generally agree or disagree with the comments you receive from your peers pertaining to your studio class performances? Why or why not?

**Response 1:** Generally agree as they mostly reflect problem areas that I am working to improve or degrees of success/improvement from previous performances

**Response 2:** I generally agree, especially since I'm still in the younger part of the studio. The other students have more experience and have usually played these pieces recently, and we all have the same studio teacher so we often tend to think alike.

**Response 3:** It's a mix every week. Everyone has their own interpretation on musicality.

**Response 4:** I almost always agree. If I do not agree, I see if the comment showed up in multiple comments. our peers always have valuable feedback

6. Do you take peer critiques into consideration? If so, how do you implement them into your future performances?

**Response 1:** Yes, I go back and listen to my studio performance recording with the notes written by my peers in front of me to see where they apply, if they have merit, and how I can make a concerted effort to address them in my practicing

**Response 2:** I definitely read through all comment sheets after a performance, and if a certain aspect of my playing is mentioned by more than one person, that's something I specifically focus on. I also bring them to my lesson and let my teacher look through them to see if there's anything that she thinks is particularly helpful. Also, if I'm performing something twice for the same people, I want them to see improvement between each performance, and taking into consideration their criticisms is a very good way to start this.

**Response 3:** Yes, I apply their critique in my practice.

**Response 4:** Some comments are fixable immediately. Those are addressed in the practice room right away. Other comments are long term fixes, and may not be possible right away. In this case, I come up with a series of exercises to address the issue.

### *PART 2: Giving Feedback*

7. Do you like giving feedback to your peers? Why or why not?

**Response 1:** Sometimes I feel as though I would prefer to listen and enjoy the performance rather than comment on it, especially if I don't know the piece because in that case I am often forcing comments for the sake of commenting rather than to help the

performer because if I am unfamiliar with the piece I don't feel knowledgeable enough to comment and it takes the enjoyment out of listening. Although if I am familiar with the piece and feel that I can make constructive comments that will help the performer, I am more than eager to do so as I know how much I appreciate receiving such helpful comments.

**Response 2:** I do like giving feedback, but it can be more difficult when a performer is much more skilled than me - there are many times that I don't even know what to say, because if there were any mistakes, I didn't notice. But it's nice to give feedback to younger peers when you feel you actually have things to say that can help.

**Response 3:** Yes, I love watching my peers grow as musicians. If I can say something that would help, I will.

**Response 4:** Yes, It has allowed me to become a more critical listener, and has developed my ears. I can think both critically and pedagogically to offer suggestions. It has my playing and teaching.

8. What aspects of peer performances do you typically critique?

**Response 1:** I usually notice specific things, whether good or bad, that I am working in my own playing

**Response 2:** I always mention if there are sections that stick out (whether in a good or bad way), if there's something easy they can do to improve their sound (like use more air), and I also mention extremes a lot regarding dynamics and rubato.

**Response 3:** Anything and everything depending on the student.

**Response 4:** I try to offer suggestions that are both short term and long term suggestions. I critique both the musical aspects and visual aspects of the performance.

9. Do you have any difficulty giving feedback to your peers? Why?

**Response 1:** As previously mentioned, I find it difficult to comment on pieces that I am unfamiliar with as I do not feel confident enough in my knowledge of the piece to make constructive comments on the particular performer's interpretation of it and I often find myself forcing comments for the sake of commenting which I'm sure are less than helpful to the performer

**Response 2:** I accidentally sort of answered this in question 7 - "it can be more difficult when a performer is much more skilled than me - there are many times that I don't even know what to say, because if there were any mistakes, I didn't notice." It can be frustrating because I know their performance probably wasn't perfect, but I'm not sure how they could make it any better because they're already at such a high level of performing.

**Response 3:** No, they are normally receptive to any comments.

**Response 4:** My feedback has improved dramatically throughout my three years in studio class. It was challenging at first, but with more experience it became easier.

### *PART 3: General Questions*

10. How have peer assessments in studio class affected your sense of self and your motivation in musical study?

**Response 1:** Studio class comments often validate elements of my playing that I have been working on as well as provide me with specific aspects of my playing to improve upon which motivates me to work to become a better musician

**Response 2:** As I briefly mentioned before, getting these peer assessments makes me want to think about the critiques and give a better performance the second time, hopefully with the result of getting feedback where several people mention the improvement. Everyone is very supportive so even if I feel terrible about a performance, there are enough nice comments in the peer assessments that I usually end up feeling better about it.

**Response 3:** All of my peers are encouraging and intelligent. Their words inspire me to perform at a higher level.

**Response 4:** It has made me a better musician, and has developed my ears. I would not say that it motivated me to practice more.

11. How have peer assessments in studio class affected your relationships with members of your studio in general?

**Response 1:** I have definitely gotten to know the members of my studio through their comments this year

**Response 2:** I don't think peer assessments have had much of an effect on my relationships with studio members. Occasionally in conversation someone might mention "hey the way you worded that thing on your comments from studio was really funny", but usually we don't tend to discuss them with each other. We tend to spend enough time together in person that the written and spoken feedback after a performance doesn't really affect our overall relationships.

**Response 3:** All of the assessments contribute to the relationship I share with each person. Their feedback shows their connection to your performance in that moment.

**Response 4:** We are all respectful of each other. We are an extremely close studio. It has helped us to provide constructive feedback without being rude.

12. Is there anything else you would like to share about your overall experience with peer-assessments?

**Response 1:** N/A

**Response 2:** N/A

**Response 3:** N/A

**Response 4:** N/A

## APPENDIX B

## STUDENT PHONE INTERVIEW

The following interview with an anonymous student of the Hayward Saxophone Studio was conducted over the phone by Taryn O'Keefe. It was recorded on May 19, 2016.

*(TO refers to when Taryn O'Keefe is speaking, and SS refers to when the anonymous saxophone student is speaking).*

**TO:** Do you like receiving feedback from your peers?

**SS:** I do.

**TO:** Why is that?

**SS:** Because it offers a different point of view from the teacher. It gets me thinking in ways that I might not have otherwise. Instead of getting one point of view, you get 10 or 12. Then you can combine them and take the best, leave the worst. It also lets you see how other people are thinking - which transfers over to what an audience might be thinking. This is especially helpful when the studio hasn't heard the piece.

**TO:** What aspects of your performances do your peers typically give you feedback on?

**SS:** In the general sense, it is more artistic-based comments than technical-based comments. We kind of already know what to do technique-wise - we know when we flub or miss a note. But the artistic stuff is not stuff we're always necessarily aware of or how it's affecting other people. For me, people comment a lot on phrasing, vibrato choices....Some technique things like clarity of articulation are sometimes mentioned - as they are something I've struggled with and something I've been working to improve. They are really just comments that amplify things that I've already thought of that maybe I thought I was doing, but wasn't doing enough of...Or too much of. Another thing that they really comment a lot on is stage presence - speaking to the audience, stand height, and communication with the people that you are playing with. I've noticed that a lot with chamber music, like "are your eyes off the page?"

**TO:** Is there any difference between what feedback they give you from when you're reading off of a page and when you're playing from memory?

**SS:** It leans more towards stage presence because you don't have that wall of the stand in between you - for example, some people stare at the ground. But they do comment on artistic things, like if you're phrasing went downhill when you did it from memory.

**TO:** What type of feedback do you feel is most beneficial and why?

**SS:** I think general artistic comments are best for me, because they are not specific choices where some people might prefer one thing over another - they're just things you can take and apply. I like general rather than specific artistic comments.

**TO:** What type of feedback would you like to see less of? Why?

**SS:** I don't dislike people's interpretive comments because I like seeing how other people would interpret it...It's always good to hear things to know that I still need to work on it...I don't particularly like when people comment on tempos. I think tempos are an artistic choice, and a lot of people are really concerned about hitting the exact tempo it needs to be at. I think they are good to have in the music so you have an idea. But I don't think there's one tempo that works for everyone all the time. I know Cara often has the metronome going during auditions....I guess in that situation, it's good to be on tempo to show that you are being precise and accurate. But even then, as an audition, you want to play musically and with your own artistic interpretation. They can very much be artistic. There is also a push and pull within one tempo mark.

**TO:** Do you generally agree or disagree with the comments you receive from your peers pertaining to your studio class performances? Why or why not?

**SS:** I would generally agree - usually the comments are things I've thought about but need to do more of. Like, yeah that crescendo wasn't intense enough. There are times when I have disagreed - for example, this year - some candidates for a job came in for a master class. One told me things like tongue stopping notes in the beginning of Fuzzy Bird that I thought just sounded really weird, and I didn't agree at all. Another reason why I generally agree is because I like to think of different ways to do things. I like to try what people say and see if it works.

**TO:** Do you take peer critiques into consideration? If so, how do you implement them into your future performances?

**SS:** What I'll typically do when people give me new artistic ideas, new fingerings, things like that...I'll implement it into my practicing for a week and work with that. If it makes it better I'll continue to do it that way. If it makes it harder or worse, I'll go back to my own way. I test the waters out. It's not even just about agreeing - it's so personal. Something may work really well for someone else. I'll agree that it may work for you, but maybe not for me.

**TO:** Do you like giving feedback to your peers? Why or why not?

**SS:** I kind of find it difficult to find the words sometimes. Like I find it difficult explaining what I want to say. I do like sharing my ideas - I've found that I enjoy it more when I share my ideas with other people playing other instruments, and not on saxophone. Like in the practice rooms when friends of other instruments, I find it interesting to hear their music and think about what I would do on saxophone and apply it to what they do. I find that easier than giving feedback in studio class. Because a lot of times, studying from the same teacher, you all think about the same things.

**TO:** What aspects of peer performances do you typically critique?

**SS:** I tend to comment more on things like direction. Lately I've been thinking a lot about direction and phrasing in lines - specifically in ways to do it differently in slow sections vs. fast sections. I notice a lot of people lose their sense of line that they have in the slow sections when they get to fast sections because they start thinking more about notes, or that their phrasing gets much shorter. Or maybe their articulations aren't as detailed than as in the slower movements. I definitely focus on things that I'm working on myself.

**TO:** Do you have any difficulty giving feedback to your peers? Why?

**SS:** I do because a lot of times I feel like it's stuff they've already heard, even though I know it's good to hear it again. So I feel like it's kind of redundant. A lot of times I feel weird giving interpretive comments. I try not to, but a lot of the time it ends up being that way. I try not to give technical comments, because when you get into interpretive comments, it's more subjective. Like, "This is what I do."

**TO:** Do you think it's more difficult to critique your peers that are older than you?

**SS:** I don't think it has much to do with age difference, and I'm not really *uncomfortable* commenting on older peers. But I have found it harder to come up with things because they already implement things that I've already been thinking about. I just haven't been at their level yet.

A freshman played Noda, and I've played that piece and I have my own interpretation like the cadenza - she did it way differently than I did it. The comments that I gave to her were tempo-wise, which goes against everything I said I don't like - being more effective with portamentos, and a lot of pacing comments which I guess can be very interpretive.

**TO:** How have peer assessments in studio class affected your sense of self and your motivation?

**SS:** They've improved my sense of self and motivation...Because they'll comment on something, and I'll be like, "Oh I didn't even think of that!" But that makes me interested in how it works and how I can improve my sound and my playing. It makes me want to go and practice and try it out to try new things. It helps me to know when I agree with what they say - whether or not I agree. It helps me to know "oh yeah, this is MY playing, rather than THEIR playing." If I play something and they say, "What if you play it like this?" And if I try it out it helps me to know, "No, this is not how I feel it." For example, I played Distances this year, and that piece is very personal to how you play it. The studio's comments helped me to realize how I play it - music is all about emoting - like, *just emote damn it!* If someone else has a way of playing something that helps them get their emotion out through music, it may not necessarily be how I do it. Especially hearing other people play pieces that I'm playing and how they interpret it and try to emote that to the audience, I get how they're trying to reach me. I reach other people a different way. It

lets me know this is how I am, this is how I get my emotion out, and this is how I connect with people.

**TO:** How have peer assessments in studio class affected your relationships with members of your studio in general?

**SS:** It has better strengthened my relationship with the studio - It's not necessarily always in studio that peer assessments happen. A lot of the times it's like, "Hey I'm practicing, can you come hear me play?" It happens in a social setting too. I think it's also good because in studio class, we're not necessarily playing a final product - we're playing works in progress and it's important to share that. A lot of times people think, "it has to be perfect!" but sharing works in progress with others lets you know that we're all working on something together, and that everyone goes through this process of learning together.

**TO:** Is there anything else you would like to share about your overall experience with peer-assessments?

**SS:** I think it's really good to do peer assessments with people on other instruments - because we all have different interpretations and different ways of doing things. I think it's interesting to think of how I would play something that a flute player is doing. Especially with working on transcriptions - If you're playing a Bach violin sonata, it's important to get into the mind of a violinist. Even things that aren't transcriptions. Like on contemporary pieces with effects, it's interesting to see how other instruments might get those effects. It makes me think of how I would do it on saxophone, or how I would get that same point across on saxophone. It really helps me in my playing to think, "Oh, how would I do that?"

Peer assessments really benefit the person being assessed *and* the assessee.

**TO:** Great, that's all the questions I have for you. Thanks so much for helping me out!

**SS:** No problem, it seems like a really interesting topic!

## APPENDIX C

## RESPONSES TO TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

*(Cara King's responses are indicated as CK)*

1. How do you implement peer assessments within your classroom?

**CK:** During student's performances in studio class (performance class), the rest of the studio serves as an audience. While they are an audience member they are expected to practice active, critical listening, and provide a general assessment for the performer. I ask that each student provide written comments, including at least 3 positive observations, and 3 points for improvement. These can be made while following a score or not. (Sometimes I specify which.) They can be general or specific. (Again, sometimes I specify which.) At times, I guide listening in advance with specific things to listen for. Then, I select 2-3 students in the class to share verbally 1 of their comments from each category (positive point and point of improvement). I make sure that every student has at least one chance to make verbal comments in each class. If comments are made that have the opportunity for discussion/teaching points for all, I try to guide that discussion.

2. What are your motivations for requiring students to make verbal and written peer assessments?

**CK:** The reasons are multifold: 1. The student receiving the assessment receives input/feedback from multiple sources. This allows the student to compare sources. Options for receiving this information include being able to observe whether they receive similar comments multiple times, possibly warranting greater attention. 2. The students creating the assessment/offering feedback and observations are asked to listen more critically when they are accountable for offering useful/pedagogical information. 3. It allows me as the instructor an additional opportunity for assessment of the assessors! Where students place their attention is what grows. They often choose to comment on areas that they themselves are addressing in their own practice. It allows me to find out what they hear, and also what they are not yet capable of hearing. This helps me further individualize their curriculum by offering insight into whether an element that is not showing up in their own playing is because they aren't hearing it, or can't physically do it.

3. How long have you had this as a requirement for your class?

**CK:** Good question! I didn't really offer formal studio classes at UNM (7 years), but I did hold them at PSU (2 years), and for most of my time at Hayward (13 years). They have become more specific in terms of required performances and assessment through the years though. I'd say this type of assessment has been in practice for approximately a decade.

4. How have the peer assessments morphed throughout the years? Was this due to changes in your requirements or brought on by the students?

**CK:** See above. They have become more organized and more formalized. Although I initially sought written feedback by using a standardized form, which was MORE formalized. This proved too limiting for most purposes. I continue to use a standardized

form for transcription assessment, as you probably remember. I often don't use peer assessment for these assignments, but have in the past. I may reconsider this. While they're not particularly useful for the performer, I think they are potentially useful for the assessor.

5. Since this is a class requirement, do you think this changes the dynamic of this process? If so, how?

**CK:** Do you mean as opposed to it being optional to provide feedback? Yes, I think it changes the dynamic. I think less experienced, younger, or even just shy students may not participate if it wasn't a requirement, and I think it's necessary for 100% participation for all the reasons I state above. In addition, if a student knows they may be called on to offer useful information, they're more inclined to pay attention in more detail!

6. Do you refer back to these peer assessments in private instruction, and how?

**CK:** Often, yes, but not always. If I feel any aspect of the peer assessment is NOT useful to the student receiving it, I make sure I help them filter through the assessment so they know which parts I give them "permission" to ignore. I also help them prioritize the information received. Sometimes it's too much information at once. Sometimes it's not "critical" or specific enough. If feedback given is particularly insightful/useful, I try to remember to let the peer assessor know that as well. (Yet another form of positive feedback -- it's impossible to have too much!)

7. Do you generally agree or disagree with comments that students give to their peers? What do you do in situations where you disagree?

**CK:** Both! And it depends. Sometimes a disagreement is simply a difference of interpretation, or a different idea, and then I welcome it. When I disagree, and it's significant or I believe it will hinder or interfere with a student's practicing and progress, I talk directly with both the recipient of the assessment and the student that made the assessment. This can vary quite a lot depending on the comment itself.

8. Is there any type of specific feedback you would like to see your students giving more of to their peers?

**CK:** I feel like I'm constantly asking for more specific feedback -- both observations and possible solutions. Some students make valuable observations but cannot offer well-sequenced pedagogical solutions. I always want to see more depth of observation and more detailed and sequenced solutions.

9. What have been the positive and negative outcomes of this peer assessment system?

**CK:** It's mostly positive! As you know, it's not exactly the same template every week. Sometimes comments are only written, if there are several performers needing the performance time. This year, we had more opportunity for verbal discussion, and more opportunity for actual peer teaching. In general though, the process of everyone making written comments, with attention to stating at least 3 positive observations and 3 points for improvement, and then me selecting at least 2 different students to verbally state 1 from each category, has worked well. As far as a negative -- very few really. When it's as open ended as it is, I could get anything, but I work hard to set it up in a way that

comments are offered respectfully and I think most students really believe in each other most of the time. When I feel a line has been crossed I try to address it right away. Obviously, it's only my opinion about when the line has been crossed, and even though I like to think I "read" everyone well, of course I'm not perfect. ;-) So, in other words, I work to create an open environment that also is "controlled" to stay constructive and safe at all times. Everyone has the right to grow and learn in an educationally conducive environment.

10. Is there anything you might change about the peer assessment system you currently have in place for future years? Why or why not?

**CK:** Sure. I'm always open to change and try different things regularly as the make up of the studio changes. I don't have anything in mind that I want to change specifically for next year. Regarding overall assessment, as you know, I combine individual improvement with set standards and believe this is extremely important.

11. Have you noticed peer assessments affect your classroom climate at all?

**CK:** I think so. I think when students know I trust them, they respond by being trustworthy. I think they know when I believe in their ability to help each other, they help each other to the best of their ability. I've always had wonderful students, but once a positive environment has been established, students understand this is an expectation from early on. It's not infallible, but when I give students room to grow, and keep expectations high, they usually respond. In other words, you get what you expect from your students!

12. Have you noticed peer assessment affect student motivation at all?

**CK:** Tough to say since there are so many aspects of the program that work together to affect motivation. What do you think?

13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your overall experience with peer-assessments?

**CK:** Hmmmm. Not sure. I wish I had had them as a student! I can tell you that we rarely performed in studio class at Michigan. Just before I was there students were making destructive comments and creating a negatively competitive environment, so Sinta just trashed the whole process. This was too bad as I would have benefitted and I think not taken so long to overcome some of the things I had to overcome. So I guess I'd say when approached in a positive and somewhat controlled way, it creates the opportunity for greater growth in a shorter period of time!