

T-TESS: Showcasing What We Do As Music Educators (Part 2 of a 4-part series)

Monica Ruiz-Mills

As you read this, it is my hope you have had a successful first semester with your music programs. By now, at a minimum you have submitted your goal setting for the year. Possibly, you may have made revisions due to outcomes or assessments from the fall. The purpose of this article is to analyze the first three domains within the T-TESS System: Planning, Instruction and Learning Environment. As music educators, we know first-hand the necessity of a planned lesson if we are to attain student success. So what does planning look like in the music world? This is a valid question, as the T-TESS model rates the lesson and the activities, not the instructor (T-TESS Rubric, 2016, February). Remember, it is essential to collect artifacts (programs, recordings, contest critique sheets, music scores, etc.) to capture what is said by the director and accomplished by the students. The T-TESS rubric is based on a preponderance of evidence and no longer determined by percentages, meaning we must now demonstrate what we do and how our students will accomplish the objectives and demonstrate understanding instead of quantifying the percentage of students on task. In essence, it is what we do on a daily basis as we reflect and prepare our lessons to improve our students' musicianship. It is important that your lesson is clear and performance objectives are identifiable to your appraiser, clarifying any questions in the Pre-Conference.

Domain 1 – Planning

The Planning Domain consists of four dimensions: Standards and Alignment, Data and Assessments, Knowledge of Students, and Activities. This portion of the evaluation system involves time reviewing the music standards in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) as the domain is scored on alignment to the TEKS, formal and informal methods to measure and analyze student progress, and ensuring high levels of learning, achievement, and the social-emotional development of all students. As we teach, we scaffold instruction for all students because of the various ability levels within the ensemble. But how do you explain that to an administrator without a fine arts or music background? I always refer to Stephen Covey's phrase, "begin with the end in mind" (*7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, 1989). What is it that you are trying to accomplish and how are you going to help the students understand and attain it? Starting from this premise will give you the tools necessary to explain your lesson.

First, identify which TEKS will be covered throughout your lesson and how activities and assessments are aligned to the TEKS. As music educators, we are constantly showcasing student work through performances and receiving feedback. Document how this collaborative culture informs your practice. Areas to address during the Pre-Conference

as you discuss planning: lesson sequence, relevance to students' prior understanding and integrating other content areas. Identify how you utilize data for your class throughout the planning process. What benchmarks determine which areas to address? We think of data as numbers; instead, refer to data as observables. What do you observe when you hear and watch your student musicians and how are those factors addressed? Utilize critique sheets from adjudicators or evaluations from music software programs. Time spent on planning will assist administrators in understanding how lessons are prepared and will lead to knowing how to evaluate and rate Domains 2 and 3.

Instruction and Learning Environment (2 & 3)

One way to ensure that your lesson is understood by administrators (and students) is to begin the practice of framing your lessons. One approach that lends itself to all contents, is based on *The Fundamental Five* (Cain & Laird, 2011). As you refer to your planning document to prepare a clear beginning, middle and closing of the lesson, develop a lesson frame.

- **What is a Lesson Frame:**

A Content Objective, TEKS and Closing Task.

- **Where is a Lesson Frame:**

The Lesson Frame should be posted prominently in the room *throughout* the lesson, either on the board or digitally posted.

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• **How is a Lesson Frame Used:** Review the Lesson Frame at the *beginning* and *end* of class (at a minimum). If you were addressing articulation and accents, continually make reference and have students identify the objective throughout the lesson. It's also a great tool to use at *transition* points to keep students oriented to the learning.

• **Why is a Lesson Frame Important:** A well-written lesson frame builds context and relevance for students. These are exactly the tools our most struggling students need to be successful. This is how we demonstrate differentiated instruction for the diverse learning groups in our music programs. Framing the lesson sets the academic expectations that challenge all students and provides evidence of student mastery and understanding. The level of rigor in your closing task, exit activity, or measure of student success may not accurately reflect the rigor in your instruction, but it will demonstrate the level of rigor students reached in their learning!

As the lesson continues, it is important to know that Domain 2 centers on Content Knowledge and Expertise and Domain 3 focuses on the Classroom Environment, Routines and Procedures. There are strategies that we use while rehearsing our ensembles—but may not consistently implement—that indicate student understanding and address the key areas in T-TESS. For example, strategies on how the teacher uses content and pedagogical expertise to design and execute lessons are aligned to the TEKS and student needs. Referring back to *The Fundamental Five*, integrate a system that is student-centered and actively engaging using some of these suggested methods:

• **Frequency** - Stop for 30 seconds to 3 minutes of student interaction, asking students to demonstrate or provide feedback on the objective.

• **Group Size** - Have students/sections model the objective/task.

• **Seed Question** - Strategic, preplanned questions keep students focused and help teachers determine students' varying levels of understanding.

• **Power Zone** - Move among students as they interact for monitoring and management. Do not just stand at the podium, be interactive within the ensemble.

Use this simple chart from *The Fundamental Five* to plan effective questions in advance. Questions may need to be altered for the ensemble rehearsal, but the end result is the same: student engagement and understanding of the lesson. Remember, students should have a precise question to answer or specific objective to demonstrate and a narrow window of time to do it before transitioning back to instruction.

Smart Questions	Smarter Questions	Smartest Questions
Who is it that...	How would you use...	What would happen if...
Tell why...	How is this similar to...	Develop a plan to...
Give an example of...	Contrast/compare this to...	Find a better solution to...
What do you think will happen next...	What is the relationship between...	What is the most important...

Incorporating your daily drill or warm-up into an authentic sequenced scaffold lesson will demonstrate your ability in differentiating instruction, monitoring and adjusting for all students, effectively communicating and creating an environment that is established, engaging, and maintaining high expectations in a collaborative setting. As we have purposeful conversations with school appraisers, we expose them to an organic process that is based on the scope and sequence of the TEKS. We also demonstrate how through music, all students are capable of attaining high academic and social-emotional expectations for themselves through an autonomous setting that is positive and encouraging. Providing opportunities for students to apply their strengths, knowledge and experiences to enhance each other's learning.

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One last thought, I leave you with this quote:

Our most effective teachers show that great teaching is leadership...In every highly effective classroom we find a teacher who, like any great leader, rallies team members (in this case, students and their families) around an ambitious vision of success. We find a teacher who plans purposefully and executes effectively to make sure students reach that vision, even as that teacher also continues to learn and improve. Without exception, these teachers define their role as doing whatever it takes to ensure their students' success.

—Steven Farr (*The Effective Educator*, 2010)

Music Educators are leaders who rally students to success through great preparation and dedication.

The next segment of this series (*Bandmasters Review*, April 2017) will focus on the post conference, preparing for the summative and professional practices and responsibilities.

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