

Summary:

This article titled “Dismantling Student Competition,” written by Rodney Miller, focused on the negative effects of competition in a music classroom. Music is emotional and creative, and often the use of competition in the music classroom can draw away from the true purpose of music and education. Many teachers and schools have started to realize the importance of alternative and noncompetitive ways to go about teaching, and this article discusses possible ways of doing so. This article suggests allowing all students the opportunity to be involved in extracurricular activities and to rid of any levels or auditions as that can create competition. Music specific, getting rid of chairs/seating placement can help give all students an opportunity to be a section leader. The article also discusses the negativity contests can bring. Even though the purpose of contest is to compete against the “standard,” Miller thinks the standard remains undefined. Schools and directors tend to focus on the ratings/score rather than the comments and feedback. Contest does not allow for creativity and individualism as the “game” is played the same way, and schools are often competing against one another, aiming for a specific result. This article also discusses how school grading systems can allow for some form of competition, as students focus more on the grade they get rather than learning and true education. Students often compare their grades to others or to a standard placed on them either by teachers, parents, peers or themselves. Miller suggests the use of the “pass-fail” grading system. This way grades are an objective representation of class participation and test scores. Instead of feeling threatened by a lowered grade, students have the freedom to pursue their own individual skill. Lastly, Miller discusses competition between professors and faculty members. This can be based on individual evaluations, which can lead to pay raises and overall praise. Instead, Miller suggests department evaluation, so all the teachers in the department can work together to achieve a common goal in providing the best education for their specific department. While there are many ways to start to eliminate the common traditions of competition, Miller emphasizes the importance of starting somewhere. It is important to observe our everyday actions as educators, to ensure we provide the best education for students.

H

- I have very mixed feelings about contest for music ensembles. I think contest can be great as it can push an individual or ensemble, but I also am not a fan of the comparison between groups or individuals. I like solo and ensemble because it is an individual competition. The student plays, then they receive feedback. I wonder if group contest could be similar? Focused on a group’s individual performance, rather than being compared to other groups. Would that be beneficial? Or would that take the whole idea and motivation of contest away?
- I have heard of the “pass-fail” grading system but have only seen one school use it: Western Governors University. Personally, I like this system, as it takes away the distraction of focusing on a grade or a percentage. Even though most schools, especially middle school and high school, don’t use this grading system, is there a way that individual teachers can apply this method in their own classroom? Would a “pass-fail”

grading system be effective in a music classroom? Has this been done before and has there been noticeable benefits?

- I was interested by the proposal of department evaluation versus individual faculty evaluation. Personally, I don't think we should totally get rid of individual evaluation, since every educator is different and should be evaluated based on how effective they are as a teacher/if they are doing their job. But, I wonder, do colleges, or public schools in general do department evaluation? If not, how come? Could it be beneficial to do a combination of both individual evaluation, as well as department evaluation? Personally, I could see benefits to this, as teachers could work together more to achieve a common goal. But at the same time, I think each teacher needs to be accountable for their actions as a teacher.

A

- I was interested to read about the school in Plainfield Indiana, that made it to where any child could participate in any extracurricular activities. Besides elementary school, I can't remember a time where one was given the choice to join an activity without some sort of trying out/auditioning process. I think the idea behind this is cool, as every child should be able to explore different activities without the pressure of being compared to their peers.
 - I am a little confused though...the text says, "The best football players still play the greatest amount of time." If this school is trying to eliminate forms of competition, is it fair to still have the "best" players play? Won't students recognize that they are the best, and possibly favored?
 - While I think this could work better in music ensembles, as the arts are more creative and inspirational. Since sports are built on competition, one team playing against another team, does this concept still apply to them? I would be curious to see how this school handles the sports department with this philosophy.
- I was interested to read about this article's opinion on contests rating system. I can see how focusing on the score/number can be looked more at the actual feedback/comments. I wish more directors would focus on the comments and take contest as a learning experience to grow as a group. Rather than focus on the score, focus on the feedback given and see improvement.
- I didn't realize there was huge competition between teachers and faculty. The article makes it seem that faculty evaluation can potentially put professors against each other. I also didn't know that a professor's salary could increase or decrease based on a rating.
 - Is it really like this at most schools/colleges? Or are faculty evaluations more about improving oneself as an individual, rather than comparing accomplishments between teachers.

T

- I have often thought about the purpose of chairs, and while I think it is important to have section leaders, which is often the best player, I do think as a teacher it is important to give everyone fair opportunities. I like the idea of rotational seating, to give everyone a chance to be a section leader or to sit in different places/seats in the section. This is something I would like to do in my future orchestra program. I want everyone to feel as though they are important and as though they are leaders. I don't want it all to fall on the "best" player.

- I am not a fan of grades. I for example, am overall really good at getting good grades, especially on tests and quizzes, without truly learning the content. I feel like students are not truly learning if they only focus on their grades. This should not be the point of education. We are missing the point if we put too much of an emphasis on test scores and grades, in my opinion. Grades should reflect what the student learned, rather than the grade being the overall factor of how a student is learning. On the flip side, there are many students who enjoy learning, but are poor test takers, which could potentially affect their grade. I want to make sure as a teacher, especially a music teacher, I don't place a huge emphasis on grades. I don't want my students to be like me and be more consumed over the grade I get in the class, that I miss the whole purpose of education, learning.
 - This is why I like the idea of the "pass-off cards" because it shows students' progress, and while yes, it is a grade, it is based on the student's level and their own individual progress.
- When reading about the idea of department evaluation, it made me realize the importance of communication with other faculty members and overall department. It is so important for teachers, especially music teachers, in a school to be on the same page, especially in regard to content, recruitment, and overall goals. Reading this makes me want to make sure I am always doing my part in communicating and working well with my co-workers/teachers in the same program as me, so we can do what is best for students and work towards a common goal as a team.