

Good afternoon members of the school board and school district. My name is Andrew Fitzgerald and I am the instrumental music teacher at Franklin Middle School in downtown long beach. I am also one of the original members of the Franklin STEP team formed last December. As you gathered from the Franklin STEP video, our meetings created challenges for the members of the team, and I'm here to talk about mine.

After our group switched focus to assessing our students' use of Academic Vocabulary, my role in the group changed from an active participant in our discussions, to a fly on the wall. I sat and listened as my colleagues discussed which writing tasks they were assigning, which assignments they were comparing for pre and post test data, methods for establishing baseline data, and what teaching strategies they were using.

I was way out my element. My curriculum focuses on a different language. Western music notation. My students learn to read it, write it, listen to it, and speak it.....with a musical instrument. I start this in 6th grade, with the goal being to have them prepared for high school music classes. We don't spend much time writing with the English language. We do use academic words specific to music, however this occurs usually in instruction and rehearsal conversation.

Listening to my colleagues strategies for teaching academic vocabulary and reflecting on my own practices made me realize how unprepared I was for this, yet in my mind I still felt the need to figure out a meaningful activity my students could do to establish some academic vocab baseline data. After a few weeks of STEP meetings, listening to my colleagues and brainstorming at the same time, I figured out what I would do.

I decided to use my two advanced ensemble classes. These classes are composed of 7th and 8th grade students. Since I spend a great deal of instruction on music theory, and my students had their end-of-the-year concert coming up, I decided they would write a critique on their ensembles' performance of one of their concert tunes.

When composers write music for ensembles, not only do they write out which sound and rhythm each instrument will play for every moment of the song, they also include specific instructions for the performance relating to the songs tempo, style, and volume. As the conductor, it's my job to see that my students interpret the music in the manner it was intended to. In order for my students to correctly critique their performance, to see if they were correctly interpreting what was specifically written for every instrument, they would need to see what every instrument is supposed to be playing. To do this, they would need a copy of the conductor score.

So, I recorded my students during rehearsal, chose the song with the best recording quality, and made copies of the entire score for each student. I spent a day with each class reviewing vocabulary, preparing them for their assignment. My students had to bring in their own headphones and a computer device that could connect to the school's WiFi. On the day of the assignment, my students downloaded their recorded performance from school loop, put on their headphones, received the music score, and began comparing how they performed the song to what was required by the music score. This being a first for both my students and I, I only required two paragraphs and gave them two days to finish the assignment.

The results were inspiring. My students were using music vocabulary! And for the most part, correctly! Their specific reference to particular sections of the music throughout their essays impressed me. They cited problems with balance, articulations, and even the number one vocabulary word for all music teachers....intonation. I also found out that as a music teacher, I need to spend more time working with my students on their vocabulary, as some were using the wrong words for what they were trying to convey. The absolute best part came after the assignment was over and done. The atmosphere of our class rehearsals changed as my students realized what they had to do as a group to play their best. They felt more accountable for their role in the ensemble. I could sense the new determination and energy they were bringing to each rehearsal, and it was fun. They did an amazing job, and simply blew my mind at the concert.

This assignment will now be a part of my curriculum. The benefits of reinforcing music vocabulary in an authentic meaningful way is incredible. This idea was created and fostered by the STEP project. STEP gave me time to brainstorm and interact with my colleagues, and challenged me to become a better teacher."