

THE TEACHER AS STAKEHOLDER IN STUDENT ART ASSESSMENT AND ART PROGRAM EVALUATION

Charles M. Dorn
Florida State University

Thirty-eight or more states are currently engaged in a major effort to improve K-12 instruction. In 2002, California, Delaware, Idaho, Kentucky, Michigan, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Wyoming, and Florida all have announced plans for new graduation requirements, new accountability models, new accreditation and graduation requirements, statewide tests in all subjects, performance accountability models and instructional remediation (NAEA 1999). The Models for Assessing Art Performances (MAAP) project conducted by three U.S. universities was an attempt to respond to these efforts. The following is a report on this year-long effort involving 70 art teachers in assessing over one thousand K-12 students and 8,000 student art portfolios in Florida, Illinois, and Indiana in 2000-2001.

Art teachers all over the U.S. are currently facing an arts assessment dilemma which is exacerbated by both the lack of standardized art tests and by district wide assessment plans which can economically and

accurately assess the art instructional program of the schools. As far as Florida's State Department of Education is concerned no art assessment plans are being developed. The general view being that the art teaching profession remains too deeply divided both as to what should be taught and how it can be evaluated. Without adequate tests and realistic district assessment plans it is quite probable that the arts in most U.S. schools will never be assessed, and with the current climate suggesting that what cannot be tested cannot be taught, the arts in the near future may face being left out of the curriculum.

The Reform Movement

According to Cusic (1994) reformers generally believe that there is a power vacuum in schools that needs to be filled with mandates and regulations to control teachers. They think the teacher centered classroom is to blame for our educational problems, and that teachers should accept reform or be regulated. Reformers want more power at the state rather than classroom level, in part because reformers come from outside the schools and most often have little or no school experience.

School reform on the other hand is usually resisted by teachers who are, in reality, the true deciding element in any reform movement. Cusic believes teachers should feel free to join or not join in reform efforts. Further, he believes that the reason teachers choose to teach is because they see personal interpretations and choices as central to their professionalism and that most of all they are individuals and not a collective force. What teachers need, he thinks, is not more regulation and control but rather the opportunity to join in reform efforts without state mandated compliance. This supports his view that teachers are quasi-autonomous individuals who are independent, self reliant, and able to regulate and evaluate themselves and set their own standards.

However, for art teachers in American schools to begin to regulate themselves and set their own standards they will have to overcome a number of obstacles some of which were set in place by the Goals 2000 school reform effort. These obstacles include, the National Education Goals, the National and State Content Standards and the current national assessment

effort being undertaken by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).

The National Education Goals

First, the art teacher must recognize that the National Educational goals which are the foundation of the Goals 2000 effort were framed as public policies which are for the most part unrelated to the aesthetic or artistic goals of the educational program. These national goals as public policies have mostly to do with the social, political, and economic goals of local, state, and federal governmental programs. As public policies they are more concerned with issues such as law and order, employment and commerce. While art may contribute to realizing some of these goals, they are neither necessary or sufficient for the purposes of art nor are they what it is that art does best.

The National Visual Art Standards

Six national visual art standards were established in the early nineties by teams of art professionals in the Goals 2000 Educate America Act. These standards are reaffirmed by the standards set at the state level and, while differing in number, nevertheless generally cover the six federal standards. Florida, for example, has five standards and Vermont three.

The standards while useful in specifying the basic performances that need to be assessed in the arts must also be recognized as reflecting a disciplined based bias to curriculum development and assessment, which may now, indeed, reflect what some feel is a failed program and one that has acknowledged it was designed in practice as an in-service program for the education of curriculum generalists (GCEA 1994) and was never intended to be viewed as a curriculum per se (Kaagan 1990). Teachers also should be aware that the national content and achievement standards do not tell us what artistic skills should be taught, what emphasis should be given to a specific standard or how much attention comparatively speaking should be given among and between the standards.

The NAEP Art Test

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) art test funded by the Getty and the National Endowment for the Arts was developed and field tested in the U.S. in 1995 and 1997. The program which spent approximately 10 million to develop was originally designed to be administered to some 4,500 4th, 8th and 12th graders. The results of the 1997 field test, however, seems to raise more questions than it answers. In 1997, 2,999 8th grade students were tested (Persky, Sandene & Askew 1998)

A number of concerns have been raised about the NAEP art test since the field test results were first released. One concern was that only about 5,000 of the perhaps 60 million U.S. students eligible to take it were tested and a full assessment of all U.S. students will not occur until the year 2007, when the current test will be outdated. Some professionals have raised concerns about whether 60 minutes spent on multiple choice and essay questions related to aesthetics, criticism, and artistic understanding and only 30-40 minutes spent on performance tasks is realistic given the fact that perhaps up to 90 percent of all school art programs are devoted to creative studio activity.

Some are concerned that the test which is designed as a standardized test requires every student in every school to answer the same questions and thereby assumes all U.S. art teachers teach or ought to teach the same art activities in the same way and that all students are likely to receive the same amount and quality of art instruction in all U.S. schools. Some test results, for example, reveal that 51 percent of the students tested failed to describe a composition by Romare Bearden, 58 percent failed in collage technique, 95 percent failed to manipulate plasticine, 97 percent can't make a sculpture using wire and plasticine, 45 percent can't identify an example of contemporary western art, 75 percent can't identify an early Cubist work and contradictory to what we know from other studies, females outperformed males, white and Asian students got higher scores than blacks and Hispanics and student performance is directly linked with the education level of the parents (NAEA 1999).

A national test in which half, or more than half, of the students taking it fail is certainly not testing what it is that the nation's art teachers expect their

students to know or be able to do. The NAEP test which was based on the National Goals and the National Standards in all likelihood is not testing what students learn in most art programs. It may well be that both the NAEP tests and the standards are what reformers believe all art educators should teach but are unrealistic in recognizing that children are unequal in their aesthetic abilities and schools in their ability to deliver quality instruction.

What Art Teachers Teach

In order to achieve the national goals we should begin by looking at what art teachers actually do in the classroom. When we anchor instructional outcomes to what it is that art teachers teach, we achieve two advantages over top-down reform approaches driven by administrative fiat. First, we provide the teacher with ownership of both the learning and evaluation process. Second, we make the teacher responsible for making his or her goals clear to both the student and school. Third, we provide an assessment process that is fair to both the student and parent.

Also, when we link assessment directly to what it is that teachers teach, teachers feel they are no longer required to perform according to someone else's rules, but rather according to their own conscious effort to make evident what it is they want their students to be able to do. In doing this, the responsibility is placed squarely on the teacher to ensure that the instruction offered is consistent with the goals the teacher seeks and that the results clearly reflect those goals. To do this in art requires that student learning in art production, art history, and art criticism be evident in the written, spoken, and visual products of instruction in both the expressive and cognitive domains. Also, when we begin with looking at what teachers do and how this connects with what it is that students learn teachers learn that effective instruction depends on their knowing what it is they have been successful in doing.

Making Assessment Authentic

An assessment is authentic when it involves students in tasks that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful. Such assessments appear as learning activities, involve conceptual and higher order thinking skills, and

interrelate several different forms of knowledge. They make explicit what the students' work is judged on and, in effect, are standard setting rather than standard testing in their character. Thus, authentic assessment makes the development of students' content and achievement standards the ultimate goal to be reached in the instructional program (Dorn 1999).

Authentic learning in art also implies a purposeful, meaningful application of relevant information, as opposed to acquiring factual knowledge for itself. It also inspires changes in curricular practices in the assessment process and in art, where the outcomes of instruction do not require all the students to learn the same thing in the same way.

Testing What Students Are Taught

If what teachers teach in art is mostly centered on student art performance then it undoubtedly makes sense to focus most of the testing effort on the student's art performance. Performance assessment in the arts involves testing what we generally do in the process of teaching art in schools, which is to make things and evaluate them in the process. Although performance assessment is not something really new to us, the development of scoring procedures that focus on defining tasks and provide a range of points for scoring each task is new.

The scoring criteria used in authentic assessment and the MAAP project reported later in this paper are contained in what is known as a *rubric*. Rubrics provide a means for making a scoring decision using an ordinal or Likert type scale that rank orders the performance being evaluated. The scale normally used is criterion referenced, which specifies a level of performance commensurate with what the student generally should be able to do at a particular grade level rather than measure up to some vague or absolute standard of artistic excellence. Scores derived from rubrics, therefore, are more likely to indicate whether the student's achievement is on, above, or below the standard set for what a student of a particular age and at a specific grade level should be able to achieve. Performance assessment in art, therefore, should be:

- based on the art curriculum content the student has studied or what the teacher wants the

student to know and be able to do.

- assessed on the overall quality of the art performance as compared with other students in the same class or school.
- interpreted as reflecting what a particular student has learned in a particular class and not as a means to compare one student, one teacher, or one school district with another.
- used as a way to determine what content the student is expected to learn, how well the student is learning it, and what classroom environmental modifications are needed in order for the student to succeed at an even higher level.

What Needs to be Assessed

There are really three important things we need to assess in art instruction: expression, knowledge and skill, and concept formation. First, we need to assess expression to answer the question of whether the instructional program and the student's learning is philosophically consistent with the means and ends of art and whether it has sufficient subject validity to provide representation of the products of artistic inquiry as well as the means for that inquiry. Secondly, we need to assess knowledge and skill in art to estimate the psychological validity of the curriculum which accounts for human growth and development, learning, individual differences and the like. This occurs through using analytic assessments which answer the question of what can be taught, *when* it can be taught and to *whom*, and how students think, how they grow and change in their thinking and in their reasoning.

Models for Assessing Art Performances (MAAP) Project

The MAAP project in 2000-2001 involved 70 pre-K-12 art teachers and 1,000 students in three states which participated in an authentic art assessment study as a call for school administrators and legislators to reconsider a national testing policy that supports a single set of predetermined

educational standards and assessments. MAAP, funded by the NEA and the National Art Education Foundation was a cooperative effort by three university art education faculties and eleven U.S. school districts to undertake the research and development of several pre-K-12 art assessment models that could be replicated in the nation's schools. This effort was accomplished through three major activities: (1) teacher training and assessment development institutes, (2) applied research in school art classrooms and (3) dissemination of the results of research to the art teaching profession. The three universities, Florida State University, Purdue University and Northern Illinois University, who conducted the training and supervised the research and the 11 school districts in Florida, Indiana and Illinois participating in the project were all nationally recognized for their excellence in art teaching and learning and for their efforts to contribute their expertise to the art teaching profession as a whole.

The research and development institutes focused on meeting four important needs: (1) helping teachers to understand and learn how to administer an authentic assessment model for evaluating student work in their own classes, (2) helping teachers develop an assessment plan they could adopt for use in their classrooms and schools, (3) devising a data collection system that meets the needs of the art student, the school and state and national art assessment standards.

Project activities included (1) training in the use of art rubrics in assessing pre-K-12 student art performance, (2) experience in using blind scoring methods by peer teachers to validate teacher-scored student work, (3) training in the use of authentically scored student art as a curriculum tool for the improvement of art instruction, (4) the development of assessment portfolios and analytical rubrics for special needs and (5) methods for developing assessment instruments and methods of reporting consistent with student needs and with Goals 2000 state and school district standards. The institute instructors included artists, curriculum and assessment specialists, and art teacher educators. The artists contributed the aesthetic and technical knowledge necessary for the teachers to increase their expressive abilities. The school districts involved included the Pinellas and Dade County school districts in Florida, Washington and Wayne township

districts in Indiana and eleven school districts in Illinois.

Detailed results of the study will be reported in the 2002 NAEA Miami convention and in the publication *Assessing Expressive Behavior* (Dorn, Madeja, and Sabol, 2002). With regard to the student portfolio assessment process the analysis of the data derived from the adjudication of nearly 2,000 portfolios and 16,000 student artworks confirm:

- 1. That teachers trained on how to conduct themselves can produce quantifiable and reliable estimates of student performance in the making of expressive objects.
- 2. art teachers with appropriate training can govern themselves and set their own standards for providing valid and reliable estimates of their own students' performances.
- 3. That the project rubrics employed in these authentic assessment settings by teachers familiar with the nature of creative forming in art can conduct an assessment process that effectively measures student expressive outcomes guided by the use of developmentally ordered rubrics and the teachers' own intuitive knowledge of artistic thinking and making.
- 4. That student art performances and their progress will vary among different classrooms at different grade levels and in different school districts which suggests that student and teacher abilities and school environments are unequally distributed, that comparisons made between the performances of teachers, students, schools and school districts are neither useful or compatible with the goals of improving instruction.
- 5. That gains in student performance may be related in a positive way to the teacher workshop interventions, the grade level of the student and the students' expressive abilities. Overall, student performance gains were unevenly distributed among different grade levels, among teachers receiving the same or different studio training, and among students of unequal expressive ability.

With numerous school districts and state Departments of Education insisting that art teachers assess student performance, and where no art tests or school art assessment plans forthcoming from either the state or the school districts, new approaches such as is demonstrated in the MAAP project are needed to do this. The nation's art teachers should be organized

to provide new directions and a new energy to school based assessment. It is, therefore, suggested that the art teachers in each state begin the process of: (1) developing their own authentic assessment instruments, (2) develop school and district assessment plans using a peer review process, (3) develop ways to document student progress and establish sensible and appropriate record keeping systems which will meet the agreed upon goals of the district and state.

In the final analysis, the case for using an authentic approach in assessing K-12 art education and giving the art teacher responsibility for carrying that out in schools must be something we can demonstrate in practice. In doing so art education professionals need to go beyond simply criticizing state mandated one size fits all paper and pencil tests and beyond simply complaining about state mandated compliance and accountability measures which view students, teachers, school and school districts as competitors.

State departments of education who view curriculum development as a matter of regulating teachers rather than helping them regulate themselves and own their own standards are, of course, not likely to view such changes favorably. It is much easier for bureaucrats to view their primary mission as enforcing rules and mandating reforms set by politicians concerned about voter demands for drug free schools and higher graduation standards. To trust the art teacher to carry out that task would, in effect, rob them of the need to perform the very regulatory function which gives them a reason to exist. Fortunately, they can count on teachers' lack of organization and distrust of testing to allow them to continue mandating meaningless true/false-multiple choice tests more useful in finding out which students, teachers and schools fail rather than what makes schools better places to learn and teach.

The task of overcoming the bias of the testing community is equally daunting. Testing which takes into account different curricular goals and unequal learning environments does not provide statisticians with the necessary means for deciding who wins and who loses. The notion that tests could be used to identify how schools, students and teachers can improve on what they are doing and how different school subjects require

differing assessment strategies for assessing different forms of knowing seems alien to their thinking. How human beings differ in their interests, how they differ in the way they go about learning how things work, and how individuals choose different ways to satisfy that curiosity, becomes an anathema to the test developers who want neat and tidy statistical cohorts to manipulate.

What is most needed is the hard evidence that teacher constructed and administered tests are not only as valid and reliable as norm referenced tests but that they are even more likely to encourage schools to get better rather than to be penalized for being different. In the end, we must realize that American school children are not equal in their aesthetic abilities and American schools are also not equal in the aesthetic opportunities they provide. But if we can at least entertain the possibility that either one or both of these conditions are reversible, our best hope lies in deciding what it is that kids need to know and be able to do and make that the primary focus in reforming schools and schooling.

Charles M. Dorn is a professor of Art Education and Arts Administration at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. Email: cdorn@mailier.fsu.edu

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