



LEARNING POINT

Performance assessments in the visual arts classroom How do they authentically show what students know and can do?

Assessments are used to make judgments on the level of student performance to show what a student knows and can do. In order to make a judgment, there must be:

- 1) content identified to make a judgment on, and
- 2) a process for collecting and identifying evidence to make a judgment.

Depending on the content being assessed, various assessment techniques may be selected to better reflect the nature of that content. For example, if you were shopping for a wedding dress, would you want to pick a designer based on their responses to a multiple-choice test or based on the dresses they have created?

Suggesting a multiple choice option sounds ridiculous due to the disconnection between the content being evaluated and the assessment tool being proposed. Assessment disconnects like these create problems around validity. Validity is achieved when the assessment techniques used accurately reflect the essence of the content matter.

Performance assessment and validity

Research has identified eight essential skills in the visual arts, referred to as the studio habits of mind (Winner, Hetland, Weenema, Sheridan, Palmer, & Locher, 2006). These studio habits of mind include:

- develop craft
- engage and persist
- envision
- express

Performance assessments are assessment techniques that ask students to apply their knowledge and skills to create a demonstration or product reflecting the essence of the content matter being assessed. Since the nature of both the art classroom and the practicing artist involves the actions of doing and making, performance assessments are highly relevant to the visual arts.

- observe
- reflect
- stretch and explore
- understand art world

Together, these skills reflect the cognitive processes and forms of learning that take place in the visual art classroom. Providing only partial exemption to the skill “understanding art world,” all of the studio habits reflect an essence of doing as a form of knowing rather than reciting as a form of knowing. It is for this reason that performance-based assessments that make judgments based on a student’s ability of a skill are a more valid form of assessment than a multiple-choice test that misses the essence of the skills being assessed.

Performance assessments are assessment techniques that ask students to apply their knowledge and skills to create a demonstration or product reflecting the essence of the content matter being assessed. Performance assessments are highly relevant to the visual arts since

the nature of both the art classroom and the practicing artist involve the actions of doing and making. Furthermore, visual art educators have resisted the concept of multiple choice and other fixed responses assessment techniques since the arts value creative production, requiring new and valuable response options that cannot be predetermined.

Performance assessments are valuable for the arts since they allow for creative behaviors and divergent thinking— aspects that are essential to the types of knowledge and pedagogy developed in the art classroom. Since performance assessments better reflect the content matter of the art classroom, they have increased validity.

One common visual arts classroom activity asks the student to create a value scale and then apply the various values to different two-dimensional objects, developing the illusion of depth. This valuable—pun intended—art skill requires the student to perform with materials to

develop the appropriate lightness and darkness of each value. Furthermore, the student should be able to manipulate these values to create the illusion of depth for various shapes.

Since the essence of this skill is performing, the typical value worksheet online has the student fill in value scales as well as basic shapes. This reflects a performance assessment since the student must demonstrate their ability to perform a skill by doing an activity. Using a multiple-choice test in this case would ignore the student's ability to create, and instead would elevate their ability to identify, reducing the validity of the assessment of the essential skill of producing and utilizing values in artworks.

Performance assessment and authenticity

Leaders in art education assessment have supported performance assessment techniques since they are more authentic, meaning students are asked to perform tasks to demonstrate learning directly related to the nature of the discipline with which they are engaged (Boughton, 2013). Elliot Eisner (1996) describes authentic assessment as

"...procedures that provide a portrait of educational performance that conveys meaning more significant than what optically scored filled-in bubble sheets can provide. The drive is to get closer to 'real life,' to secure information on performance that really matters (p.3)"

This focus on content being relevant to the individual student and "real life" applications is crucial in authentic assessment. Dorn (2002) further describes the characteristics of authentic assessment as purposeful, worthwhile, significant, and meaningful application of relevant information (as opposed to learning factual knowledge for the sake of knowing). Despite the increased assessment validity afforded by the use of authentic performance assessments, questions can arise related to reliability.

Performance assessment and reliability

Reliability is the ability of multiple judges to independently assign an equivalent value to the same work. America's preoccupa-

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National Arts Education Association
arteducators.org/learn-tools/assessment-white-papers-for-art-education

tion regarding reliability has dominated the concerns of validity in assessments, resulting in the application of multiple-choice testing in the visual arts. In order to create assessments in the visual arts that are both valid and reliable, art educators must work together to develop their own collective assessment techniques.

Studies on assessment techniques in the visual art have shown that teachers who participated in assessment and curriculum development can conduct both valid and reliable assessment (Dorn, 2003). Since authentic performance assessments can be both valid and reliable, students can benefit when art teachers engage in assessment development in order to take command of the assessment techniques used in the visual arts rather than allowing others outside the field to apply assessments.

Summary

In a time of high-stakes testing and teacher accountability, art educators and their students could benefit from assessment techniques that are both valid and reliable to the domain of the visual arts. Rather than trying to fit the mold of selected-response standardized assessment techniques used in other disciplines, visual art educators are starting to embrace and invest in performance assessment techniques.

The use of authentic performance assessments can accurately reflect the forms

of learning that take place in the visual arts classroom and provide deeper value to the students and teachers involved. If visual art educators want meaningful assessments in the arts, then they must invest in performance assessment techniques that are valid to the content being assessed and have reliable results.

References

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The Michigan Assessment Consortium's Assessment Learning Network (ALN) is a professional learning community consisting of members from MI's professional education organizations; the goal of the ALN is to increase the assessment literacy of all of Michigan's professional educators.