

The Capacity of Assessment in Arts Education

La Capacidad de Evaluación en la Educación Artística

La capacité d'évaluation dans l'éducation aux arts

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ABSTRACT

Assessments play a dominant role in teaching and learning within current accountability frameworks of education. In such contexts, assessments may be perceived as barriers to promoting creativity within arts education. In this article, I examine emerging research that pushes educators to reframe assessment as a pedagogical structure that supports the development of creativity in students. I begin by justifying the integration of newer forms of assessment (i.e., assessment *for* and *as* learning) within traditional assessment *of* learning structures and in relation to our aim of developing students' creative capacities. I then consider the practice of constructing performance assessments that maintain criteria that encourage creative development rather than limit it. Thus my purpose in writing this article is to provide both a theoretical rationale for assessment integration in the arts as well as a practical approach to arts assessment that works within the current structures of assessment in schools.

Key words: assessment; evaluation; arts education; creativity.

RESUMEN

Las evaluaciones tienen un papel predominante en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje dentro de los marcos de responsabilidad actuales en educación. En estos contextos, las evaluaciones pueden ser percibidas como barreras para la promoción de la creatividad en la educación artística. En este artículo examino la investigación emergente que presiona a los educadores para que reconsideren la evaluación como una estructura pedagógica que apoya el desarrollo de la creatividad en los estudiantes. Parto por justificar la integración de formas más actuales de evaluación (por ejemplo, la evaluación como y para el aprendizaje) a la manera tradicional de evaluar las estructuras de aprendizaje y en relación con nuestro objetivo de desarrollar las capacidades creativas de los estudiantes. Luego considero la práctica de crear evaluaciones de desempeño que mantengan criterios que fomenten el desarrollo creativo de los estudiantes en vez de limitarlo. Es así que el propósito de este artículo es entregar tanto una base teórica para integrar la evaluación

a las artes como un enfoque práctico para la evaluación de éstas que funcione dentro de las estructuras actuales que las escuelas utilizan para evaluar.

Descriptores: evaluación; calificación; educación artística; creatividad.

RÉSUMÉ

Les évaluations jouent un rôle prédominant dans l'enseignement et l'apprentissage dans les cadres de rendement de comptes en éducation. En de tels contextes, les évaluations peuvent être perçues comme des barrières à la promotion de la créativité dans l'éducation aux arts. Dans cet article, j'examine la recherche émergente qui pousse les éducateurs à reformuler l'évaluation comme une structure pédagogique qui soutient le développement de la créativité chez les élèves. Je commence par justifier l'intégration de nouvelles formes d'évaluation, (i.e. évaluation *pour et comme* apprentissage) au sein de l'évaluation traditionnelle des structures d'apprentissage et en lien avec notre but de développer les capacités créatives des élèves. Puis, je considère la pratique de bâtir des évaluations de la performance qui conservent des critères qui encouragent plutôt qu'elles limitent le développement de la créativité. En effet, le but de cet article est de fournir une logique qui soutienne l'intégration d'une évaluation dans les arts ainsi qu'une approche pratique à l'évaluation fonctionnelle des arts au sein des structures présentes d'évaluation dans les écoles.

Mots clés : l'évaluation; l'estimation; l'éducation aux arts; la créativité.

Introduction

“The challenges of the next century must be met by citizens with enormous energy and a well developed capacity for imaginative discipline. Our communities need creative pioneers, adept at risk taking, challenging assumptions and questioning conventional wisdom. This is the domain of the artist: listening, translating, borrowing and synthesizing.”

—William Cleveland

THE EPIGRAPH ABOVE CALLS for citizens with a capacity for artistic inquiry. It speaks to engaging the imaginative domain of learning and energizing acts of risk-taking and questioning. It further recognizes that “the arts are deeply engaged in the development of mind” with a capacity to challenge and change ways of thinking and being in this world (Eisner, 2005, p. 10). The word *capacity* intrigues me here. Capacity in its conventional wisdom is about containment, limits, and bounds, as in, ‘the capacity of this space.’ However, Cleveland uses the word capacity differently. He urges us toward a definition of ability and limitlessness. When paired with the notion of creativity, this connotation makes good sense. Creativity is about our ability to step into new ways of seeing. It is about constructing alternative representations that give rise to different understandings about our world and its future. Ultimately, creativity is about our capacity for imagining beyond current social and intellectual boundaries, to forge forward into novel spaces of possibility (Gardner, 2007).

However, despite our aim toward developing the imaginative mind, Bruno-Jofré (2008, p. 1) asserts that, “schools, preoccupied with measurable outcomes, quite often place the cultivation of the artistic and the aesthetic in an inert and rigid space.” In contexts of contemporary schooling, creativity often gets overrun by a curriculum

driven by the need to achieve and assess pre-determined expectations (Sheridan-Rabideau, 2010). Plainly put, current assessment practices limit creativity (Cornett & Smithrim, 2001; Sahlberg, 2010). Over fifteen years ago, Eisner (1993) cautioned that conceptions of assessment would need to be reshaped in order to foster the type of creative pioneers that Cleveland describes. Unfortunately, while there have been significant efforts in both research and practice to expand assessment to better engage creativity in learning, these efforts have been overshadowed by heavy accountability frameworks and standardization processes that have dominated recent educational reforms. Moreover, such reform initiatives have served to valence disciplines (e.g., mathematics, science, and language arts) that have large-scale assessments and other associated accountability measures within public education. As a result, the arts maintain a subsidiary placement amongst school curricula. Hence there remains a need to reshape assessment in ways that feature the arts within current assessment reforms while still promoting the creative capacities and that foster the development of an imaginative mind.

In this article, I examine emerging research that pushes educators to reshape assessment as a pedagogical structure that supports creativity in arts education. I begin by justifying the integration of newer forms of assessment (i.e., assessment *for* and *as* learning) within traditional assessment of learning structures and in relation to our aim of developing students' creative capacities. I then consider the practice of constructing performance assessments that maintain criteria that encourage creative development rather than limit it. Thus my purpose in writing this article is to provide both a theoretical rationale for assessment integration in the arts as well as a practical approach to arts assessment that works within the current structures of assessment in schools. In this way, I hope to begin a response to Sheridan-Rabideau's (2010, p. 55) call to work "within current assessment-driven educational frameworks...to broach the question of how we will evaluate the value added to our teaching by infusing the fostering of creativity throughout it."

Assessment and Arts Education

In striving to educate toward creative capacity, Doll (2005, p. 21) reminds us that "capacity is no friend of standards or accountabilities, opinion polls, common sense, facts, competition, and the like: those are the hobgoblins of small minds." The tension between assessment and the arts within formal schooling has been an enduring educational dilemma, further agitated by recent accountability movements that place greater emphasis on classroom and large-scale assessments (Cornett & Smithrim, 2001). The current standards-based framework of most educational systems in North America and Europe has resulted in greater reliance on classroom and large-scale assessments within certain disciplines (Klinger, DeLuca, & Miller, 2008). Such a framework serves not only an accountability purpose but also creates a perceived valuing of some disciplines over others (e.g., mathematics, language arts, and sciences over the arts, history, and physical education). In addition, within this educational climate, traditional *assessments of learning* (AOL) approaches play a dominant role

in shaping teaching and learning (Shute, 2008). AOL serves a summative function by measuring and reporting on student achievement at the end of a learning period (McMillan, Hellsten, & Klinger, 2011). While paper-and-pencil tests and assignments remain the central method for summative assessment, alternative strategies are used within classrooms to assess diverse forms of student achievement (e.g., portfolios, rubrics, and performance assessments). For creative tasks, students are often graded using a rubric assessment structure that delineates criteria across a range of performance qualities.

In addition to AOL, teachers and students are also being encouraged to engage in ongoing formative assessment, or what is now termed Assessment for Learning (AFL). This form of assessment can be thought of as the assessments that occur between summative tasks to promote student learning (McMillan, Hellsten, & Klinger, 2011). AFL differs from traditional conceptions of formative assessment in its reliance on active student engagement in the assessment process (e.g., self- and peer-assessment, student-generated assessment criteria). Based on Black and Wiliam's (1998) seminal meta-analysis of AFL strategies, the Assessment Reform Group (1999) identified five principles to guide assessment during learning. These principles included: (a) the provision of effective feedback to students from teacher and peers, (b) the active involvement of students in their own learning through self-assessment, (c) use of self-, peer-, and teacher feedback and assessment results to guide learning and instruction, (d) recognition that assessment has a profound influence on motivation and self-esteem, and (e) self-assessment is a key factor in promoting students' understanding of learning. Ultimately, AFL utilizes an integrative approach where assessment, learning, and instruction are paired to improve achievement, develop meta-cognition, and support motivated learning and positive student self-perceptions through assessment activities (Assessment Reform Group, 1999, 2002). Research on AFL demonstrates that this practice helps students to assess their own abilities and then effectively plan for their learning and develop their skills (Earl, 2003; Falchikov, 2003; Kirby & Downs, 2007). Moreover, through peer feedback processes, AFL encourages the development of a learning culture in classrooms that values self and peer reflection with the aim of improving learning and performance.

Given the potential of AFL to improve student learning and metacognition, and to support the development of reflective learning cultures, I believe that AFL provides a promising and viable way to reshape assessment in the arts that simultaneously aligns with contemporary assessment demands. In particular, two fundamental reasons support the use of AFL in arts education. First, AFL promotes the foundational skills needed for creative development. As noted above, AFL enhances students' ability to self-reflect, critique, evaluate, understand learning and development processes, and listen and learn from others. These are the skills of artists and artists-in-the-making who work to develop their art form and deepen their creative capacity through self-evaluation and critique. Moreover, AFL has been suggested as an approach to help facilitate a community of learners who value critical reflection and process learning. Professional artists rely on and participate in such communities to further develop their art in response to feedback from others; the playwright works with a dramaturge

and workshops their script in small public forums, the painter shares paintings in a studio, the poet joins a writer's group and reads aloud each week for feedback. In this way, AFL supports the development of students as artists and begins to address Sheridan-Rabideau's (2010) call for assessments that authenticate the collaborative elements of art making and that contribute to students who can appreciate artistic complexity.

The second reason for AFL integration within arts education is that it works within the current assessment framework characteristic of standards-based and accountability movements in education. Despite the common misconception that AFL is something different from AOL, in reality, AFL practice and philosophy are not disconnected from summative assessment processes (Taras, 2007). In fact, proponents of AFL adamantly support the notion that engaging in AFL during learning enhances student achievement on summative forms of assessment. Gardner (2006, p. 198) states, "paradoxically, assessment for learning's central message...is that overall standards and individual performance may be improved by actually emphasizing formative assessment techniques." Hence, the integration of AFL within arts curricula not only supports the development of fundamental skills necessary for learning in the arts but also supports contemporary approaches to assessment in education. However, in suggesting greater AFL assessment integration in the arts, I caution that formative assessment criteria must be constructed in ways that promote creativity rather than limit it. Too often assessment criteria are construed as narrow constraints on artistic processes and products. What is needed is a way to construct assessment criteria that enable this form of learning and that hinges on our aim to promote creative and imaginative development. As such, in the following section, I take a closer look at how to construct assessment criteria that enable students' capacity for creativity.

Constructing Assessments in the Arts

Like in other disciplines, students in the arts are expected to learn specific content objectives—definitions, language, facts, and techniques—in order to master their artistic form. In addition, there is a need to develop an appreciation for the discipline of practice, its history and contemporary approaches, uses, and influences. However, perhaps most important to learning in the arts is the need for students to develop their creative and imaginative capacities. Given these various learning expectations, it is no surprise that arts curricula across educational contexts are typically based on a laundry list of educational objectives that engage learning and assessment on artistic technique, aesthetics, and creativity. Technique involves the fundamental skills needed to engage in an art form (e.g., use of a pottery wheel or sculpting tool, breath and support in singing, tableau and levels in drama). Aesthetics, on the other hand, puts technique to work in order to create a coherent artistic representation that fits within a discipline of practice and cultural context (Dissanayake, 1995; Greene, 2009). Creativity pushes further, relying on technique and aesthetics to offer novel representations that encourage meaning making and shifts in understanding (Greene, 2001). Creativity is about using artistic techniques to reconstruct our world

in new ways. As suggested by Sheridan-Rabideau (2010) authentic assessment in the arts must measure more than solely technique and aesthetics, assessment must engage with the complexity of creativity and the collaborative inquiry processes that give rise to it. In this section, I explore a specific approach to constructing assessment in the arts. By drawing on the constructs of technique, aesthetics, and creativity, I examine how teachers might construct and use assessment criteria in their classrooms in ways that promote artistic development across these constructs.

In order to assess artistic processes and products (i.e., performance assessment), it is useful to establish a set of criteria that demark the quality of performance across a range from beginner to more advanced (Fostaty Young & Wilson, 2000). Students and teachers can then use these criteria to assess learning and achievement. A commonly used framework for this approach to performance assessment is a rubric or achievement chart. Generally, rubrics are created in a table format (see figure 1 as an example). The categories of learning may reflect specific curricular expectations related to technique, aesthetics, or creativity (or another topography of learning objectives). The levels represent the range of performance qualities while the criteria describe learning at various levels.

Category	From beginner → to → more advanced		
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Technique – Expectations	– Criteria	– Criteria	– Criteria
Aesthetic – Expectations	– Criteria	– Criteria	– Criteria
Creativity – Expectations	– Criteria	– Criteria	– Criteria

Figure 1. Example of performance assessment rubric structure

In constructing performance assessments, it is largely the quality of criteria that determines the effectiveness of the instrument in assessing and promoting student learning. I find it useful to think about criteria as an *enabling constraint* within arts education. While the concept of enabling constraint may seem counter-intuitive at first, it supports learning that is “simultaneously rule-bound (constraining) and capable of flexible, unanticipated possibilities (enabling)” (Davis, Sumara, & Luce-Kapler, 2008, p. 193). Criteria that are *enabling* to creativity do not pre-establish processes or products of learning but support the construction of novel ways of connecting and extending ideas. However, these criteria are also *constraining* as learning in the arts is limited by the techniques and materials contained within a specific artistic discipline. Thinking about criteria as an enabling constraint signals a shift in criteria that is prescriptive to criteria that provides students with a set of parameters that promotes creativity. In order to better understand this distinction, let us look at few examples of different criteria for a performance assessment. Table 1 below presents an assessment rubric for an assignment to create a charcoal drawing of a subject. The table offers three examples of criteria to assess this work.

Table 1. Three examples of performance assessment criteria for curricular expectation to demonstrate creativity in charcoal drawing (category: creativity)

Examples	<i>From beginner</i> →	<i>to</i>	→ <i>more advanced</i>
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Example 1	Demonstrates minimal creativity	Demonstrates some degree of creativity	Demonstrates a high degree of creativity
Example 2	The charcoal drawing represents a sketch of a subject by using elements of line and representation	The charcoal drawing represents a subject by using some techniques of line, texture and shading to create volume and depth	The charcoal drawing is life-like and incorporates all elements of line, texture, and shading
Example 3	The charcoal drawing represents a subject by using techniques of line, texture and shading	The charcoal drawing integrates various techniques to represent a subject within an abstract or discrete context to create visual interest	The charcoal drawing represents a subject in a novel way that pushes toward deeper-meaning making

The three examples provided in Table 1 present different approaches to performance criteria. The first example reflects criteria that attempt to quantify learning by using words such as “few,” “some,” “more,” or “high,” to describe learning and, in this case, creativity. These words indicate the degree or amount of learning (i.e., how much learning or creativity has occurred) rather than describing the quality of student learning. Such an approach to criteria construction is not very useful for students or teachers in judging the quality of learning as little information is given about the qualities that distinguish one level of performance from another (Fostaty Young & Wilson, 2000). Furthermore, these criteria do not offer guidance for improvement nor do they link creativity to other aesthetic and technical processes; thus, the criteria in Example 1 are not constructed as an enabling constraint to support students’ creative development.

The second example begins to describe learning through qualitative descriptions that tell the students what their drawings should look like as they move from beginner to more advanced. In this way, the criteria can be useful in guiding student development throughout the artistic process and in assessing finished products. This qualitative approach to performance criteria is effective for domains of technique and aesthetics in which there are pre-established benchmarks of quality and where students are asked to reproduce good practice. However, as the criteria in this example specify the visual qualities of students’ finished products, there is little room for creativity in student work. Hence while these criteria do provide students with constraints for their work, they do not enable student creativity. When assessing creativity, simply providing a qualitative description of what learning looks like is incommensurable with our definition of creativity and thus limits imaginative inquiry in students.

Example 3 offers a way to establish criteria for assessing creativity. Criteria in this example are based on the novelty of artwork with consideration for how the student has connected techniques to represent a subject, contextualized that subject

for visual interest, and represented the subject in a novel way to push meaning making forward. As such, the criteria do not stipulate what the picture should look like but rather encourage students to think about abstracting their drawings to provoke deeper understandings about the subject of their artwork. Likewise, if a student was to demonstrate achievement for a task related to singing a song, enabling criteria would encourage creative use of various vocal techniques and elements to provoke a new listening experience. In this way, the criteria stipulate the constraints of the artistic form but also support students to think creatively about their artwork. These examples present criteria that represent the concept of enabling constraints.

In order for assessment criteria to promote student learning it must be used during the learning period rather than solely as tool for summative evaluation. Following the principles of AFL, assessments should be actively used by students through peer- and self-reflection throughout learning and by the teacher to guide their feedback on student progress (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). In this way, as students develop their artistic work, assessment criteria can be used to move students from beginner to more advanced. Students can also use the criteria to assess the work of others, developing an appreciation for the complexity of art-making as well as engaging in meaningful dialogue about student development. Enabling assessment criteria leads to questions about art-making, possibilities for creativity, and feedback on work: Where will you take this drawing next? How will you know when it is finished? Why did you situate the subject in this way? This process of structured peer dialogue and feedback promotes a community of artists who value learning with and from each other. However, for students to use assessment criteria throughout their learning, it is necessary that they firmly understand what the criteria mean. Hence it is useful to engage in joint assessment construction or in applying assessment criteria to sample works. Ultimately, the use of assessment in the arts requires that students themselves learn how to develop and use assessments for art-making. Like other skills, learning how to assess requires direct teaching and scaffolded learning opportunities—creating these opportunities to learn about assessment is the teacher's responsibility. When students develop the skills to assess their own learning, when assessment criteria are reshaped to enable creativity, and when assessments are used during learning (AFL), assessment serves a powerful pedagogy for developing students' creative capacities.

Reshaping Assessment in the Arts

In this article, I have begun to tie together emerging thinking in assessment and the arts in order to reshape how teachers might engage assessment to promote creativity in students. Given the current need for creativity in our society and given the current accountability framework across most educational systems across the globe, assessment and the arts is an important and pressing nexus of inquiry. Despite this, in writing this article I was astounded at how little research had been conducted in this area. This is problematic. If we do not find ways to effectively assess learning in the arts that work within the existing accountability parameters that value certain knowledge, then arts will remain a subsidiary discipline within school curricula. In

pairing AFL with assessment forms that enable creativity, I believe assessment can be reshaped as a useful condition of learning in the arts while simultaneously satisfying accountability demands. However, more research is needed that reshapes arts assessment by translating contemporary assessment theory into viable classroom practices. As such, I end this article with a call for additional scholarship that considers the capacity of assessment as an enabling pedagogy in the development of creative and imaginative minds.

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