

# Art Assessment and the Artistic Process

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## Introduction

### *The problem*

As I began my student teaching experience, I became anxious about how I was going to assess students' artworks. I found that experts in art education recommended the use of rubrics and portfolios as tools for assessing student work (Eisner 2000, 2001; Dorn, 2004, 2005; Lindstrom, 2006; Sabol, 2004, 2006; Madeja, 2004). However, I noticed that teachers I observed in my student teaching placements relied more on informal assessments to check for understanding from their students rather than rubrics and portfolios. I wondered why these teachers were not using the tools for assessment recommended by experts, and if there were methods that could help art education mimic the artistic process. I was determined to see if, like the writing process, an artistic process could be adopted in art assessment in a way that would be convenient for art educators. Therefore, my problem can be summed up with two questions:

- What is the artistic process?
- How can art assessment better mimic the artistic process within the time constraints of the art classroom?

### *Existing research*

Mary Stockrocki (2005) caught my attention because she recognizes that research in art assessment tools usually discusses the use of rubrics and portfolios. However, Stockrocki believes that art assessment can benefit greatly from the use of everyday informal assessment of students in the classroom because "...it provides feedback directly to students in the process of their learning, more than mere measurement or rubric ranking does" (p. 107). This article was my starting point of research. When I modified my search terms to reflect vocabulary used by artists such as dialogue and reflection,

rather than vocabulary used by educators, I found many articles on how art assessment can mimic the artistic process. Many researchers believe that there is a general artistic process that can be taught which revolves around the use of dialogue and reflection in the art classroom (Anderson, 2004; Cohen & Gainer, R., 1995, Smith, 2005; Taunton, 1984; Zander, 2004). These researchers believe that dialogue and reflection are essential in art education because students are encouraged to problem-solve and to think and act like artists.

My research adds suggestions and insights from my experiences inside of the classroom to current research on how art education can mimic the artistic process. Through a literature review and interviews with art educators at the elementary, high school, and college level, I have compiled ideas on how to fit effective art assessments within the time constraints of the art classroom, where some teachers only see their students once a week.

### Methodology

After completing an additional literature review on art assessment, I interviewed five teachers (two public school teachers and three college professors) who were in the unique position of also being practicing artists within their community. I conducted some of the interviews in person, and others by e-mail. Based on these interviews and the review of literature on art assessment, I selected and implemented the most useful assessment methods, and then reflected on their success.

### Analysis and interpretations

I found that there is a misconception in the schools I have interned at about what art education should teach students. It is unfortunate that art education is only valued for the art products that students make, and not for the problem-solving skills they develop by using the artistic process. I believe that the focus on products in art education has caused art educators to lose sight of what art is about and why we want children to learn about art. Art is about being human and sharing the human condition. If we miss out on the process of art then we are missing another chance to teach students how to be human.

What also I found is that a basic artistic process can be taught

in art education. Here is the basic structure of the artistic process that I have developed based on my literature review and interviews:

Phase 1: Impulse/Desire to make/Problem or question to solve

Phase 2: Exploration, Experimentation, Decisions, Dialogue

Phase 3: Reflection

Phase 4: Repeat

The most important components of the artistic process are dialogue and reflection. My mentor and interviewee Lisa Scheer explained:

“Without reflection art is just making and not responding. Things that are done artfully are not done automatically. This is why artists must reflect. Art without reflection is not quality. Art is not so much about making but more about responding.”

### Conclusion and action plan

From my research, I can conclude that the art educators I interviewed are on the right path to including the artistic process in art education. However, the next question to consider is how to incorporate more dialogue and reflection into the scheduled art classes when teachers may only see students once a week. Here are suggestions I have based on assessment methods I have tried in my student teaching:

- Engage in dialogues with students while they are making art.
- Encourage students to discuss their art together.
- Ask questions at the end of art-making that require reflection on the process. For example, when I had students create their portfolios of work they had done throughout the year, I asked the students questions such as “How did you feel about looking at art you made in the beginning of the year and art you have made recently?”
- Dedicate *entire class periods* to dialogue and reflection! In order for students to get the full experience of the artistic process, teachers need to spend more time in the classroom on dialogue

and reflection, which means sacrificing art-making. Art teachers will be hesitant to do this, but the rewarding experience the students will have is worth having fewer art products. Who knows, perhaps when students start demonstrating their problem-solving skills, more educators will learn the value of the artistic process.

I plan on refining and applying my findings to my teaching practice. In my classroom I will strive to create a better balance between art-making, dialogue, and reflection. I hope to share these techniques with other art educators and convince educators that there is more to art than making.

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