"Assessment techniques are only as limited as the teachers' imagination!"

Art Assessment that I Will Use in My Future Classroom

By Ning Zhan (Jenny)

As a beginning international student in art education, I was concerned about my academic background that I would need to succeed in the courses at the beginning of this Fall semester 2016. My weaknesses or obstacles were language and lack of background education in western art. Also, I did not know anything about how art educators assess students in the American education system. However, as I read the articles more, I gradually gained the basic knowledge about art assessments. Meanwhile, based on the teaching experience in MU Tiger Artist program[1], I realized how important art assessment is. When I was designing my art unit which is a twelve-week art semester project, I was thinking about which assessment strategies that I could use and how these strategies encourage authentic art thinking and creating. Since I had those questions in my mind, I interviewed several practicing art teachers in the Columbia community. I wanted to learn some strategies or art assessment samples that are used by current art teachers, because then I could compare the knowledge about art assessments that I read from books with the practical art assessment samples from practicing art teachers. Based on the information that I gathered, I want to combine them into some useful and practical art assessments that I will use in my future classroom.

1

What is Art Assessment?

What is the assessment? How do teachers assess students? I am currently an Art Education student, and I was wondering how my professors assess me? So I am intrigued to know how to assess students. For me, assessment is a system which helps students' thinking and learning. It is difficult however, to assess students especially in the area of Art. We all know that there are many policies enacted in schools which represent the state's interest, the school district's interest, and the individual school's interest. Teachers are the policy enforcers who implement school policies, but they seem to do so with reluctance because it is hard to balance the school's interest with the students' interest. Secondly, some assessments focus on students' results instead of their learning process. As a result, students gradually care about their "grades" but not their improvement. At this time, should schools and teachers focus on individual development or the results? Which one should be valued? In China, we have a saying that today's Chinese students are not functioning as learners, they are robotic machines. The school policies in China are designed to direct students to achieve the defined goals.

For instance, the College Entrance Examination (CEE) in China is the most important assessment strategy to evaluate which students are qualified to go to the universities. However, the College Entrance Examination is only held once a year and a student's results on that exam determine their fate for a lifetime. Ironically, some students who attend the top 10 universities cannot perform common daily tasks of living very well. Indeed, they gain good grades in many subjects however they lack ordinary living skills, communication skills and social skills. That's why today's educators in China are worried. Obviously, assessment strategies play a vital role in schools. "An effective art assessment program enables the art educator to diagnose student strengths and weaknesses early and on a regular basis, to monitor student progress, to improve and adapt instructional methods in response to assessment data, and to use information about students individually and as a group to manage the classroom more effectively." (Beattie, 1998)

"Research has shown that most teachers spend nearly one half of their work day doing assessment-related work." (Beattie, 1998) It is very difficult to formulate art assessment since everyone has his/her own viewpoint towards the world –and art. Here is an example, a student earnestly finishes his/her art project and shows improvement in the process, but the level of achievement did not meet the standard requirement; how would the teacher assess this student? Good or not good? The boundary here is problematic.

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Art Assessment Review and Practicing Art Teachers' Assessment Strategies

There are many art assessments that are currently used in schools, such as formative assessment, performance-based assessments, and summative assessment. However, when art educators design art assessment samples, they need to follow some principles of quality classroom art assessment. For example, "assessment focuses on both products and processes, and assessment is responsive to collaborative and cooperative learning." (Beattie, 1998) But, "not all of the principles are applicable to every grade level. You can decide which ones will work best for you and your students." (Beattie, 1998)

Honestly, as a beginner in teaching art, "an easy and manageable way to begin is by responding to just one or two of these assessment principles during a given school year." (Beattie, 1998) Based on these good principles of art assessment, I think at least I have a clear direction in which to design and create art assessment samples.

My professor helped me revise the samples which are more rational, but she asserted that I may revise the assessment samples many times when I am really teaching art in the classroom. That is true, because "we do not truly have a viable curriculum or assessment method until we know who our students are, how they best understand, and the world in which we are sending them into." (Michelle Livek) Therefore, this is why I want to have a solid foundation about art assessment so that I will be better able to meet the unique needs of individual students. "Most art assessment strategies currently used by art educators are performance-based, which is the term that refers to the task, method, or activity used to assess the performance in which veteran art educators have the same idea as expressed by one educator when I interviewed her via email. She said that most of her assessment was performance-based. She introduced several strategies to me, such as portfolios, journals, diaries, integrated performance, group discussion, exhibitions, audio tapes and video tapes. She emphasized the importance of documentation video which is based on the tapes of audio and video. "The use of technology for assessment purposes is rapidly changing the field of assessment. Video- and audio-taped performances can be used in conjunction with portfolios, class

discussions, any tasks set up in an interview format, integrated performances, and various scoring strategies such as student self-evaluations and teacher or student critiques." (Beattie, 1998) Here is an example about using documentation video to assess students' learning. In Tiger Artists Program, we guided students in the process of recording and creating their artwork, and we taught them how to use iMovie app to combine the footages that they had filmed. Moreover, students wrote down the scripts about their thoughts according to the videos and then made the voice-over. Surprisingly, we found that many students had better understandings about the topic – daydream. They visually expressed their ideas and their thoughts through the technology – video.

When it comes to portfolios, we do not feel unfamiliar. "The portfolio as used in the art classroom today emphasizes significant evidence about the progress, achievements, and experiences of the student."

This strategy is commonly used by art educators which "provides an important tool for evaluating the curriculum and determining necessary changes." We all know this strategy, but how to use it to promote students' learning and performance? Michelle Livek who is a college instructor and a veteran art educator gives us an excellent example. She introduced to me her previous art assessment strategy in a high school. She had her students create One Page Portfolios. "They were to generate one page of writing and one page of images that would show their pre-thinking, process, product, and predictions. They were to develop the One Page Portfolio throughout the whole semester and turn it in at the end of the semester." Livek says, "this assessment was ongoing, authentic, student-driven, individualized, and was open for interpretation." She thinks that "it changed the type of projects that the students could do." Meanwhile, she mentioned that "before using this type of assessment, the students' projects were all appearing too much alike because the rubrics were too specific and too stifling. However, after the assessment changed, they were then able to follow their intuitions." I watched those One Page Portfolio examples that her students created, and I felt like this strategy is a kind of computer-based portfolio which "enables students to scan in their artworks, create written entries, and reflect on their works in a file that is accessible to both teachers and parents." Actually in addition, One Page Portfolios helped students to open their minds and cultivate their learning skills, because her students later on "started creating blogs, websites, and would give presentations that would cover all of the works that they had created in a whole semester."

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"Performance strategies exemplify excellent models of ideal processes, those that engage students in complex thinking skills and multilevel tasks." (Beattie, 1998) This is why most art educators choose this strategy. Certainly, there are some other samples that art educators use at schools, for example, postcards to a friend, which "is an unusual written project that can be designed to assess content and processes in aesthetics or art history." This strategy can be adapted by the art educator for use with different age groups. (Beattie, 1998) Dr. Unrath who is an associate professor at the University of Missouri assigned her graduate students to make their benchmark experiences with postcards from their journey to become an art teacher. They should be aware of their learning and think of their epiphanies as "Postcard Moments". It was beneficial when I was creating this postcard, because it gave me the opportunity to think about what I have learned through the whole semester and the moments of sudden insight. Actually, when I recalled what I wrote down on a particular postcard, I was touched by the remembrance of a student named Bode in Tiger Artists Program which was my first time to teach art. I still remembered the moment when Bode raised his hand and told me he had previously learned the iMovie app before, and my mind suddenly went blank because I did not know how to respond to him. I then replied to him, "Wow, that's awesome, you could help me as a teaching assistant. You know you are a great help to me and to the class. You are so amazing". After that, I saw an immediate change in Bode. In previous lessons, Bode disturbed his deskmate many times. However,

in lesson 4, he was confident and had an opportunity to show his skill. Subsequently, he was fully engaged in the class, and I observed that he was very proud and confident. I personally profited from making the postcards so that I could recall this valuable memory. I think when my students create the postcards, they may have the same feelings too.

Recently, I learned another strategy- Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) which is "a method initiated by teacher-facilitated discussions of art images and documented to have a cascading positive effect on teachers and students." We used this VTS activity through the whole process of Tiger Artists Program. Personally, I really like this strategy because I learned some wonderful ideas from my students when we observed an artist's artworks. Students' imagination is powerful and their ideas were completely beyond my imagination. Definitely, students also learn from sharing thoughts from others. I think the VTS is based on the group

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discussions which is "viewed as a performance assessment strategy, the group discussion is a group demonstration task limited to one response mode – oral." (Beattie, 1998)

"What strategy can double student learning gains? According to 250 empirical studies, the answer is formative assessment." (Finley, 2014) "When the cook tastes the soup," writes Robert E. Stake, "that's formative; when the guests taste the soup, that's summative". It describes the formative assessment vividly. There is no doubt that "formative assessment tools provide critical feedback to teachers, helping them to monitor and modify their instruction methods and lesson plans. It is important to use a variety of teaching and learning formative assessments, changing them frequently to stimulate both students and teachers." (GDC Team, 2016) Mrs. Anne who I interviewed via email described to me one of her teaching strategies that she has used. She said that she kept students thinking by asking them really good questions which were based on the conversation between her and her students.

She called it "assessment conversation". Those questions can be basically like, where does your idea come from, and how do you make it happen, and why do you choose this kind of method to solve the problem or to make the artwork. Certainly, teachers should keep asking provocative questions to further students' understanding and thinking. For example, in Tiger Artist Program lesson one, Amy Roupp who is the director of the Tiger Artists Program politely stopped the class and asked questions to enlighten students as to daydreaming. In the meantime, my brain started to flash with many new ideas. Boom! Boom! Boom! Students then quickly looked at their daydream list and I was sure they were thinking about it.

As the beginner in art education, I need many hands-on experiences, and especially step-by-step directions. Beattie's assessment book is useful which gives me a practical direction that I can follow when I want to use formative assessment in the classroom successfully. For example, first, I should identify a teaching objective to assess, related to discipline-specific content, or discipline-specific processes, or

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student attitudes, motivations, values. Second, I need write a single, assessable question pertaining to the objective. Third, I should select an effective informal feedback strategy or technique. Forth, I need to decide how to introduce the strategy and fit it smoothly into the lesson or classroom activity. Fifth, try to apply the strategy. Sixth, I should analyze and interpret the feedback. Seventh, I should respond to the results. (Beattie, 1998) Based on these steps, I started to design the assessment for my unit plan which I will describe later in part THREE of this article.

Actually, I got some information from practicing art teachers about the use of role playing to assess students. For example, Mrs. Frances who is a veteran art educator shared her teaching experience in middle school with me. She said she created role playing to assess students in 8th Grade. The students were assigned to create their own logos which would be sold to a company, and Mrs. Frances would be the supervisor of this company who would make the decision to select the logo which is most appropriate for the company.

When students were done with the logo, they needed to make an appointment with Mrs. Frances's assistant who was one of the students in the art class. When Mrs. Frances met the students, she asked them several questions about the logos. For instance, what is the meaning of the logo? Why do you make the logo in this way? Where does your idea come from? etc. Certainly, it is beneficial to use this strategy, because the relationship between the teacher and students are enhanced. At least, the teacher has an opportunity to figure out what students have learned through the process. In the meantime, students have a chance to express themselves clearly since the conversation is personal but is professional. "If teachers follow assessments with high-quality corrective instruction, then students should have a second chance to demonstrate their new level of competence and understanding. This second chance determines the effectiveness of the corrective process while also giving students another opportunity to experience success in learning, thus providing them with additional motivation." (Reeves, Douglass, 2007) I think role playing has a potential possibility for students to have a second chance to demonstrate success because when they communicate with the supervisor (the teacher), they would receive some suggestions to revise their ideas and artworks and make their artworks better.

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Which assessments that I will use in my future classroom and how will each of those methods encourage authentic art making?

The assessments that I am choosing now are not absolute, because it depends on the situation that I will face in the future classroom, including students and curriculum. However, I want to pursue some practical and useful assessments that provoke students' thinking and learning, while simultaneously developing the relationship between students and teachers. Since I am creating the art lesson sequence for 8th Grade students which specifically is the project - living in harmony with nature, I am going to design some art assessments based on this project. I think my assessments will focus on formative assessment and performance-based assessment, and I believe that all my assessments should be formative. This is a description of the art project: In this project, students will study the vocabulary terms surrealism and cyanotype printing process. Meanwhile, they will create artworks which display how humans live in harmony with nature in a surreal way by using PicsArt app. In the end, they will create documentation videos which express what and how
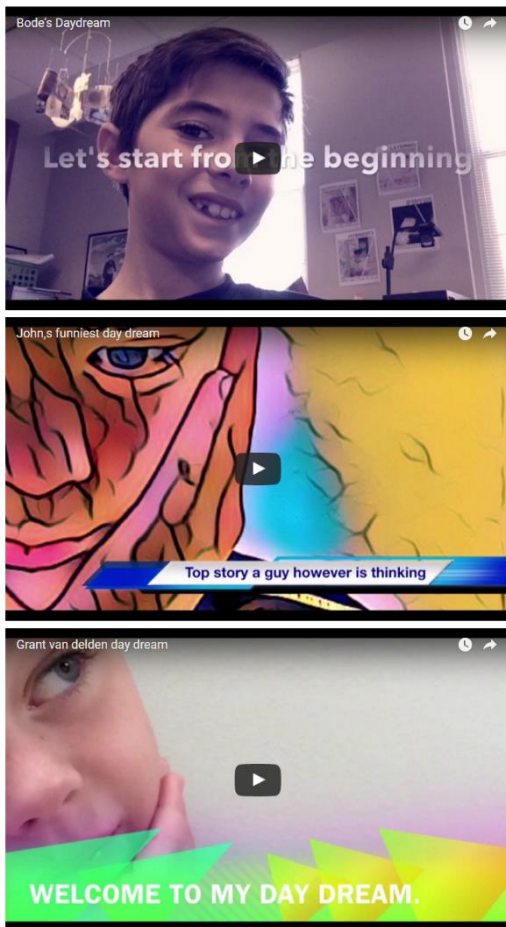
they have learned through the processes.

According to the formative assessment steps, I am carefully thinking about the objectives that I have created which are related to discipline-specific processes. "A key element of authentic assessment is the opportunity for students to help design the assessment and reflect on its purpose – individually and as a class." (Kohn, Alfie, 2015) At this points, I will hand out the sheets with some assessment questions to students and gather the feedback. Based on students' opinion and thoughts, I will decide the assessment strategies and introduce the assessments to students and apply them in the class.

"All assessment come from questions"

– Dr. Kathleen Unrath

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Students' Artworks - Documentation Videos

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The first objective that I will formulate is that after students have observed Annija Veldre's artworks and done the VTS activity, students will be asked three questions which are "what is going on in this picture?", "what do you see that makes you say that?", and "what more can we find?" These routines "help students identify the basis for their thinking by asking them to elaborate on the thinking that lies behind their responses." However, it is important to take notice of the students' responses to the questions. "Do students provide support for other people's assertions as a way of strengthening them?" (Ritchhart, R., Church, M., & Morrison, K. 2011).

The second objective is that students will be able to demonstrate their ideas about how humans live in harmony with nature by using photography and PicsArt app. According to this objective, the assessment will focus on students' participation, student attitudes, and the surreal image that they will create. They will have peers observe their images and get feedback, meanwhile students should answer the following questions: is the surreal image full of meaning? Is it meaningful? How does your work express an emotion that demonstrates how humans live with nature?

The third objective is that students will learn the skills of the cyanotype printing process and they will use cyanotype printing to print their surreal image on fabric. The assessment at this point will focus on their learning process and the pictures they have taken and the notes that they have made, because all these materials will be a basis of the documentation video.

The fourth objective is that students will be able to create documentation video by using iMovie app. This is a discipline-specific process, and students are asked to "keep step-by-step records of their own processes as they create an artwork", and write the art-related script according to the video, and make the voice-over. Actually, I benefited from the process of making documentation video as well when I was creating my big idea book.

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Through my process of the creation of the Big Idea Book, my definition of memory changed in the end because I investigated the idea thoroughly and had my own new thoughts. In the same way, students would be aware of this change. I then would ask them whether they changed the definition of their big idea. I think the parallels in the process of developing a lesson plan are the same as the process of creating the Big Idea Book. For example, I asked myself questions when I was pursuing my big idea. These questions are required in art class. They are called "essential questions". I think documentation video is a very excellent strategy to develop students' thinking and learning. Besides, the college of education at Harvard published a book named Making Thinking Visible. This book provides some good methods to help teachers know what students have learned. Teachers use the method "I used to think...now I think...", for example, to test what students have learned. In addition, there is a significant point that these videos are also artworks.

In the fifth objective, student will be able to upload the videos to YOUTUBE, and generate the QR codes, in the meantime, they will have an art show. In the art show, students' surreal image cyanotype prints will be displayed in the classroom and each print will be attached with a QR code. Students are asked to scan the QR codes to watch videos and interpret each artwork, and they will have an opportunity to critique the surreal images and make notes if someone gives valuable suggestions or comments. After class, students are assigned to assess the artworks they have created by themselves. They will have a hand-out sheet to answer the following questions:

1)   What do you like best about your artwork and why?

2)   What was the most difficult part of this project? Why?

3)   If you were to do this project over again, what would you do differently and why?

Conclusion

I am inspired by those creative formative assessments and performance-based assessments, and I have devised my own engaging assessment tools which are based on the teaching objectives that I have designed. I do not know how it will be when I implement these strategies, however, at least those strategies I already have used in Tiger Artists Program and have experienced from my professor's classroom as well are very practical and rational. I know it take times and effort to make assessments appropriate and fit them smoothly into the class. However, as I search for art assessment strategies

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and samples, I gradually have a basic foundation and a rough outline about art assessments and the knowledge of how a practicing art teacher can use assessment strategies. Anyhow, I really appreciate and have benefited from this semester's study of this process of learning art assessments and creating assessment strategies.

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