

Embracing Assessment as Advocacy

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While as educators we know that assessment is required, for many of us, because it is tied to grading, assessment is often the least fun and is one of the most put off tasks that we complete.

Have you ever had a parent dismissively ask “Why did my child get a “C”? It’s *just* art...” The “Just” in this sentence is a key indication of the continued advocacy work we need to do day-to-day as art teachers and also why rich, data driven assessment and transparency in assessment is a key component to your ongoing advocacy efforts. In this article we offer answers as to how assessment can be used as a strong advocacy tool and pair assessments you are already doing with advocacy audiences. We also provide charts of assessment strategies paired to the standards that can be found here and on the NYSATA website.

While as educators we know that assessment is required, for many of us, because it is tied to grading, assessment is often the least fun, and is one of the most put off tasks that we complete. Something always seems more important—preparing a new demonstration, unloading the kiln, organizing the crayons, perhaps? Yet assessment is imperative and might as well be leveraged on as many fronts as possible. But **why** is assessment part of advocacy and **how** can you embrace assessment methods to support art advocacy?

Why is Assessment a Part of Advocacy?

To answer this question, let’s clarify some terms. Assessment—both formative and summative—is about the ongoing and recursive process of evaluating whether students are making progress towards learning objectives. Assessment can be immensely valuable to you as the teacher in determining whether or not you need to reteach a skill or can move on while also providing students with the means to evaluate their own progress and learning. Grading on the other hand is a static value judgement issued on report cards and transcripts. Grades come from assessment, but good assessment does not always require a grade. Take for example an in-progress critique which allows the teacher to hear from the student about process, content, and technique. Vocabulary use is authentically assessed as the student recalls and applies their knowledge in context. A grade is irrelevant to the conversation, consequent reflection, and movement forward with the work. The grade may be necessary inside our educational system but is a secondary

step to the assessment. It is not the grade that is part of advocacy but the “making learning visible” (Krachevsky, et al., 2013) comes out of assessment. When we can show young artists’ thinking and learning, when we manifest what seems opaque to many, art becomes not this magical, “talent” based thing, but a set of powerful cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional skills.

One of the key limiting art learning beliefs of stakeholders and administrators that prevents them from supporting art education is the idea that success in visual arts is about inborn “genius” or “talent” some simply have and others do not (Erikson, 2002). From this belief, administrators decide that those who have talent will discover on their own how to be successful or seek specialized extracurricular educational opportunities. Everyone else does not need an arts education because the arts are readily available in our visual and material culture (Erickson, 2002); and they (the administrators) turned out just fine without an arts education didn’t they, so what’s the big deal? Assessment, good documentation, and “making learning visible” can slam through this faulty belief by explicitly showing what we teach in the arts in a language stakeholders understand.

Embracing Assessment to Advocate

Assessment is language that all educators speak, including administrators – so even if they do not understand the joy and learning in the pile of cardboard at your sculpture station, or the hours you spent teaching color mixing, they do understand learning objectives paired with assessment that are aligned to standards, SEL, and CRSE anchors. Advocacy through assessment means code-switching between artistic jargon and educational jargon. And who better to do that than us? The art educators who bridge these worlds all day, every day? Here are some specific strategies to leverage your assessment:

- **For Administrators:**
 - Make sure you have a curriculum map, and/or lesson plans that are standards aligned.
 - Make a briefing document/global statement with examples about how SEL and CRSE elements show

up in the art studio.

▪ **For Parents:**

- In elementary classes, create a reference sheet about how you determine students' grades (We recommend checking out the assessment resources in *Studio Thinking from the Start* (Hogan, et al. 2018).
- In secondary classes, make sure your syllabus includes a summary of assignments and holistic rubrics. Be clear in how grades will be determined.
- Consider inclusive transparency in learning and teaching assignment sheets for students (that parents can see) for big assignments and portfolios. Include the following:
 - The purpose of this assignment is...
 - This assignment helps you practice the following skills...
 - The assignment will also help learn the following content knowledge in art...
 - Specifically, your task for this assignment is to...
 - The criteria for success for this assignment are...
 - Checklist, rubric, or other tool to document degree of success.
- Prepare clear qualitative rubrics so that you can confidently explain, based upon the learning objectives, how you determined a grade. If you are using Studio Habits of Mind (SHoM) readiness rubric – be able to explain the student's understanding, ability, and inclination to engage with a particular SHoM, with examples from their work and classroom behavior.

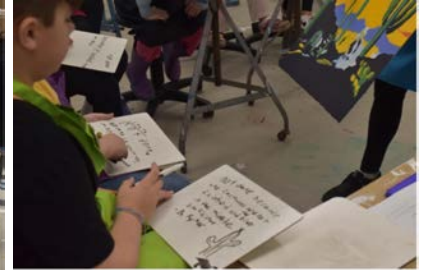
- **For Yourself and Students:** Do not forget to take pictures of guided practices, thumbnails, envision handouts, and sketchbooks pages. Revise and build strong routines for reflective writing and artist statements to accompany work. We know that final artwork can be so outstanding that viewers cannot perceive how the magic happened...take the opportunity to show them.

- **For Art Show Visitors:** Include process pictures in the art show, or even SHoM posters, standards, "I Can" statements, or classroom visuals to help narrate the art show. If you have an outside juror or specific awards categories, consider sharing the juror's process. For example, *Best in Show* is often a piece that exemplifies the most successful overall in composition, technique, expression, and viewer engagement. While a *Principal's Choice* award may simply be a selection of a piece that the principal finds visually appealing.

process (Create, Produce, Respond, Connect) we provide suggestions as assessment strategies for you to use or adapt in your own way. A quick study of the charts reveals multiple ways assessment is used in each artistic process throughout the lesson cycle. Keep in mind the overall goal in using assessment as an advocacy tool is to make the learning of the student visible and clear to all stakeholders. Assessment completed in this manner will strengthen your art instruction, student learning, and elevate respect and value for your art program.



CREATE: mixing of colors as low stakes discovery play



RESPOND: determining criteria for the completion of personal artwork



CONNECT: applying findings from artwork of exemplar artists to sketches



PRESENT: using artist statements with displays of artwork



References

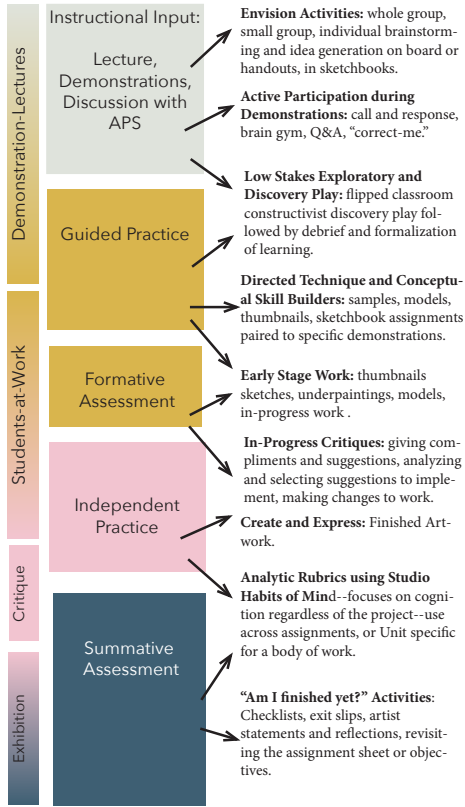
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Hogan, J., Heltand, L., Jaquith, D. B., Winner, E., (2018). *Studio Thinking from the Start: The K-8 Art Educator's Handbook*. Teachers College Press.

Krachevsky, M., Mardell, B., Rivard, M., & Wilson, D. (2013). *Visible Learners: Promoting Reggio-Inspired Approaches in All Schools*. Jossey-Bass.

Assessing CREATE Standards in the Lesson Cycle

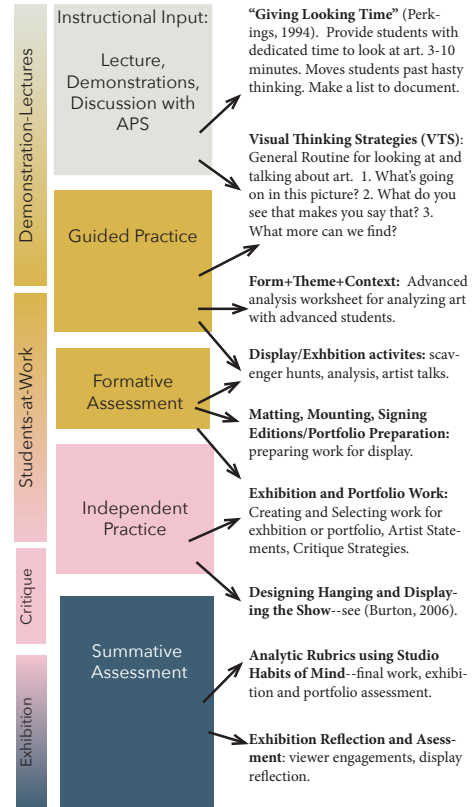
Studio Structures and the Lesson Cycle



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Assessing PRESENT Standards in the Lesson Cycle

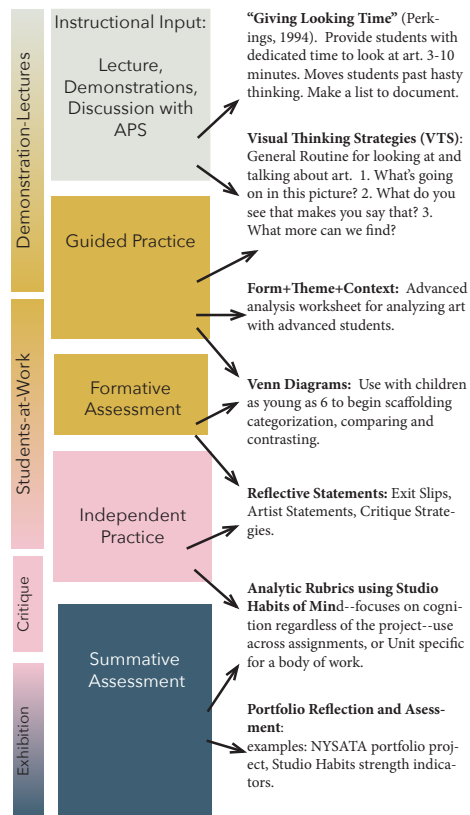
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Assessing RESPOND Standards in the Lesson Cycle

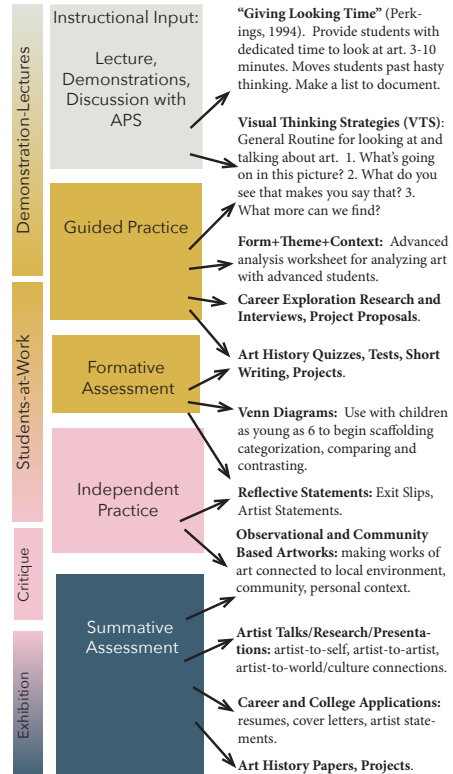
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Assessing CONNECT Standards in the Lesson Cycle

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