

**The Power of Assessment: Promoting Communication and Problem Solving Skills in  
Independent Schools Visual Art Programs K-8<sup>th</sup> Grades**

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**Author Note**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the power of assessment, and focuses on independent art educators in grades K-8<sup>th</sup>. The study is informed by an art educator questionnaire as well as in-classroom observations that establish a foundation for how educators use different methods to assess students. There are many ways educators can assess students' levels of understanding; this study singles out art education assessment practices that best foster students' abilities to obtain a high level of understanding. Evaluation is considered a prominent factor in education and is incorporated in all facets of schools curricula. Therefore, the criteria must be pre-determined to assist educators in modeling and identifying the specific benchmarks for students to achieve success consistently. Extensive research and studies have guided this thesis to define the best model of assessment to foster creativity, encourage problem solving techniques, and strengthen students' communication skills.

## Introduction

A solid foundation of consistent assessment practices in an independent school's visual art program can improve students' abilities to expand their creativity, communicate effectively, and problem solve. Assessing students' artistic performances at the elementary and middle school level will broaden their opportunities later in life by enabling them to articulate their sensorial ideas and learn different techniques to strategize and problem solve in both a logical and creative manner. Assessment is a controversial topic in education and as a result, there are many different arguments about the pros and cons of assessing students in art education. Assessment is a topic which causes frequent objections. Art teachers are questioned on a regular basis if assigning a grade to art is important. According to Caucutt, the following arguments against grades are:

Grades can receive more emphasis in the minds of students, parents, and teachers than the significance of the art experience and the art learning which results.

With emphasis on grades rather than on the art experience, grades can actually get in the way of learning.

Emphasis on grades can lessen the spontaneity of a child's art expression.

Grading art at the elementary level puts additional pressure on children, already too often pressured at too young an age.

Grades can be seen as "rewards". Should we indeed emphasize the rewarding of students for learning, in any subject? (Caucutt, 1989, para. 1)

Caucutt illustrates the heightened attention to the topic of assessment grading young learners' art. After extensive research and observation, I disagree with the assertions Caucutt makes about assigning grades in art. Grades are a proven method to give feedback to students and parents, as well as school authority figures. However, grades should be based on informing educators about students' experiential growth instead of rewarding what is perceived as a "good" final product. A focus on grades as a reflection of growth in understanding as opposed to rewards will allow art educators to improve the effectiveness of their teaching methods. After viewing the learners' grades educators will know if and when they need to alter the way material is presented or the manner in which they are assessed. In this study, I will demonstrate the importance of assessing elementary and middle school students' art work in a way that encourages students to excel in the visual arts while simultaneously fostering their creativity, communication, and problem

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solving skills.

The experience of art education and assessment had a profound impact on both the educational and personal development of my own life. Throughout my education, I was fortunate to have art classes in kindergarten through middle school with a choice to continue studying art in high school. This early artistic exploration was the foundation that helped me find my enthusiasm for the arts. High school provided the opportunity to discover other areas of academia while continuing to progress in the school's art program. My passion for the arts combined with the skills I gained guided me to pursue a career in the arts after majoring in studio art at Sweet Briar College. I found that art was the subject that brought me the most joy in school at a young age. As I continued my education I began to realize the importance and became intrigued about the question; How do art educators judge student performance while aiming to foster creativity?

In this study I will investigate how art educators at independent schools measure their students' absorption of material learned in the classroom. What is the standard method art educators use when evaluating a student's level of applied knowledge? What, if any, is their collective criterion for assessing a student's artistic product? Does this stay constant? What differs between how elementary and middle school art teachers critique students with and without assessment tools? From my own experiences, attending an independent coeducational school that focused on evaluating achievement in all areas of education, I found it interesting that independent schools implemented a variety of different assessment methods. Within an independent schools assessment system, there are multiple ways educators can evaluate students' artistic abilities. This allows the teachers the freedom to design their own tools to evaluate their students. Kane (1992) describes independent schools as being "a subset of American private schooling and can best be defined by the following common characteristics: self-governed, self-supported, self-defined curriculums, and self-selected students and faculty" (Green, 2008, p.348). Therefore, each self-regulating independent school has different approaches to assessment that corresponds with their policies. At the same time, independent schools do not have a required set of assessment protocol that is centered on the standards of the state in which the institution resides.

I chose to use independent schools as the focal point of this study to learn how independent art educators implement such a wide array of assessment practices that aims to foster

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communication and problem solving skills while encouraging creativity. However, within the framework of independent schools, the wide array of assessment practices creates problems with consistency and can lead to implementation of practices that may or may not be effective at achieving the end goal of student progress. This study will serve as a guide to applying different methods that have been observed and critiqued to create an effective and consistent assessment tool. I hope my research will be a resource for independent art educators to assess students' works of art while promoting creativity in their art making process. President Barack Obama stated that, "The future belongs to young people with an education and an imagination to create" (Day & Hurwitz, 2012, p.26). Therefore, as educators it is our duty to ensure the establishment of a learning environment that enables each child to enrich their creativity both inside and outside the classroom. Young artists are often applauded for their inimitable achievements so it is our job as art educators to help students become effective communicators, critical thinkers, and problem solvers without losing sight of their artistic and creative abilities in our teaching and assessment practices.

What approaches to critiquing works of art are beneficial or detrimental to a student's creativity? How do teachers know when to alter their methods of evaluation in the best interest of the student? Looking back on my education, teachers critiqued skills and measured achievement to determine if students met the desirable requirements in each content area. Through mathematic examinations, literary reports, and statistical merits in sports, teachers assure students of their effort or comprehension by giving them exemplary scores or noting when improvement is needed. However, critiques in the visual arts were just as important in aiding my verbal and written skills, which strengthened my ability to express myself both artistically and academically. Therefore, I believe that a well-structured method of assessment through self-assessment, peer-evaluations, and critiques of one's work can benefit one's life skills. This continuous approach to evaluation ensures that students are constantly learning and building upon new ways to strategize and verbally express their thoughts. My thesis question will examine the following: how do K-8 independent visual art educators assess students' artwork while teaching students how to become better communicators and problem solvers through creative expression? This thesis will serve as a guide for independent art educators to view current trends in assessment and apply different methods in order to effectively measure achievement in elementary and middle school art classes.

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During the first few years of school, young learners use their senses to navigate the world in which they live and interact with their peers. Learning about their environment and cooperating with others are life skills people establish at a young age and use throughout adulthood. Children acquire important aptitudes when learning different processes of art making by experimenting with materials and learning how to communicate their concepts. Elementary and middle school provides students with a foundation of basic skills that are built upon throughout one's life. Therefore, it is important to stress the ability to express and explain one's work. Critiques, peer-evaluations, self-assessments, and journals are methods of assessment that strengthen one's verbal and written skills. According to Eliot Eisner,

evaluation is the process 'for improving the quality of curriculum, teaching, and learning,' and is a primary professional responsibility for those educators implementing discipline-based instruction. Evaluation should address the content of the curriculum, the quality of the teaching and the degree to which the instructional objectives have been met. As such, evaluation is much more than a mere grade and functions as a source of feedback for both the teacher and the student. (Eisner, 1987, p.26)

Eisner's ideas are important because assessment is centered upon how visual art programs within schools evaluate their curriculum in order for educators to properly assess their students' work. As a result, a well-designed curriculum that educators follow will foster better quality teaching practices and students who can clearly express and solve problems creatively. The feedback educators obtain from students is also an important assessment tool in determining if students comprehend what the instructor is teaching during an art lesson. By studying assessment of independent schools visual art programs, focusing on kindergarten through the eighth grade, it is my goal to give guidance to independent art educators on effective assessment tools to challenge a student's level of deeper understanding and to help young students articulate their artistic ideas.

### **Glossary\***

*Action Research* – Action Research is a method used by teachers to solve complex classroom problems. Problems solved by utilizing this method can involve peer-to-peer issues or student-to-teacher issues. The method is also an effective way of utilizing the power of small group learning. By decentralizing the classroom into smaller and more manageable groups, students are able to learn from each other and increase one-on-one learning.

*Assessment* – Assessment of student skills is an important part of the learning process for teachers and an effective way for teachers to independently document past performance, potential skills, and behavioral influences that foster a high degree of learning.

*Authentic Assessment* – Authentic Assessment is a specific type of assessment that focuses on skills already possessed by the students. Many students enter the classroom with strong natural or learned skills that can be helpful in Action Research and other types of small group research.

*Cognitive Developmental Theory* – The theory of Cognitive Development encompasses four stages: Sensorimotor stage, Preoperational stage, Concrete Operational stage, and the Formal Operational stage. These stages breakdown a child's development in terms of informational processing, conceptual resources, perceptual skills, and language learning in addition to other aspects of cognitive development that explain how children see images of the world. Logical sequencing thinking, recalling, and questioning make up the framework of the Cognitive Developmental Theory. This theory provides a framework for understanding how children acquire knowledge and the nature of intelligence and mental development.

*Communication Skills* – The tools by which information is exchanged between individuals. They require a shared understanding of symbols, words, and gestures that enable an individual to clearly express artistic ideas through various methods of documentation.

*Constructivist Approach to Learning* – An approach that explains how knowledge is constructed in the human mind when new information connects with existing knowledge that has been developed through individual experiences.

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*Creativity* –A phenomenon where original works are created and hold subjective value. Works are characterized by originality, nonconforming ideas and products, and the ability to transform innovative ideas and images into unique elements of art and design in the art classroom.

*Criteria* – A standard directive which gives basis for judgment or evaluation and functions as a measured method of comparison for quantitative and qualitative value. This includes elements of significance which independent art educators use to assess student skill, daily performance, the artistic process, and presentation of the final product.

*Criticism* – The practice of giving qualitative or quantitative feedback on a body of work that can be highly specific and detailed or subjective and general. Criticism is a constructive outlook on the qualities and mistakes of students art work.

*Discipline-Based Art Education* – Study of art through aesthetics, art history, criticism, and production.

*Evaluation* – Systematic measurement of a subject’s form and function based on predetermined standards and best practices, which is designed to give insight and understanding in a comprehensive way. The measurement of criteria of an independent schools curriculum is designed by members of the art department or other faculty.

*Emic Coding* – Data from participating art educators, K-8 Independent Art Educator Assessment Questionnaire. (See Appendix A)

*Etic Coding* – Data that is based on literature that has already been researched and published.

*Formative Assessment* – The range of informal and formal assessment practices that are used during the learning process to better modify and employ relevant activities and practices in a learning environment. These often involve qualitative feedback on performance and ability.

*Independent Schools* – Educational institutions that are independent of national or local government financing and are instead funded by an assortment of tuition, investments, and gifts. These institutions are self-regulated and exercise freedom in curriculums and assessment practices.

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*Judgment* – Ability for independent art educators and students to communicate their ideas about others work of art to give criticism or an unbiased opinion.

*Learner -Centered Approach* – When students integrate what they learn in order to communicate and problem solve.

*Measurement* – The ability to know what students learn from a lesson or unit plan by assessing their skills during in process work as well as the end result.

*Qualitative Assessment* – Measures one’s performance.

*Qualitative Content Analysis* – Method to interpret meaning from text.

*Rubric* – A rubric is used to define the expectations for a project and measure a student’s performance. Teachers also use rubrics as a reference tool to ensure that they cover specific topics when teaching a lesson.

*Summative Assessment* – Reviews the learner’s progress and material learned once a unit is completed. This form of assessment can be seen when judging the final product, the aesthetic appeal, and how students value their artistic creations.

*Teacher-Centered Approach* – Transfer of knowledge is from the teacher to the student. As stated, the teacher is the person who dictates the important information and material to be learned in a lesson.

*Theoretical Research* – Conceptual data.

*\*These terms are defined for references that correlate to this study*

### **Literature Review**

Assessment in art education benefits not only the student, but also the educator. The students gain insight to their understanding of the concepts taught and can gauge progress in a subject matter once they get projects and papers back from the teacher. Different assessment methods can help students express their ideas and learn to problem solve. The educator gains guidance after receiving feedback from grades, which allows him to alter his teaching practices to best suit the students' needs. If independent art educators can work together to foster creative minds, utilize assessment tools, and recognize the importance of consistency in assessment of students' oral expression, then their students' problem solving skills will enable them to continue to advance throughout their academic years and well beyond.

#### **Supporting Creativity**

One of the most important factors in promoting assessment in independent art education is to hold creativity at a high standard. To achieve sustainable creativity, it is important that independent art educators implement unique and authentic ways to assess and enhance opportunities for students to document their creative ideas. According to Cunliffe, "For the knowledge and creativity to be rich and complex, a student would also need to be able to give meta-cognitive feedback by learning to independently generate and monitor the accuracy and validity of the two forms of knowledge they are processing" (Cunliffe, 2008, p.313). The ability to process expressive and receptive language from teachers and peers provides students with the skills needed to constructively criticize work and apply it to other artistic applications. This allows students the opportunity to get feedback from the teacher along with their peers in order to make necessary judgments to improve their work. To foster creative minds, art educators must consider:

The immediate benefit of understanding creativity and learning as residing in the accretions of social practices is to make it easier to understand the significance of the assessment process as supporting the acquisition and cultivation of the knowledge and dispositions that radically improve the voluntary aspects of creativity, as opposed to focusing on the involuntary traits, which are often beyond the influence of the educational process. Such an approach would be structured by procedural knowledge, declarative knowledge, and the knowing what to do of meta-cognitive, ethical self-knowledge, as a prerequisite for regulating more complex forms of learning and creativity. (Cunliffe, 2008, p.314)

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As stated above, art educators should teach students how to form their own ideas within the context of their artistic processes. Therefore, students will have the ability to control their own cognitive skills and to think in more abstract terms. Elementary students are categorized in the context of pre-requisite knowledge, because they use what they already know from past experience as a framework to apply aspects of creativity. Middle school students are in a more complex stage of learning. At this stage it is important for the learner to realize their own strengths and weaknesses, which allows students to be accountable for their own learning.

Being responsible for one's education requires an active learning theory that is similar to the constructivist approach. The constructivist approach stimulates young learners into becoming scholars because it intertwines "reform", "development", and "problem solving" (Tataroglu, 2011, p.159). This approach involves the child as an individual in correlation to differentiated methods of assessment which, when applied, can benefit different students' needs. The aim of the constructivist approach is for students to excel in their academics as well develop life skills. An educator evaluating a student's individual performance should base the level of a project's difficulty on the artistic process in combination with the end product. Thus stated it is evident that:

when both the project and the works subject to measurement of the performance are evaluated together with the product file, it allows to assess the total process on the whole. These offer both visual and written sources intending to explain how the learning function is realized. (Tataroglu, 2011, p.161)

As a result, the constructivist approach is considered a recipe to measure students' performance in the classroom alongside their artistic process when creating the final work of art. Through this approach, students can build upon their verbal and written skills when describing their artistic process to get to the end result. Linking the constructivist approach to sustainable creativity in schools will promote one's communication skills. However, as Driscoll (1994) informs, it is critical to bear in mind the "objective of the assessment is not to measure the knowledge the learner may remember but, to reveal how the learning has been sustained" (Demirel, 2002, p.85). Art educators can measure what students take away from the lesson when students demonstrate material learned verbally and document one's innovative ideas in various methods.

Knowing students' cognitive learning function along with unique ways to assess and measure their understanding should be an art educator's main priority in teaching. This goal in education, pairing levels of cognitive development with one's learning function in order to

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measure what a student knows, is a learning tool that is infused in the arts and other areas of the school's curriculum. Measuring a student's knowledge in the arts will enable him to authentically tie material learned in a creative fashion to other core subjects.

### **Implementing Consistency in Independent Institutions**

Developing authentic approaches to assessment and my personal experience attending an independent school drove my inspiration for the research in this report. Identifying different educators' methods of assessment and the criteria which they use to measure student achievement heightened my excitement to research the teaching process and assessment techniques used by art educators in an independent school environment. I am using independent schools as the basis for this study since independent institutions do not have a governed state mandated set of standards that are often focused on traditional classroom examination techniques found in social arts, sciences, and mathematics. There is a certain level of flexibility in independent schools that allows educators the opportunity to choose how they plan to evaluate their students. However, if an independent school does not have set learning standards then how does an art educator assess students' work while promoting communication and problem solving skills? Due to the lack of consistency independent schools are susceptible to forces outside the classroom that cause creativity and learning to be stifled. Often times the inconsistent methods create a lack of communication and advancement of the educational experience. Utilizing a common set of basic guidelines and aims can serve to enhance assessment methods and practices.

Independent schools often regulate assessment practices by including aspects of their schools' mission in behavioral narratives and academic achievement reports that are sent home to parents and legal guardians. It is apparent that a school's community and society plays an influential part in assessment. In independent schools the community consists of faculty, students, and members of the board. The method of assessment in an independent institution is designed and based on specific material that board members and head of schools consider important for students to learn. This freedom allows independent schools to create their own assessment system instead of relying on standardized tests to measure the content a student masters. Among the participating independent schools in this study there are multiple assessment practices within a school's art department. By creating a consistent assessment system, art educators can use the tool as a guide to bring uniformity into their assessment

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approaches. This assessment tool will foster students' linguistic and problem solving skills. As a framework, it is important that independent schools formulate assessment systems to coincide with their schools mission statement and curricula when assessing art.

### **Types of Assessment Independent Art Educators Use**

The main approaches of assessment are qualitative and quantitative assessment. Qualitative valuation pertains to who and what is being assessed. Quantitative calculation relates to students' evaluations and the specific grades they receive. The end product is also important when determining the student's grade. The following are quantitative aspects that educators use to question a student's final work of art. Does the object have aesthetic appeal? Does the student value his work? Does the art educator want to hang the finished piece in the school's gallery space or hallway? Is the final piece a proper representation of the student's artistic ability? These questions act as reasoning skills to decipher a student's grade. Another way art teachers can assess students both qualitatively and quantitatively are direct observations and rubrics. Assessing students while they are working allows educators the time to converse with their students in a one-on-one environment to evaluate their thought process as well as provide thought provoking questions to guide them in the right direction. According to Noonan and Duncan (2005), "Formative assessment examines student learning outcomes through the process of the learning experiences" (Popvich, 2006, p.38). This is evident when students interact with their peers and ask questions; they are learning new techniques and ways to strategize to achieve their desired end results. Students learn from one another and discuss the mistakes they encounter. To promote students' verbal skills when viewing art work at the end of a unit, the following summative assessment tools defined by Boston (2002) can be implemented: "interviews, journals, critiques, and conversations" (Popvich, 2006, p.38). Each form of assessment involves dialog either between peers or the student and teacher.

Popovich describes the significance of rubrics and how they can be used to facilitate consistency in the classroom. For instance,

Scoring rubrics establish the criteria for student performance at different levels of achievement and can help clarify teaching objectives and promote clarity and consistency in the evaluation. (Popovich, 2006, p.38)

Rubrics can be a tool for both the teacher and the student. The teacher can create a rubric for them to ensure that they are covering all the desired topics for a particular lesson. Students can

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use a rubric to visually interpret what is required of them to excel in the lesson or as a method to self-evaluate their effort throughout the artistic process for a project.

Elementary and middle school students can refer to a rubric or checklist to become visually aware of what material they need to interpret in order to quantify what was successful and what needs improvement. Categories in the rubrics that correlate specifically to certain lessons will give students an opportunity to reference the criteria on which their work is being assessed. These methods of assessing students' work hold individual learners accountable for their creative actions through various forms of formative and summative approaches to assessment. Taking ownership for one's own learning will facilitate students in becoming advocates of their education and in the desire to surpass the standard level of achievement.

### **Theorists on Developmental Stages and the Significance of Visual Culture**

Consistency in education is equally important in connecting the environment and one's own knowledge with the stages of development. Young learners go through many phases of development from birth to adolescence. Children begin to learn in elementary school how to manipulate meaning through visual imagery. It is evident that when students mix exploration with education they are more apt to learn. Students develop first into the pre-representational phase and are capable of using symbols to help communicate their sensorial logic. In this stage students use a visual stimulus that corresponds to their behavior to dictate their emotions. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an eighteenth-century theorist in art education, believed that children should express themselves through activities they initiate. This philosophy of active engagement brings a connection between the learner and their environment. Similarly John Dewey "was greatly concerned with the relationship of learners to their environment and to the society in which they live and regarded education as the 'continuing re-creation of experience'" (Day and Hurwitz, 2012, p.7). Therefore, in independent art education teachers can actively engage learners in the topics covered by relating the project to their daily lives. The arts are linked to topics in core subjects throughout the context of a well-rounded education, which enables students to expand their knowledge in the arts by building upon previous experiences.

Edward Thorndike, a contemporary of Dewey with similar approaches to education, fashioned the stimulus-response theory. This particular theory "held that learning consists in establishments of a series of connections, or pathways, in the brain resulting from a specific response to stimulus" (Day and Hurwitz, 2012, p.7). In art education students are constantly

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combining different materials, elements of history, science, and math together to create and resolve problems in their art work. Pairing the arts with core academic subjects creates a series of connections that allow students' brains to continuously send responses from their minds to their bodies and back. This process is constantly repeated; since students associate their learning in relation to their environment, they tend to connect what they already know to what they are learning. Young learners can effectively retain information about something if they have previous knowledge of that topic. "In a visual culture approach, children produce their own visual culture and become partners in the art learning and making process" (Boughton, 2005, p.214). This theory can be applied to elementary and middle school students because it fashions the basic learning skills young people use as the building blocks for the foundation of their schooling. As discussed earlier, middle school students especially have the knowledge already built up so fostering this approach is beneficial to learners at the middle school level. A visual culture approach, making connections to the environment, and recycling knowledge and facts of history with present day topics will allow educators the opportunity to aid in students' cognitive growth and to strengthen students' communication and problem solving skills.

Along with Rousseau's, Dewey's, and Thorndike's educational philosophies are Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development. Students evolve sequentially through the sensorimotor, concrete operations, and formal operations periods of cognitive development. The sensorimotor stage is when infants begin to acquire knowledge by understanding through seeing and hearing. In the concrete operations period children are able to solve problems more logically. Finally, in the formal operations stage, students are able to demonstrate theoretical reasoning. This implies that the learner is able to make logical decisions that apply to their level of thinking in order to critically problem solve and communicate with others. The first two stages of development relate to elementary students, while the third pertains to middle school students, because their minds have developed into a higher order of critical thinking. This level of thinking begins at the elementary level and is developed throughout one's life.

In relation to Piaget's stages of cognitive development, visual representation and process assessment are two methods in which students can practice theoretical reasoning. Visual representation is a way to understand students' learning experiences through their depictions of symbols and other figurative images. Process assessment is a form of evaluation for students to reflect upon their practices when using visual representation. To master these educational

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approaches independent art educators should stress the process over the product. The aim for students is to examine their own perceptions through visual representations to find meaning. In an insightful directive, Boughton stated that teachers should:

engage students in the sustained pursuit of ideas that are relevant to their lives and culture. We also need to teach them to be critical participants in the cultural life of their communities. To do this we need them to understand the seductive power of the visual to engage and persuade them as they participate in the world of ideas. (Boughton, 2005, p.217)

Students can look at the media in today's society for inspiration to link to their own experiences within present-day culture in order to construct meaning from their art work. (Boughton, 2005, p.214) Relating one's work to present-day culture will generate conversation in middle school art classes because students in today's society are virtually connected and can relate to what is occurring in the world.

### **Written Reports**

To prevent negative connotations of assessment it is critical that art educators give positive feedback. Promoting insightful thinking will help students expand their problem solving tactics within a work of art. If teachers facilitate a healthy work ethic for students to follow in their classroom then students will be more aware of what to anticipate when receiving the teachers written report. The purpose for written reports is to inform parents and legal guardians of their child's accomplishments and performance in the visual arts. The report will include behavioral aspects along with a description of a student's work ethic. Educators need to account for this possibility and realize that

Assessment can lead to students feeling oppressed by their assessors (Meldrum 2002) and Freire (1998) warns of the dangers of using methods because of their efficiency at the expense of the freedom of the student. If we are producing such a negative experience of assessment for students, then we must bear in mind the consequences this has on their creative abilities in an assignment. (McKillop, 2006, p.142)

Removing the connotation of "fear" that many students' align with grading will aid students' in learning to trust the judgment of their teacher when assessing art work.

Building a strong rapport and a trusting relationship with students as well as parents can foster the parent-teacher and the student-teacher relationship. Concrete relationships will aid in understanding students' learning abilities and aid in evaluating their developmental growth.

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Student advancement is an important indicator to note when documenting educational achievements. As a result, teachers need to document students daily effort and work in class in order to give feedback to parents as well as other faculty members. Teachers will need to be more diligent in documenting each student's artistic development. Keeping a journal will allow educators to note students' progress in addition to their own progress. Having a strong connection and interaction among parents, teacher, and students will allow for a more fluid conversation and create an open door policy to strengthen communication inside and outside the classroom.

### **Arts and the Brain – Ways to Problem Solving**

The tools and methods used in the art room can affect the students' ability to resolve problems in other classes as well as heighten their knowledge of the digital world in which they live. Infusing the fine arts in all areas of academia, students will learn to:

Take risks: Art by nature is a form of self-expression. As students work with various materials throughout the school year, they will find ways to give form to thoughts or feelings that they might have had difficulty describing previously.

Hone critical thinking: Encouraging students to talk about their own work as well as the work of others helps students to understand the process of analysis. Teaching students about tools they can use to analyze art, such as the five elements of design (i.e., line, shape, space, color, texture), gives them a way to begin a focused study or discussion of artwork. This idea of parts making up a whole can help to introduce the student to analysis across the academic spectrum. Reviewing the process of a project upon completion helps students appreciate sequencing and prioritization. (Smith, 2001, p.92)

Taking risks and thinking critically are characteristics students display in the art room, either consciously or unconsciously. In the arts, students explore different materials by using the right side of their brain. A visual arts education is designed for having open-ended answers and different theories. For example, questioning why an artist painted a landscape in a particular fashion. This opportunity for ambiguity makes assessing one's art difficult. Some independent art educators assess solely on the outcome of the final project and their perception of the piece. How can independent art educators foster creative minds and promote problem solving and communication skills if they assess just the end result? When it comes down to the final assessment, art educators have one of the most difficult jobs in evaluating a student's

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performance. As a part of assessing the final product, a rigorous documentation method should be used in order to keep track of a student's accomplishments.

It is evident that through the arts that cognitive development can flourish and students can integrate the content learned through the visual arts into other core subjects. "The emphasis in education today is on the development of critical thinking, problem, solving, and independent thought -- the capacity to critically analyze the ideas of others and to generate ideas of one's own" (Cross and Angelo, 1988, p.15). It is apparent that being able to problem solve and communicate ones ideas translates into everyday life skills that one needs in order to succeed. These skills are taught early and are constantly built upon through a rich visual arts education.

### **Assessment Methods that Foster Communication**

In an independent art educator's classroom, students have more freedom to take risks with materials because educators have more flexibility in creating lessons that assess how students interact with materials and work amongst their peers. Unlike public schools, which tend to assess based on specific mandated standards, independent art teachers have the freedom to evaluate students based on their conversations amongst their classmates instead of predetermined benchmarks.

Maintaining conversation in the classroom about the art students are making will foster an educator's ability to assess students' development and progress. Another way to promote communication in the classroom is by verbally interpreting teachers' and learners' expressions (Feldman, 1973). "Through creating their own artworks and through looking at and talking about works of art through time, elementary school children can explore the emotions and concerns that other humans have shared" (Henry,n.d., p.203). This idea illustrates how the arts can help elementary students express and learn about emotions and empathize with others. Through portraiture work and other related projects, it is possible to bring together the influence of emotion.

In accordance to depicting one's emotions, students improve their verbal skills in group discussions and peer-evaluations. These two methods of assessment allow students the opportunity to critically discuss their work either formally or informally. From a group discussion students can build upon other students' ideas to improve their own art work. Peer-evaluations make students critique another student's work and critically analyze it to determine the qualities and inconsistencies a student has in their project. This process is a verbal way

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students can assess their peer's work and practice the basics of critiquing. It is referenced that "Art criticism is informed talk and writing about art for increased understanding and appreciation of art" (Barrett, n.d, p.115). Teaching students to talk about their work and their peer's work is an important life skill students learn in elementary school and build upon throughout middle school. In addition to being able to defend one's work in a clear and concise manner, students are able learn the differences between what is inferred and what can be seen with the naked eye. Students are more concerned about their artistic thought process and how they resolve a project in order to verbally defend it in front of their peers. For instance,

Internal description is based on what can be observed in the work; external information is knowledge not observable in the work, but information pertinent to the art object such as historical facts about the world at the time that the artwork was made and the culture in which the work emerged. (Barrett, n.d., p.116)

Being able to decipher and intellectually discuss the context and historical aspects of a work and how it was created is a form of critiquing a work of art through a method called visual thinking strategies. This strategy allows the art teacher to ask the students questions about a piece of art. The following questions are typically asked when performing a visual thinking method: what is going on in the work of art? Why does the student think that is happening? Can students determine how the artist feels? What is the artist trying to infer? Visual thinking questions allow individuals to engage in a group activity to actively interpret what is taking place within the context of a work of art. Putting visual thinking strategies into practice in schools will benefit students verbal skills by asking students to articulate what they see. Students will reinforce and strengthen their comprehension and communication skills by actively speaking about art.

Without assessment implemented throughout the curriculum, students will not be able to reflect upon their creative abilities and may only work to meet the final assessment criteria. (Gordon, 2004) A teacher's aim is for their students to do their best work and to go above and beyond the assessment criteria. How can approaches to assessment in art education be altered to facilitate the evaluation processes so that students are in tune with their creativity while educators teach skills needed for students' to excel beyond their limitations? Integrating the visual arts into academic core classes allows students to be stimulated in all areas of education. Promoting students' social and behavioral mannerisms in addition to communicative skills is typical in a visual arts education. Evidently, "the purpose for teaching the arts is to enable

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students to develop the capacities to create, perform and respond with understanding, critical judgment and appreciation of works of art” (Deasy, 2012, p.3). Students work on their conditional reasoning abilities and become better problem solvers who can theorize their actions by verbally expressing their reason for creating art. Students are able to express their individuality and show their potential in their aspirations with the arts.

Portfolios are also another form of assessing students’ work to advance their communicative skills. Boughton believes,

The purpose of educational portfolios . . . is to promote the students’ knowledge of their own progress, and support their ability to demonstrate independence in researching and evolving their own projects. Thus, including works in progress, sketches, and reworked pieces is important because they provide insight into student growth, and patterns of decision-making about evolving work. (Boughton, 2005, p.219)

Students will develop communication expertise by using portfolios as an aid to interview their peers on a particular in process work or a completed work of art. Elementary school and middle school students can also dictate and share their own insight of findings within their art work with their parents and other faculty members. Sharing this information is another way students can verbalize their artistic processes. If teachers create homework assignments that require students to interview their parents or legal guardians and transcribe what they see and infer in a work of art, then students’ linguistic and written skills will improve. For example, “Interviews are commonly used in conjunction with portfolios to determine the degree to which students understand their own growth and development” (Boughton, 2005, p.219). Hence,

The challenge for art educators is to create the kind of learning environments that are appropriate to the life experience of students and will enable them to actively participate in this complex cultural environment. Good visual culture curricula need to be supported by reflexive assessment practices that value and promote the individual pursuit of visual understanding, engagement with important ideas, and the capacity to critically respond to the visual world. (Boughton, 2005, p.222)

Constructing a sound classroom environment is critical for students to thrive academically. Controlling a classroom environment can be designed by the tone and physical structure of the schoolroom. As described by Jensen, “it’s the arts that lay the foundation for later academic and career success. A strong art foundation builds creativity, concentration, problem solving, self-efficacy, coordination, and values attention and self-discipline” (Jensen, 1998, p.36). These

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factors help build achievement in academics based on skills which are stimulated by the student's in the art room. The structure and layout of the classroom are critical for students to succeed as well as for educators to have adequate space to work and to perform group critiques. This is important because these core concepts are interrelated and connect students' minds and bodies with learning.

Another way to share and express ones communicative skills is by playing academic games. When students mix exploration with education they are problem solving how to improve in certain skill areas. Creating academic games to learn art lessons will increase students' motivation to learn and excite their minds while they communicate with their peers to master the game. Silverman (1993) concurs with many studies which, "suggest that students will boost academic learning from games and so-called 'play' activities" (Jensen, 1998, p.87). A way art educators can assess their students through an interactive art game is by observing their roles, participation, and how they communicate with their classmates to complete the activity. Reflection on an activity, lesson, or game will strengthen students' verbal reasoning and expand their boundaries of thinking critically if educators ask students how and why questions. The association of learning through games is a collaborative method to get students to work in groups and communicate with their peers. Students will begin to formulate patterns in their own discoveries. This is another method of assessment and a way for students to communicate with each other in order to strengthen their verbal and written skills.

Through appropriate and authentic forms of assessment students will learn to communicate with others and strategize to solve problems. A consistent assessment approach will help students know what is expected of them and they will be more actively engaged in the art lesson. These approaches to assessment will strengthen students' abilities when giving constructive criticism and expressing their creative ideas at the elementary and middle school levels.

### **Methodology**

The central question of this thesis is how do K-8 independent visual art educators assess students' artwork in order to teach students how to become better communicators and problem solvers?

To begin to answer this question I gathered data from different sources and by different means. First, I decided I wanted to create a questionnaire for independent art educators to complete. The purpose of the questionnaire is to determine methods independent art educators use to assess their students' level of achievement while enhancing their communication and problem solving skills.

As a baseline consideration, I confirmed that independent art educators' methods of assessing coincide with the requirements for their schools grading system. There are many different ways schools can inform parents and legal guardians of their child's performance in the visual arts. The majority of participating independent institutions use a combination of grades along with written narratives. Some of the participating independent art educators are only required to assign a letter or numerical grade rather than writing a written report.

In order to conduct this study I first had to decide what criteria will be used to determine how educators foster the development of students' communication and problem solving skills. Articulating the reason and process by which a student created a work of art, being able to defend art work, and giving constructive criticism are examples of specific criteria that improve the development of a student's artistic expression and method to resolve an issue.

To implement this study, I presented the initial questions from the questionnaire to peers for feedback. I then made final corrections to the questionnaire and chose art educators to submit the form to. I submitted the questionnaire to independent art educators electronically and then analyzed completed questionnaires.

The following are examples of questions that made up this questionnaire: how do art educators pre-assess and post-assess? What criteria do art educators use to measure and evaluate a student's work? What alterations could be made to the current assessment system? These inquiries encompass the overarching question of how art educators assess their students' work and document their ingenious ideas while promoting students to become better communicators.

The questionnaire covers basic information that distinguishes how the educator's classroom setting and style of critiquing their students' work succeeds or has shortcomings within the

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context of the assessment tools they utilize. The questionnaire is located in appendix A titled, *K-8 Independent Art Educator Assessment Questionnaire*, which I designed in order to explore assessment practices of independent art educators.

I contacted many different art educators spanning from Richmond, Virginia to Washington, District of Columbia to ask if they would be willing to participate in this study. The six independent schools that responded each have slightly differentiated goals in which they hold their students accountable. The general key themes that guide the assessment methods of the six participating schools are students taking ownership for their own learning, creative expression, individual development, and participation in educational conversation. Themes the participating schools use to evaluate students' behavior and achievement in the visual arts link the research conducted in the literature review to certain methods of assessment that the following participants use.

Among the six participating independent schools there were nine participating art educators who completed the questionnaire. I observed five of the six schools and two of the six educators classes I visited were from the same independent institution. The purpose of the observations was to see how the art educators put into practice their responses in the questionnaire. I observed four classes by Art Educator 1 and 8, two classes by Art Educator 2, 4, and 7; and one class by Art Educator 9. Classes were at the elementary level except for observations with Art Educator 8 and 9.

To gather information while observing the art educators' classes, I listened in class conversations between the students and the teacher in addition to peer conversations. It was also important to observe how the teachers began each lesson and ended the activity with questions for the students regarding what they learned and how their work relates to past projects.

I will create an assessment tool that can be applicable to independent art educators by using pieces from the participating teachers' assessment practices that they consider most affective. This tool will be beneficial for independent art educators who are looking to improve their students' oral skills and ways to strategize.

This authentic model of assessment will bring consistency into independent schools visual art programs.

The tool will be a list of specific criteria that can be adapted to a rubric designed for

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independent art educators at the K-8<sup>th</sup> level in order to implement a consistent set of expectations into the assessment system.

## **Data and Results**

My data reflects key themes in education with a glimpse into how art educators assess their students work in the context of the art room. Through the independent visual art educator questionnaire, direct observations, and a content analysis approach I quantitatively and qualitatively assessed and analyzed the content of this study.

The original questionnaire I sent out can be viewed in Appendix A. Data from the questionnaire is displayed in Appendix B-I. All of the data represented in this thesis refers to the responses from independent art educators in K-8<sup>th</sup> grades and field observations.

### **Patterns and Themes in Assessment**

There are several key themes within the data collected from the questionnaire. For instance, multiple participants wanted more time to accomplish projects and facilitate proper assessments of their students' work. Meanwhile other participants stated that they assess the product through process, observation, and discussions with the students. Participants that commented that they do not typically assess their students said they would use: portfolios, peer-evaluations, self-evaluations, critiques, grading students daily classroom work, effort, displaying the "best" artwork in community areas of the school (i.e. hallways, gallery space, etc.), and a variety of exit evaluations if they have the opportunity and time.

Each participant in this questionnaire has their own art room. Rather than having to clean up the classroom for other academic courses students have the opportunity to make the space their own. Students in this circumstance understand that the art room is a space that does not need to be anything else except the art room, which allows more chances for students to use the space to foster creative ideas.

Another key theme derived from analyzing the questionnaire is the differences between lower school and middle school learners. Middle school students document their performance in written form while elementary students orally express their skills in relation to the expectations of a rubric. Both allow students to improve their written and verbal skills to express their creative ideas based on the particular assessment criteria for a project.

Patterns found as a result from the art educator questionnaire show that observation and discussion are the predominant ways art educators assess their students. It is apparent from the outcomes of the questionnaire that each art educator has their own preconceived thoughts on

assessment and is set in the ways in which they assess.

### **How Participating Art Educators in Questionnaire Approach Assessment**

An independent school allows teachers more flexibility for their own style of teaching and developing authentic assessments. Peer-evaluations and self-assessments are ways to evaluate students more freely in exploring the realm of assessment. Peer-evaluations allow students the opportunity to expose misconceptions, engage with others, and get immediate feedback. Another attribute of peer-evaluations is that learners are more likely to respond positively to their peers than their teacher. Self-assessments allow an individual to critique their own work and to take ownership of their own learning while the educator still has time to interject information to the learner to consider in order to improve their work.

However, without a consistent guideline, some teachers do not put an emphasis on assessment. One particular participant was adamant about not pre-assessing or post-assessing students' achievements. How then do students understand what is expected of them on a daily basis? An important facet of assessment as proposed in the literary review is growth and process, which are the mere methods of evaluating daily progress. This data can be viewed in Appendix C. In Appendix B are found the participating educator lessons and methods to assess each activity. Through peer-evaluations, self-assessments, and teacher conferences students can consult with their peers and the teacher to analyze what is needed for completion when working to improve work of art.

In Appendix B it is clear that the participating art educator assesses students' verbal perceptions and ways students choose to problem solve to achieve certain concepts when working with different mediums. With this research it is evident that proper assessment practices can benefit students' abilities to become better problem solvers and reinforce ways to document their artistic expression verbally and in written form.

### **Grades versus Narratives**

As previously mentioned, independent art educators either use a combination of grades and narratives to inform parents and faculty of the student's progress or only a grade or written narrative. Art Educator 1 uses a report card designed by an assessment team made up of faculty members from the school. Students' with profound issues receive teacher comments. This educator uses a check list that serves as their rubric which has evolved over the years. The check indicates a number that corresponds with students' ability to master the skills stated in the check

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list. The numerical check list scales from 1-4, with 4 equaling outstanding achievement. Art Educator 2 gives a written report for elementary school levels and a graded report for middle school levels. The middle school report is a combination of a written report and a letter grade that students receive. The report is designed by the art department and the written portion is a paragraph about the student's progress. This educator tends to lean more towards a traditional approach to assessment and prefers to assess students based on the skills they learn. This style lends itself well for the functional assessment in art, but not the creative making process. Art Educator 3 submits a number grade and has parent teacher conferences. Art Educator 4 does not implement a formal grading system into their assessment system and does not account for assessing students work. This educator writes narrative reports that are sent to parents. The report describes an evaluation of a student's behavioral development rather than focused progress in art. Educator 5 uses a letter grading scale and written comments for each student. The report cards are accessible online which enables parents to easily stay informed on their child's performance. Art Educator 6 stated that because their class is an additional elective that the school offers, there are no grades. Additionally, parents are not cognizant about the students' progress in this particular class. Art Educator 7 uses a series of "ok" skills which is designed by the art educator to assess the students. Art Educator 8 issues letter grades in elementary school and in middle school assigns a number grade. Daily performance is also graded in association with completed assignments. Educator 9 does not grade by either a letter or a number grade. This educator allocates students' performance and understanding by issuing a pass or fail. These varied methods to document and inform parents of the students' performance proves that a well versed narrative and reasons for issuing grades is mandatory to interpret a child's success.

### **Ways to Document Artistic Ideas and Problem Solving Skills through Assessment**

Assessment provides educators the opportunity to foster students' artistic expression and problem solving skills. The following are various methods the participating independent art educators use to improve communication skills. Art Educator 1 promotes students verbal skills when asking their pupils what challenges them or surprises them in their art work. Group discussions that create ways for students to verbalize concepts strengthen students' linguistic abilities. This educator's students are constantly solving problems within their own work by manipulating different materials to achieve their concepts. Another way of visually problem solving a piece of art is during the art making process. Holding a work of art at a distance will

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help students determine what the composition requires to be complete. Art Educator 2 comments that they require students to talk about the artists they study and use terminology that pertains to the assignment to foster student communication. To promote oral skills, Art Educator 3 assesses students through one-on-one and group discussions. This educator encourages students to ask questions to clarify concepts and take risks as a method to problem solve in their work. Art Educator 4 believes that creating sequential pieces of art fosters students verbal skills by having them title their work and talk about their artistic process. Another method of fostering communication is through visual thinking strategies. This method encourages students to discuss what they see in a work of art. Participating Art Educator 5 has students present their work to their peers and other faculty members by explaining the process used to create the end product. These oral presentations often occur at the end of a lesson or unit. Through self-assessment and reflection students are able to interpret ways to prevent problems in their future work. Art Educator 6 asks students questions at the beginning of each lesson to focus on the meaning of different artistic terms and concepts. The repetition of terms and concepts aids students in stating what they learn and helps them describe discoveries they make when working in different mediums. Art Educator 7 analyzes students oral skills and problem solving skills through direct observations and students' ability to recall information.

In contrast to Art Educator 7, Art Educator 8 focuses on strengthening students semantic abilities by presenting their work to their peers. This educator also encourages students to develop comfort giving and receiving constructive criticism. Along with Art Educator 5, this educator implies the importance of reflecting upon one's work and describing obstacles in implementing their artistic concepts. Lastly, Art Educator 9 promotes students verbal skills by challenging students to defend their work. This educator also has students articulate elements of their art and design to find solutions for the end product. By implementing these different assessment practices, art educators can foster students' verbal and written skills and mentor their creative minds.

### **Field Observations and Analysis of Field Observations**

The art educator questionnaire is an unbiased approach to assessment because each educator has different views on evaluation. Therefore there are multiple hypotheses that are obtainable for art educators to use in their teaching approaches. For instance, we know and understand that these methods of assessment as mentioned in the summarized appendices above

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promote communication and problem solving skills, but which approach is the best? The information gathered and described in greater detail in this section was from observing participating art educators put into practice their most effective approaches to assessment. After observing several visual art departments and specific classes I was able to witness first-hand that structured assessment methods best aid student's cognitive verbal and written skills.

From observing Art Educator 7 it is evident that their assessment method matches their answers to the questionnaire. Their approach and is solely based upon observation and the final product. In the image below you can see an example of a fourth graders portrait of artist Frida Kahlo. For this assignment students were required to research a famous artist, paint a portrait, and make a video describing the artist. This process is a form of assessment that allows students to interact with their peers and take on the persona of the artist. This ability enables students to relate to the material being taught.



Image 1

The portrait provides the students an outlet talk about specific physical appearances and connotations that make artists famous. This method of evaluation enables students to talk about their work and practice describing what they see. Through the process of thinking, pairing, and sharing the students can collaborate with peers in order to reach a conclusion.

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After observing Art Educator 1 it is evident that certain boundaries and limitations must be set in order to see high quality performance from students during in class work. In art education it is critical for students to value their peer's ideas, respect each other, and to self-examine their own work. Students were constantly contemplating their work by holding it at a distance and talking about what they needed to add or take away from the work. Through this approach students are able to problem solve and create original works of art. This educator has students begin class seated on the floor to listen to the plan for the day's activity. The still life image is the work of a third grader, representing plant growth. When students were working on their still lifes and talking amongst their peers, they were asking one another what color should "these be" when pointing to flowers. This shows that the students are self-evaluating and using their peers as a tool to assess their own work when determining how to proceed.



**Image 2**

This image of the color wheel was placed on each table where students were seated to use as a reference when working to choose colors and help problem solve issues relating to elements of art and design. By viewing the color wheel students learned that they could apply layers of warm and cool colors to build multiple foundations.



Image 3

While the students were working the educator went around the room and posed questions to the students to get them thinking about their work. This encouraged students to use the new perspective to think critically how they are planning to design the image. Another method the educator used to assess students was asking “exit” questions while the students were lining up waiting and getting ready to leave class. The questions directed students to compare and contrast what is different about their past and current projects in addition to what makes an art work abstract or realistic. It is evident from observations that educators develop an innate sense for how to evaluate students even if they do not think about it in the sense of “assessment”.

In accordance to observing art educators, I was informed about their method for submitting progress to parents and other faculty. The assessment method has changed throughout the years in this school. Students who are struggling now get a phone call home from the educator instead of receiving written comments. Educators used to have to write comments for each student; now there is a checklist. The verbiage below demonstrates the changes in the checklist from 2007

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until 2013.

*Before 2007:*

*Verbally demonstrates understanding of art concepts*

*Applies art concepts to artworks*

*Creates original, expressive artworks*

*Displays appropriate development of fine motor abilities*

*Participates in discussion and studio activities*

*Listens to and follows directions*

*Interacts respectfully with peers and teachers*

*After 2007:*

*Applies understanding of art concepts*

*Creates original, expressive art*

*Displays development of fine motor skills*

*Participates in discussion and studio activities*

*Focuses attention during instructional and studio time*

*Interacts and contributes appropriately*

*After 2013:*

*Demonstrates understanding of art concepts (should read verbally demonstrates)*

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*Applies understanding of art concepts*

*Creates original, expressive art*

*Displays development of fine motor skills*

*Participates in discussion and studio activities*

*Focuses attention during instructional and studio time*

*Interacts and contributes appropriately*

From observing Art Educator 1 it is evident that having students successfully communicate with their peers confirms their acquisition of knowledge by verbally describing the material taught by the teacher and demonstrating what can be accomplished when working with different mediums of art materials. If verbalizing one's applied knowledge is not a central focus of the evaluation process how will students understand the importance of communicating their creative ideas in order to find ways to problem solve? In order to assess students while encouraging the importance of communication skills the criterion to assess must be clear and consistent in the schools evaluation system.

From observing Art Educator 9 it is apparent that collaborating with the students helps both the student as well as the teacher define the rubric criteria in order to assess the final product. The following comments are ideas that 7<sup>th</sup> grade students came up with to assess their shoe sculptures created from found materials.

- Group 1: Effort, Creativity, Originality
- Group 2: Originality, Using materials creatively, Using what you have well
- Group 3: Creativity, Neatness (unless the design calls for it) and Material use

This criteria is what the students thought was most important for this particular project to assess the product pictured below.



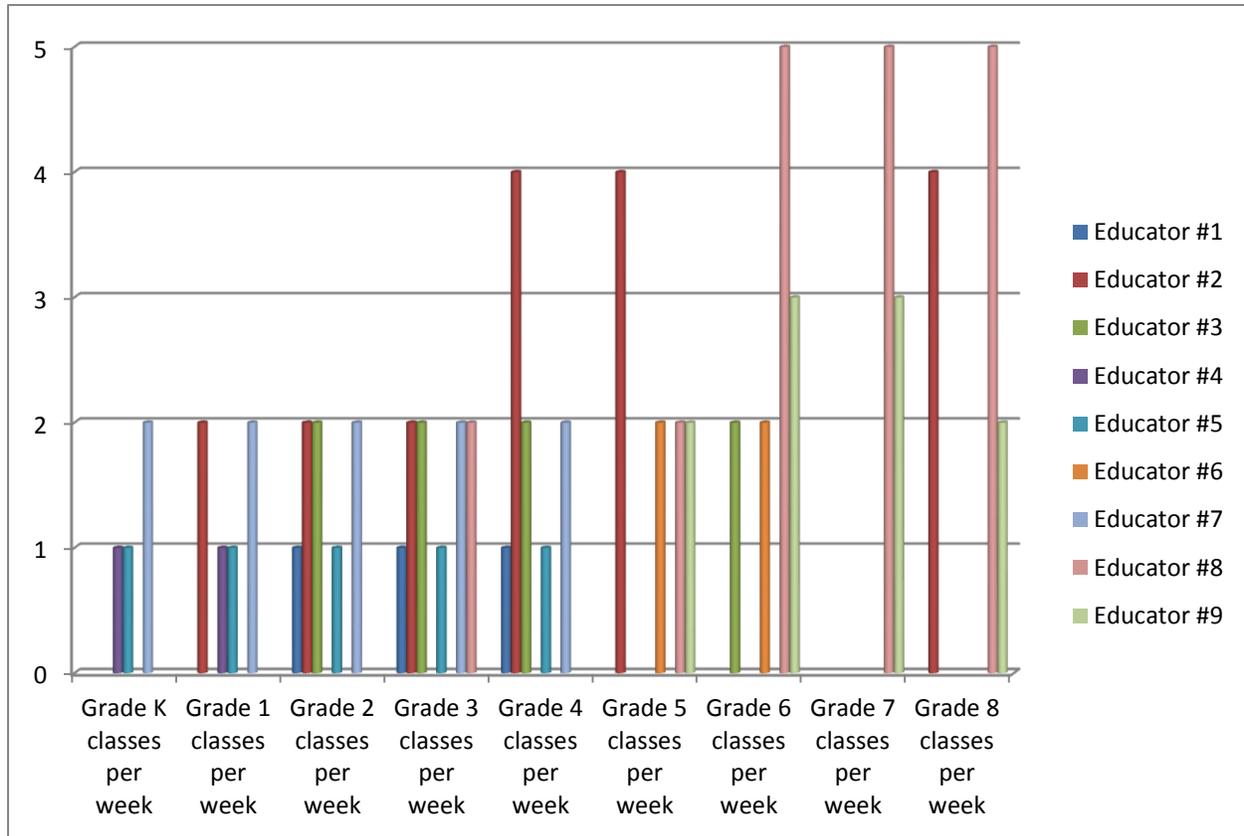
**Image 4**

After listening to the in class discussion between the students and the art educator it was evident that the students wanted more structure and specific guidelines from the instructor rather than collaborating with the educator to create an assessment tool.

Observing Educator 4, I found that when the kindergarten students began seated on the rug they were more focused and able to answer the educators questions about what they remembered from the previous class. This art educator allowed students to begin working on their color charts when they were sitting quietly. The students were working on creating a color chart with a representation of warm colors on one side and a variation of cool colors on the other. As the students were working the educator went around the room and asked the students if they could tell if the color they made should be on the cool or warm side of their chart. In addition to asking students questions while they were working the art educator also asked students “exit” questions. This method of questioning students is a form of assessment to see what the students learned during the class period. The young learners commented that from this project they knew how to make specific colors. Another student stated that it is possible to mix a color and change it by adding other hues to alter the shade and value. Students in this lesson were acting as scientists. The students’ responses affirm to the teacher that the exercises are encouraging students to experiment and stretch the boundary of their imaginations in order to make a multitude of colors. From this observation the educator demonstrated the significance of an “exit” assessment. Without assessment questions it is likely this realization would have been lost. Exit questions reaffirm that the lessons have done more than just teach students to create different colors. This form of assessment not only evaluates the students, but also evaluates the effectiveness of a teacher’s ability to help students retain what they learned.

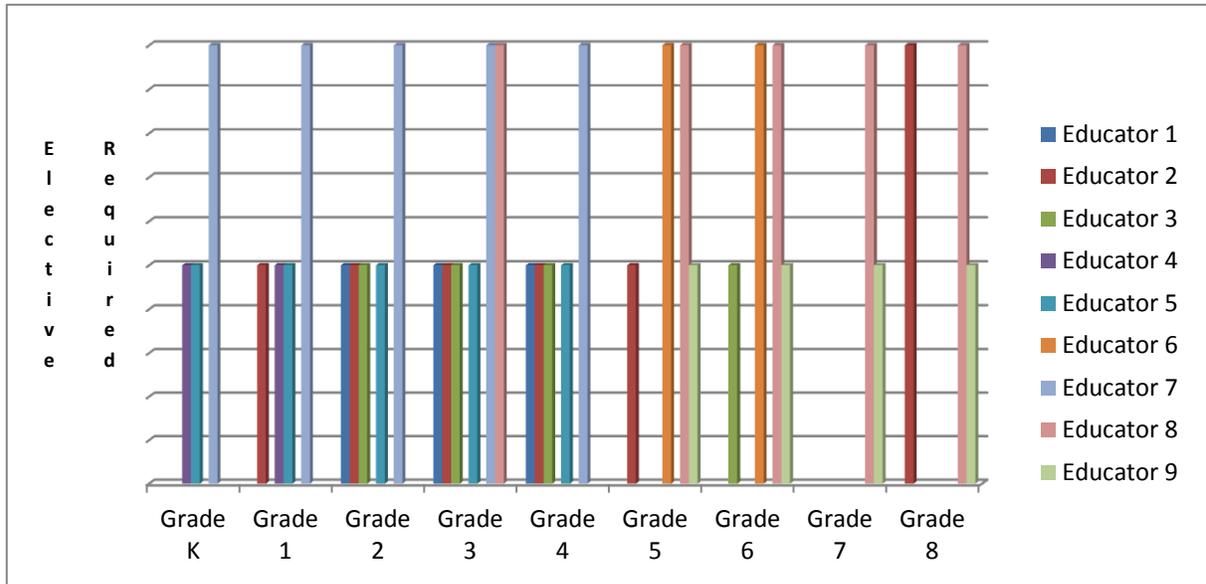
## Graphs

**Days Per Week Each Class Meets**

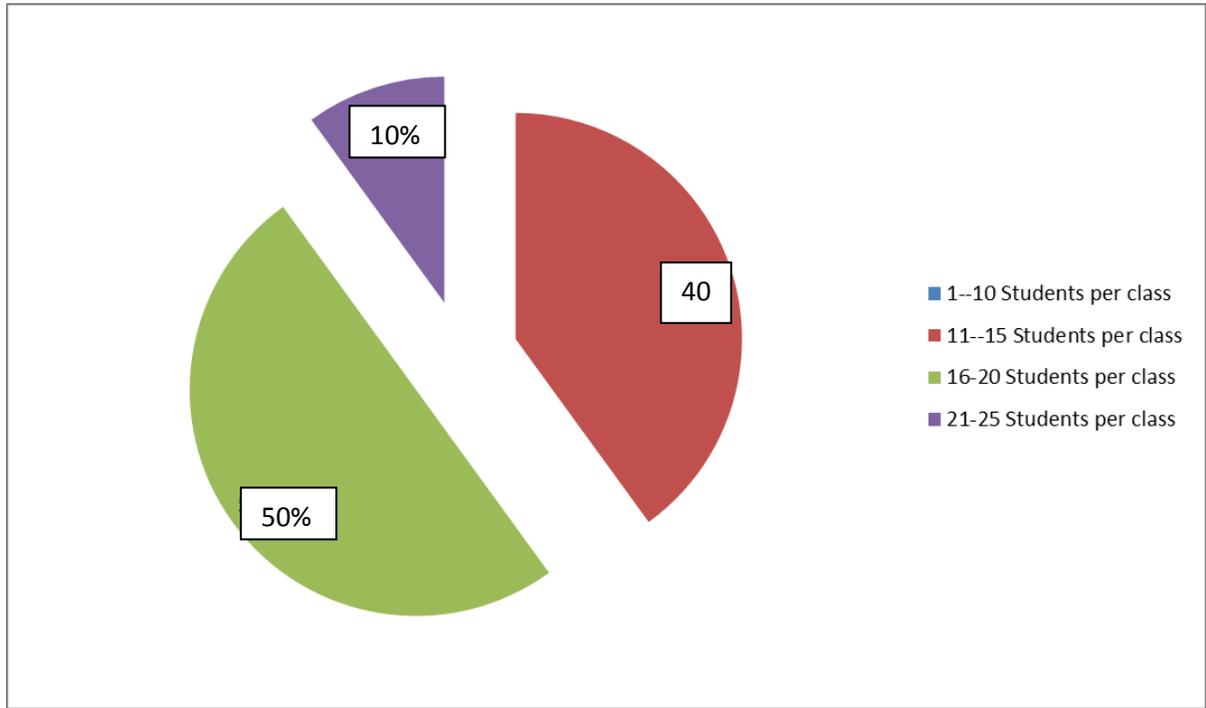


This graph indicates that in higher grade levels there are more art classes per week than lower grade levels. The extra sessions per week allows more time to assess students' art work, foster communication skills, and for students' to solve problems within their creations.

### Grades Taught by Participating Art Educators Required Course VS. Elective Course



This graph designates which levels participating art educators teach and if it is considered an elective or required course in the independent school. This representation depicts that all levels have art built into their schedule but some of the independent schools call art an elective and others a required course. This is an example of inconsistency in independent art education.

**Number of Students in Each Participating Educators Class**

This chart symbolizes the percentage of students each participating art educator has in their classes. Due to majority of independent art teachers having small class sizes they have more time to give individualized attention to students and assess students in small group discussions to work on improving students' abilities to express their artistic ideas.

### **Discussion**

My objective in creating the questionnaire was to determine how independent art educators foster students' linguistic and problem solving skills while encouraging creativity through different methods of assessment. After reading and interpreting the educator's assessment practices in the questionnaire, I was eager to observe how they implement assessment in the classroom and to what extent. As a result of the observations, I witnessed the application of the techniques educators use to assess students' empirical growth.

I wanted to make it easy for art educators to complete the questionnaire within their daily time constraint. The main obstacle I came across when I began submitting the questionnaire was through Google Drive. This was an issue because many participants had difficulty opening the Google Drive document and were unable to comment within the text. Due to this issue I sent the questionnaire as a word document attachment which made it easier for the teachers to open and respond to a timely fashion. Having the questionnaire sent as an attachment made the educators feedback easy to receive electronically. This allowed me to analyze the content of each questionnaire quickly. The benefit of submitting the questionnaire as an attachment helped minimize the amount of computer experience the educators needed in order to complete and return the document. The participants needed access to a computer in order to open the attachment, but were able to then enter their responses directly in the word document and return the completed form easily. The second limitation in this study was that I did not have 100% participation. The lack of participation impacted the amount of results and data collected in this study.

After communicating with the participants through e-mail, one educator directed me to other potential participants. This allowed me to interview other educators with whom I was not previously connected. From the participating educators feedback to questions in the questionnaire, I created a comprehensive and consistent assessment tool that can be adapted for K-8<sup>th</sup> grades. This tool is designed for independent schools visual art programs to promote consistency within their assessment systems. Despite the limitation of the study, educators who participated were very eager to have a tool like this to use when assessing their pupils. I felt confident in my creation of the questionnaire because of the responses and participation that I received.

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The outcomes from the questionnaire indicate that assessment in lower school is different than in middle school. In lower school, students are primarily evaluated on their behavior and mastery of different materials. Their mastery relates to their fine motor skills when working with different art supplies. In contrast, middle school students have more in class critiques and discussions. This is because middle school students' minds have developed cognitively and they are able to critically analyze a work of art. Their art classes meet more frequently than elementary art classes which allow more opportunities for creative expression.

There are multiple benefits of an independent art educator's approach to assessment. Even though they are constantly changing their assessment systems to correlate to their lesson and unit plans, improving students' communication and problem solving skills are the focal point of how they assess their students. Keeping students actively engaged will heighten student's ability to connect with the material being taught. Observation and discussion are implemented on a daily basis by the majority of the participating independent art educators. From analyzing data in the questionnaire it is evident that the most common approaches to assessment are observations and discussions. These methods are executed to determine students' achievement and performance. Observation is fundamental in assessment because it allows the educator to step in when they notice a child is having difficulty. This form of assessment is the main method that stays constant in the independent art educators' approaches because they are constantly viewing their students' progress. Through observation an educator can see if students can simulate their multi-step instruction when working with specific materials from the educator's instructional demonstration. Observation can be used as an assessment technique for the students when they look at their work from a distance. Stepping back and removing oneself from the work allows students to evaluate their work and decide how they can improve the composition. Art educators can assess students' ability to manipulate a material prior to the lesson when observing students mix exploration with play. Students who have an opportunity test out the material prior to being graded will increase their skills by learning how to manipulate the material for a particular project. This is an opportunity for students to experiment and mix play with learning. This method of pre-assessment will also alleviate any fear when introducing new supplies that students have not previously handled.

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The assessment criteria that is used almost as frequently as observation is the evaluation of students' performance on their artistic process instead of just examining the final product. Evaluating the process over the product allows art educators to observe the effort and different approaches students apply when completing an assignment. Educators are able to note outstanding achievement and document a student's mistakes during this time. Assessing the artistic process is valuable in art education because it simulates skills students can apply as they grow older. Assessment of a student's thought process can also help decide the materials educators choose to implement into their lesson plans. Some art educators commented that they designed lessons based on the interest of the learner. In some circumstances the educator will create incentives for students to work with certain materials in order to determine if the student has mastered operating the material while improving their fine motor skills. The research shows that the educators who are able to most effectively incorporate the assessment of the process are those who have smaller class sizes. The small classes allow educators to give extra attention to each student and frequent feedback to each student. Without feedback from teachers, students will not know their progress and what skills they have mastered or what they need to improve upon. Knowing what skills students need to work on can help students take ownership for their own education.

I learned from the questionnaire and from the field observations that it is important for the student as well as the teacher to document their ideas. Documentation in the form of journaling will help educators note student achievement and when to alter assessment methods to best suit the learners' needs. After observing the participating art educators classes, I realized that educators alter questions directed to students to correlate with their learning abilities. Some educators even collaborate with their students to create rubrics as their assessment tool.

I found from this study that without a consistent and solid foundation of assessment in art education students will not know their weaknesses and therefore will not be able to grow and learn from them. It is important for students to grow and learn from their weaknesses to improve their artistic skills and not repeat mistakes. Informing a student on their weaknesses in a particular area of the arts is the educator's duty and is included in written reports. One-on-one discussion with the teacher will also enable a student to learn ways they can improve in a specific area. Encouraging building upon a student's weak areas can strengthen the

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relationship between the teacher and the student. Fostering communication and learning to receive constructive criticism is also another skill students learn when young and is built upon throughout one's life.

The issue of time is a constant factor in art education. Teachers consistently noted that if more time were allotted to spend on projects they would be able to better pre-assess and post-assess students work. Art educators need to allocate minutes within the period for communicating artistic ideas, documenting issues within a work of art, completing the project, and putting in effort in order to receive feedback. If time is used effectively and the criterion is set for each project, students will benefit by exhibiting their willingness and readiness to participate. Allowing more time for communication gives students the opportunity to regulate and pace themselves to finish art projects. Art lessons can be abstract, but if students know what to expect they will be more likely to participate in class discussions and document their ideas.

A consistent system of assessment with specific standards and guidelines that correlate to the school's mission will help students to verbally and physically express their creativity. Implementing a consistent method will stimulate creative thinkers and artistic processes that students design because it gives students a solid base from which they can grow and develop. This approach will improve students' willingness to create because by setting limits students will ultimately look for and create innovative ways to grow academically. Another attribute to a consistent approach to evaluation is for students to know the educator's expectations and to become advocates for their own knowledge. Young learners will be able to excel in an environment with structure because they can expand their artistic expression which will enable them to take ownership for their own learning.

A consistent framework will permit students to become better communicators by applying their verbal and written skills to solve problems. The following are examples independent art educators use to promote students' oral skills: connecting concepts, verbally describing their artistic ideas, peer and group discussions, talking about and studying the work of famous artists, making sequential projects, visual thinking strategies, presentations, and constructive criticism. These methods are the best and most noted ways educators can improve students' verbal awareness and skill.

It is evident within the context of this study that fostering creativity and oral skills goes

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beyond the classroom but is often, specifically at a young age, only taught and encouraged through visual art programs. Very few subjects in early children's academia allow for such a creative process to guide them to a final product. Therefore, early art education acts as a foundation for a more complex method to problem solve by having a structured set of procedures to follow and build upon throughout a student's educational experience. The following are examples independent art teachers use to encourage problem solving techniques in the visual arts: viewing art work at a distance, critiques, and peer-evaluations and self-assessments. In conclusion, effective assessment is essential because it supports the development of their abilities to express artistic ideas and problem solve.

### **Recommendation**

The assessment tool below is a proposed method that highlights useful tactics from each participating art educator to create an approach that will benefit assessment in independent visual art education programs. There is no single device that can equally assess kindergarten students at the same level as eight grade students so I have created a design that encompasses a broader set of criteria which can be adapted to different grades. Each approach to evaluation is varied and based in institutional culture which makes it difficult to make generalizations regarding effective assessment for K-8 grades. From analyzing the data from the questionnaire and observing independent art educators assessment techniques I believe this tool is adaptable but structured enough so that it will enable educators in differing environments to be able to foster students' creativity, communication, and problem solving skills. This tool will help create a consistent approach to assessment in an independent institution where educators in addition to students are used to a more flexible evaluation system. This will enable students and teachers to understand the expectations and guidelines to keep their evaluations consistent. Teachers are constantly reflecting to figure out the best methods to teach lessons and assess their students. First year teachers like Art Educator 3 in this study could really benefit from a base guideline. Other educators requested a similar consistent approach in regards to the final question asked of them: do you think your approach to assessment is viable for other art educators to use as a tool to assess his or her students' works of art? Why or why not? Therefore, this tool I created is a device for independent art educators to employ consistency in their assessment systems.

**Proposed Rubric Criteria for Independent Visual Art Programs, Grades K-8<sup>th</sup>**

*Demonstrates one's ability and applies concepts verbally*

*Displays development of 3D fine motor skills*

*Displays development of 2D fine motor skills*

*Participates in discussions*

*Demonstrates effort*

*Creates original work*

*Aids in studio clean-up and follows directions*

*Gives constructive criticism*

*Makes connections between projects*

*Presents projects and explains artistic process sequentially*

*Uses correct terminology to relate specific projects with elements of art and design*

*Shows respect for others and materials*

*Ability to argue and defend one's reason for creating*

To continue this study I would ask the participating art educators to put this rubric into practice as their method of assessment and then document how students' creativity, communication skills, and problem solving skills have either improved or stayed the same. I would also design and implement a pre-test and post-test to determine how a student's skills have altered.

If I had to present another questionnaire in the future to a specific group of people I would use an online program such as SurveyMonkey, so that I could analyze the data and view the outcomes graphically. Lastly, I would survey the educators again to see how this consistent assessment approach has changed their style of teaching, what they have learned by documenting students' performance, and seek their advice as to other ways educators could enhance student learning to help them become better communicators and problem solvers.

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## Appendix A

### **K-8 Independent Art Educator Assessment Questionnaire**

*Welcome Art Educator, I have designed these questions to guide my thesis research. My thesis is about how art teachers assess students art work while promoting creativity and communication.*

Please mark an (X) for the following questions:

What grades do you teach?  K  1st  2nd  3rd  4th  5th  6th  7th  8th

Do you have your own art room?  Yes  No

How many days a week do you see each class?

Is art required or is it an elective?  Required  Elective

How many students do you have in each class?  1-10  10-15  15-20

Please respond to the following questions in the format you are most comfortable:

1) What is the grading system like in your school? (Number Grade, Letter Grade, or Written Response) When grading do you take into account the whole artistic process, the final product, or a combination of both? How are students and parents informed about his or her progress and how often? (Mailed Home Report, Take Home Report, Conference)

2) If you use a report card or follow a different method instructed by the school, who designed the report? Please attach or mail a blank report when submitting the completed questionnaire.

3) How do you assess students understanding of the material? What criteria do you use when assessing students in-class assignments and why?

4) Do you pre-assess and post-assess students work? How? What methods of informal and formal assessment work the best and why? What are the students reactions?

5) In what ways do your assessment practices aid students written and oral communicative skills? What would you alter to improve students written and verbal communication?

6) What would you include and change about your current assessment system and why?

7) Do you think your approach to assessment is viable for other art educators to use as a tool to assess his or her students works of art, why or why not?

*Thank you for your time and I greatly appreciate your participation in this questionnaire. May I please e-mail you with any further questions?*

## Appendix B

### Participating Art Educator 1

*Please mark an (X) for the following questions:*

What grades do you teach? \_\_K \_\_1st **x** 2nd **x** 3rd **x** 4th \_\_ 5th \_\_ 6th \_\_7th \_\_ 8th

Do you have your own art room? **x** Yes \_\_ No

How many days a week do you see each class? **One**

**We also have Morning Art every day of the year – an open studio time for 2-4<sup>th</sup> graders**

**We also have ILT sessions (integrated learning time) in which classroom teachers and arts teachers team teach lessons related to other subject areas.**

Is art required or is it an elective? **x** Required \_\_ Elective

How many students do you have in each class? \_\_ 1-10 \_\_ 10-15 \_\_ 15-20 **x** 20-23

*Please respond to the following questions in the format you are most comfortable:*

- 1) What is the grading system like in your school? (Number Grade, Letter Grade, or Written Response) **1-4, 4 being outstanding. We write comments on students with profound issues and pass them on to the teachers who have conferences with the parents twice a year. When grading do you take into account the whole artistic process, the final product, or a combination of both? A combination** How are students and parents informed about his or her progress and how often? **(winter and before summer break > Mailed Home Report, fall and spring > Take Home Report & Conference)**
- 2) If you use a report card or follow a different method instructed by the school, who designed the report? **Assessment Team...a variety of classroom teachers and resource teachers. Please** attach or mail a blank report when submitting the completed questionnaire.
- 3) How do you assess students understanding of the material? **Can they verbalize concepts and manipulate media and tools to follow through on concepts and multi-step instructions. What additional criteria do you use when assessing students in-class assignments and why? Do they value their work and efforts? Can they create their own original and/or unified art, contribute to class discussions, and provide peers with assistance/constructive criticism when the opportunity arises?**
- 4) Do you pre-assess and post-assess students work? **We look at works throughout any given assignment and each student must check in with a peer and then me before it is considered**

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complete. How? What methods of informal and formal assessment work the best and why? I often hold a student's work away from him/her by 6-10 feet and ask them what they see and what the composition may need. As a class, we talk about the challenges or surprises of an assignment as we line up to leave. The finest works are hung in the halls (34 bulletin boards, a gallery space and 2 sets of glass cases.) What are the students reactions? They are extremely proud of their work on display and look forward to the changing exhibits. They also understand that any work that is displayed meets the requirements of the unit/assignment.

5) In what ways do your assessment practices aid students written and oral communicative skills? They must be able to verbally describe their ideas and dreams, connections between concepts, and they allow themselves to be vulnerable and take creative chances with words and images. What would you alter to improve students written and verbal communication? I hope what we do in our limited time in the art studio inspires my students written work in other spaces, but I am not concerned with them writing during my time with them. Making sure a teacher gets around to talk with each student in each class period is of great importance. This allows the quieter students to feel free to discuss their ideas and processes.

6) What would you include and change about your current assessment system and why?

I would add even more specific areas of assessment in visual art, i.e. –

Displays development of 3D fine motor skills as one item and Displays development of 2D fine motor skills as a separate item

7) Do you think your approach to assessment is viable for other art educators to use as a tool to assess his or her students works of art, why or why not? Certainly. I continue to have conversations and relationships with former students years and even decades after they have left the lower school. Some are in the arts and others are not, but they are all connected to/respect the arts in one way or another. This tells me I have validated and respected them and their work while holding them to a high standard of learning.

**Here's our current rubric for 1-4 art:**

Demonstrates understanding of art concepts

Applies understanding of art concepts to artworks

Creates original, expressive artworks

Displays development of fine motor abilities

Participates in discussions and studio activities

Focuses attention during instructional and studio time

Interacts and contributes appropriately

## Appendix C

### Participating Art Educator 2

Please mark an (X) for the following questions:

What grades do you teach?  K  1st  2nd  3rd  4th  5th  6th  7th  8th

I teach 1-5 and 8th grades.

Do you have your own art room?  Yes  No

Yes, I have my own room

How many days a week do you see each class?

I see each class two times a week for 1-3 and 4 times a week 4, 5 and 8.

Is art required or is it an elective?  Required  Elective

Art is required for all grades except in second semester 8th grade when they have a choice of an arts enrichment class. Drama, film, art, chorus, playwriting etc...

How many students do you have in each class?  1-10  10-15  15-20

I have between 11-14 students per class.

Please respond to the following questions in the format you are most comfortable:

1) What is the grading system like in your school? (Number Grade, Letter Grade, or Written Response) When grading do you take into account the whole artistic process, the final product, or a combination of both? How are students and parents informed about his or her progress and how often? (Mailed Home Report, Take Home Report, Conference)

We have letter grades and written comments for middle school and only written comments for lower school. When doing grades/reports I take into account their skills, their effort and the end product. Our report cards are sent home via email and we have parent conferences twice a year.....two consecutive days in the fall and spring. We send home report cards three times a year.

2) If you use a report card or follow a different method instructed by the school, who designed the report? Please attach or mail a blank report when submitting the completed questionnaire.

Our report cards are designed by each individual department within the school. We use FaWeb (Faculty Access to the web.) You can access examples by logging into FaWeb.com

Email me if you can't access FaWeb. We don't have a check list or anything like that. It's basically a paragraph that we write about the student.

3) How do you assess students understanding of the material? What criteria do you use when assessing students in-class assignments and why?

We constantly assess the kids work while they are in class; giving them constructive criticism along the way. We hang finished projects in the hallways for the community to view. They leave our art classes at the end of their session with a cohesive portfolio.

4) Do you pre-assess and post-assess students work? How? What methods of informal and formal assessment work the best and why? What are the students reactions?

I don't pre or post assess with the kids. We as teachers look at the projects that we assign and tweak or come up with better ones or totally different ones that teach the same thing. We are always evaluating and improving our already rich art curriculum.

5) In what ways do your assessment practices aid students written and oral communicative skills? What would you alter to improve students written and verbal communication?

We are always talking about the artist we are studying, using terminology that pertains to the assignment and medium they are using. Students don't generally write in our classes.

6) What would you include and change about your current assessment system and why?

Less written reports, a more specific check list of skills (we currently do not have a check list) A descriptive curriculum statement and check list would be perfect!

7) Do you think your approach to assessment is viable for other art educators to use as a tool to assess his or her students works of art, why

or why not?

I think that students prefer to be doing hands on art rather than spending time assessing their work. A simple “good job,” or “this needs more work,” etc is enough for elementary school. Eighth graders can handle a critique once in a while.

## Appendix D

### Participating Art Educator 3

Please mark an (X) for the following questions:

What grades do you teach? **2nd 3rd 4th and 6th**

Do you have your own art room? **Yes**

How many days a week do you see each class? **2x**

Is art required or is it an elective? **Required**

How many students do you have in each class? **10-15 Lower school 15-20 in middle**

Please respond to the following questions in the format you are most comfortable:

1) What is the grading system like in your school? (Number Grade, Letter Grade, or Written Response) **Number Grade** When grading do you take into account the whole artistic process, the final product, or a combination of both? **Primarily the process** How are students and parents informed about his or her progress and how often? (Mailed Home Report, Take Home Report, Conference) **Conference**

2) If you use a report card or follow a different method instructed by the school, who designed the report? Please attach or mail a blank report when submitting the completed questionnaire. **I do not have access to a blank report. this is all entered online. I am just learning this process, as I am in my first year at this school. I can see about a blank copy.**

3) How do you assess students understanding of the material? **discussion and observation**

What criteria do you use when assessing students in-class assignments and why? **attitude, ability/willingness to follow basic instructions, asking questions to clarify, attention to details, use of materials, taking risks...**

4) Do you pre-assess and post-assess students work? **yes** How? **I almost always give students a chance to “play with the materials” first and call it a draft so that they are not fearful and can relax while planning their idea.** What methods of informal and formal assessment work the best and why? **informal; one-on-one and group discussions** What are the students reactions? **students are receptive to feedback**

5) In what ways do your assessment practices aid students written and oral communicative skills? **students are able to make connections between projects and express this aloud. They generally have these “a ha!” moments when they do this. For the younger ones (2nd) having**

*them write to assess totally slows down their reflection process they are much better assessed orally.* What would you alter to improve students written and verbal communication? **sentence starters for the young ones or a verbal/oral assessment. I would like to have more assessment time in general. I don't do it enough. This would give them more opportunities to become used to this and use art vocab more.**

6) What would you include and change about your current assessment system and why? *I would have them write about what they learned, why they thought it was important/or not, ask them to reflect on important vocab words and their meaning and importance after each assignment. I really want to have them create a "binder/journal" to document their art ed experience.*

7) Do you think your approach to assessment is viable for other art educators to use as a tool to assess his or her students works of art, why or why not? *I think I am just beginning to really focus on trying to do this . I definitely need to figure out the best method to implement this more.*

## Appendix E

### Art Educator 4

K-8 Independent Art Educator Assessment Questionnaire

*Please mark an (X) for the following questions:*

What grades do you teach?  K  1st \_\_\_ 2nd \_\_\_ 3rd \_\_\_ 4th \_\_\_ 5th \_\_\_ 6th \_\_\_ 7th \_\_\_ 8th

Do you have your own art room?  Yes \_\_\_ No

How many days a week do you see each class? **Children come once a week, but students are allowed to come during recess, normally no more than 15 come at one time**

Is art required or is it an elective?  Required \_\_\_ Elective

**Required for pre-primary to 8<sup>th</sup> grade**

How many students do you have in each class? \_\_\_ 1-10  10-15 \_\_\_ 15-20

*Please respond to the following questions in the format you are most comfortable:*

1) What is the grading system like in your school? (Number Grade, Letter Grade, or Written Response) When grading do you take into account the whole artistic process, the final product, or a combination of both? How are students and parents informed about his or her progress and how often? (Mailed Home Report, Take Home Report, Conference)

**There are no grades, there's a check list that is more about behavior than art, the progress report is a narrative to tell how they are doing and it gets mailed home to parents,**

**For example: \_\_\_\_\_ is getting better at developing hand / eye coordination or needs to improve**

**Twice a year progress report is mailed home**

**I try to keep open communication: during winter I offer parent / child art classes, parents also sign up to volunteer in the classroom, conversation has to stay open, and it has to go both ways.**

2) If you use a report card or follow a different method instructed by the school, who designed the report? Please attach or mail a blank report when submitting the completed questionnaire.

**Checklist is school's property is consists of about four questions discussing: following through, fine motor skills, not about grading art**

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3) How do you assess students understanding of the material? What criteria do you use when assessing students in-class assignments and why?

By observation and discussion, but mainly observation, sometimes I have students attention one-on-one when needed

4) Do you pre-assess and post-assess students work? How? What methods of informal and formal assessment work the best and why? What are the students reactions?

Normally simply by watching the students, I do not have a set curricula, I want to see what they want to learn, if I need to create an incentive for them to work with scissors I will make it happen and working to hold materials, I'm constantly thinking what do I need to do differently, I was working with a group of first graders recently to attach scratch and slip to clay piece, I realized certain children weren't understanding why it happened, they were bypassing it in a way, and I needed to explain it better by showing, I take it as my fault if they don't understand, even if they have processing issues

5) In what ways do your assessment practices aid students written and oral communicative skills? What would you alter to improve students written and verbal communication?

Making sequential pieces: a sequence accordion book, the students title their work, they talk about their art work, recently talked about ashcan school, they are constantly talking about what they see in works of art

6) What would you include and change about your current assessment system and why?

I'm always looking at it but since its built on observation I am always looking to see how I can do it better, taking notes better, I think school systems get stuck on final product, the product itself will fade, but more than anything they are artists, I open the door to them to come in because I want to foster their creativity, more stress and emphasis on the process, I want students to honor their work, if a child says I have an idea I want to do it this way I have the child explain it to me and then I can alter the approach to fit their needs and sometimes the children have better ways to explain it

7) Do you think your approach to assessment is viable for other art educators to use as a tool to assess his or her students works of art, why or why not?

Yes, if assessing by observation and looking at the students as artists

## Appendix F

### Participating Art Educator 5

*Please mark an (X) for the following questions:*

What grades do you teach?  K  1st  2nd  3rd  4th  5th  6th  7th  8th

Do you have your own art room?  Yes  No

How many days a week do you see each class? **1 day a week for 45 minutes**

Is art required or is it an elective?  Required  Elective

How many students do you have in each class?  1-10  10-15  15-20

*Please respond to the following questions in the format you are most comfortable:*

1) What is the grading system like in your school? (Number Grade, Letter Grade, or Written Response) When grading do you take into account the whole artistic process, the final product, or a combination of both? **We use letter grading scale and a written comment for each student.**

**We complete three grading periods so I do formal recording of grades 3 times a year. In addition to our grading periods we also post information about grade level projects on our newsletter**

**(online)** How are students and parents informed about his or her progress and how often?

(Mailed Home Report, Take Home Report, Conference) **See above/ report cards are all on-line**

2) If you use a report card or follow a different method instructed by the school, who designed the report? Please attach or mail a blank report when submitting the completed questionnaire. **I do not have access except during the two-week period at the end of the semesters.**

3) How do you assess students understanding of the material? What criteria do you use when assessing students in-class assignments and why? **I have a closure lesson with each activity where the students explain their work to the class for grades k-4 and for grades 3-4 they complete a grading rubric and self-assessment forms at the end of each big project. We usually complete 2-4 projects per 6 weeks. I use this time to enter in grades and I access student progress weekly in a grade book. I incorporate an effort grade weekly as well.**

4) Do you pre-assess and post-assess students work? How? What methods of informal and formal assessment work the best and why? What are the students reactions? **I constantly assess and record student progress but I am less concerned with a finite grade as long as I see progress, especially for grades k-2. As they get older they complete a rubric about their own work and do self-assessments.**

5) In what ways do your assessment practices aid students written and oral communicative

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skills? What would you alter to improve students written and verbal communication? **Students reinforce their communication skills by presenting their work and reflecting upon their own progress at the end of each unit or student project.**

6) What would you include and change about your current assessment system and why?

**I would love to have more time to include greater depth to my grading system. It is very difficult to grade, display, and the myriad of other art responsibilities because my teaching schedule is very full.**

7) Do you think your approach to assessment is viable for other art educators to use as a tool to assess his or her students works of art, why or why not? **Yes because I believe it gets students involved in the assessment of progress while building confidence and enhancing art skills. It also is a wonderful opportunity for me to hear from the student to see where I need to help them or how I can better teach them.**

## Appendix G

### Participating Art Educator 6

*students art work while promoting creativity and communication.*

*Please mark an (X) for the following questions:*

What grades do you teach? \_\_K \_\_1st \_\_ 2nd \_\_ 3rd \_\_ 4th **\_x\_** 5th **\_x\_** 6th \_\_7th \_\_ 8th

Do you have your own art room? **\_x\_** Yes \_\_ No

How many days a week do you see each class? **Twice**

Is art required or is it an elective? \_\_ Required \_\_ Elective (**My class is an additional elective**)

How many students do you have in each class? \_\_ 1-10 \_\_ 10-15 **\_x\_** 15-20

*Please respond to the following questions in the format you are most comfortable:*

1) What is the grading system like in your school? (Number Grade, Letter Grade, or Written Response) When grading do you take into account the whole artistic process, the final product, or a combination of both? How are students and parents informed about his or her progress and how often? (Mailed Home Report, Take Home Report, Conference)

**The class that I teach is a special elective class that is ungraded. It is part of a new enhanced art program, that has its strengths and weaknesses. Students and parents are not informed about progress, unless there is a specific issue to discuss. This leaves a very open curriculum to build onto the existing art program at my school, but it also gives the students little accountability. Behavior is often one of the biggest challenges. There is also a regular art class in which middle school students have art for one-third of the year.**

2) If you use a report card or follow a different method instructed by the school, who designed the report? Please attach or mail a blank report when submitting the completed questionnaire.

**I do not contribute to the report card.**

3) How do you assess students understanding of the material? What criteria do you use when assessing students in-class assignments and why?

**I use class discussion and recall of previous work to assess their understanding. I also use their artwork and whether they have met the criteria of the assignment to judge if they understood the concepts. (The challenge sometimes is knowing whether the student understands but just doesn't follow directions.) We review what we discussed last class at the beginning of each class. Also, I ask students at the end of class to talk about what they learned that day.**

4) Do you pre-assess and post-assess students work? How? What methods of informal and

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formal assessment work the best and why? What are the students reactions?

Sometimes I have students create initial sketches to see where their skills lie and where to push students further. Usually I ask students questions at the beginning of a lesson about what they think a term means or what they know about a concept. We repeat these concepts often and review what they learned after the project has been created/finished.

5) In what ways do your assessment practices aid students written and oral communicative skills? What would you alter to improve students written and verbal communication?

My class has very little writing at this time, but in the future I might have students write about their artworks and have them explain what they were trying to portray. Often though, I do have students talk about concepts and connect them back to other ways of thinking about the concept. For example, when talking about balance in an artwork, also exploring what it feels like for a person to physically balance, etc. I try to get shy students to tell the group important discoveries they have made.

6) What would you include and change about your current assessment system and why?

The fact that students have no grade at all makes it a harder challenge to make students feel like they need to do the assignments or behave well, so I might change the program to at least pass/fail or have a participation grade. That being said, the current system challenges me to create projects that the students will really want to do well, and structure my classes in a more efficient way. Also, I would love to have more art discussions about their finished artworks, so they could share their work with their classmates.

7) Do you think your approach to assessment is viable for other art educators to use as a tool to assess his or her students works of art, why or why not?

I think class discussions and portfolio reviews are important forms of assessment for all art teachers. I also think that having students share what they learned, in writing or with the entire class, is a great way to determine what they have taken away from the lessons.

## Appendix H

### Participating Art Educator 7

*Please mark an (X) for the following questions:*

What grades do you teach?  K  1st  2nd  3rd  4th  5th  6th  7th  8th

Do you have your own art room?  Yes  No

How many days a week do you see each class?  2

Is art required or is it an elective?  Required  Elective

How many students do you have in each class?  1-10  10-15  15-20

*Please respond to the following questions in the format you are most comfortable:*

1) What is the grading system like in your school? (Number Grade, Letter Grade, or Written Response) When grading do you take into account the whole artistic process, the final product, or a combination of both? How are students and parents informed about his or her progress and how often? (Mailed Home Report, Take Home Report, Conference)

*Lower school is graded every nine weeks with a series ok skills*

2) If you use a report card or follow a different method instructed by the school, who designed the report? Please attach or mail a blank report when submitting the completed questionnaire.

*We all have input*

3) How do you assess students understanding of the material? What criteria do you use when assessing students in-class assignments and why?

*I assess by observation and final project*

4) Do you pre-assess and post-assess students work? How? What methods of informal and formal assessment work the best and why? What are the students reactions?

*It is all by observation. Due to small classes I can do that*

5) In what ways do your assessment practices aid students written and oral communicative skills? What would you alter to improve students written and verbal communication?

*Not applicable*

6) What would you include and change about your current assessment system and why?

*I just changed my assessment to reflect skills of each grade level*

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7) Do you think your approach to assessment is viable for other art educators to use as a tool to assess his or her students works of art, why or why not? **Yes, it seems to measure skill sets expected by age.**

2011-2012 Skills K-5

- Listens well and follows directions
- Demonstrates effort
- Exercises self-control
- Understands and applies media and technique and process
- Completes assignments
- Cleans up thoroughly

Proposed skills for 2012-2013 by grade

**KINDERGARTEN**

- Recognize shapes
- Name primary colors
- Cut straight and curved lines with scissors
- Paint and color within the lines
- Use glue appropriately
- Demonstrates effort

**FIRST**

- Recognize the difference between geometric and organic shapes
- Review primary name secondary mixed from primary
- Cut shapes with scissors
- Join pinch pots together, learning score and slip
- Draw on one surface print many copies
- Demonstrates effort

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- Recognize three dimensional shapes
- Review primary and secondary, learn and mix tertiary
- Recall the colors of the rainbow
- Use the scissors to cut out middles of objects
- Sew the running stich and cross stich
- Weave a simple wall hanging
- Create a masterpiece on a slab of clay by carving
- Demonstrates effort

**THIRD**

- Review primary, secondary and tertiary and list warm and cool colors
- Use colors to represent emotion
- Sew a pillow
- Build a coil pot to contain water
- Demonstrate effort

**FOURTH**

- Recognize complementary and analogous colors
- Weave a radial weaving
- Hand build a slab box
- Use pen and ink appropriately
- Paint with concentrated water colors correctly
- Demonstrate effort

## Appendix I

### Participating Art Educator 8

*Please mark an (X) for the following questions:*

What grades do you teach? \_\_K \_\_1st \_\_ 2nd X 3rd \_\_ 4th X 5th X 6th X 7th X 8th

Do you have your own art room? X Yes \_\_ No

How many days a week do you see each class? 2 days a week for 3 and 5, each day for others

Is art required or is it an elective? \_\_ Required X Elective

How many students do you have in each class? \_\_ 1-10 \_\_ 10-15 X 15-20

*Please respond to the following questions in the format you are most comfortable:*

1) What is the grading system like in your school? (Number Grade, Letter Grade, or Written Response) When grading do you take into account the whole artistic process, the final product, or a combination of both? How are students and parents informed about his or her progress and how often? (Mailed Home Report, Take Home Report, Conference)

In lower school – letter grade. In Middle School – number grade. I DO take into account each child and their level and abilities. I also grade on a daily grade and a completed assignment grade. Parents are notified by a computer system that they can monitor grades at will and also I send out an interim and semester grade and maybe a comment if warranted.

2) If you use a report card or follow a different method instructed by the school, who designed the report? Please attach or mail a blank report when submitting the completed questionnaire.

3) How do you assess students understanding of the material? What criteria do you use when assessing students in-class assignments and why? I grade on how they do the project while following directions. I grade on their class participation and how well they work on a daily basis. After a week's homework the students present their work to the class and get their work critiques. I then give them a letter grade based on their own level and the success of their work.

4) Do you pre-assess and post-assess students work? How? What methods of informal and formal assessment work the best and why? What are the students reactions? See above

5) In what ways do your assessment practices aid students written and oral communicative skills? What would you alter to improve students written and verbal communication? By presenting their work to the class it is enabling them to become comfortable in front of their peers, to accept criticism in a positive setting, to be aware of their own work and know what they

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had trouble with and what they are proud of.

6) What would you include and change about your current assessment system and why?

7) Do you think your approach to assessment is viable for other art educators to use as a tool to assess his or her students works of art, why or why not? **Yes because it has a positive outcome with the student as they view and comment in their peers work and also as they present their own work.**

## Appendix J

### Participating Art Educator 9

*Please mark an (X) for the following questions:*

What grades do you teach? \_\_K \_\_1st \_\_ 2nd \_\_ 3rd \_\_ 4th X 5th X 6th X 7th X 8th

Do you have your own art room? X Yes \_\_ No

How many days a week do you see each class? 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> – 2x

6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> – 3x

Is art required or is it an elective? X Required \_\_ Elective

How many students do you have in each class? \_\_ 1-10 \_\_ 10-15 X 15-20

*Please respond to the following questions in the format you are most comfortable:*

1) What is the grading system like in your school? (Number Grade, Letter Grade, or Written Response) **Pass/Fail** When grading do you take into account the whole artistic process, the final product, or a combination of both? **Primarily the process** How are students and parents informed about his or her progress and how often? (Mailed Home Report, Take Home Report, Conference)

**Report card online; classes are a quarter long**

2) If you use a report card or follow a different method instructed by the school, who designed the report? **Please** attach or mail a blank report when submitting the completed questionnaire.

3) How do you assess students understanding of the material? **Discussion and observation** What criteria do you use when assessing students in-class assignments and why? **Attitude, ability/willingness to follow basic instructions, asking questions to clarify, attention to details, use of materials, taking chances, ability to work with others on collaborative projects,**

4) Do you pre-assess and post-assess students work? **No** How? What methods of informal and formal assessment work the best and why? **Informal; one-on-one and group discussions** What are the students reactions? **Usually positive; I try to have students understand that they can “argue” and “defend” their reasons for what they are doing**

5) In what ways do your assessment practices aid students written and oral communicative skills? **Students begin to articulate the basic vocabulary of the elements of art and principles of design** What would you alter to improve students written and verbal communication?

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I would like to have students all year long rather than one quarter

6) What would you include and change about your current assessment system and why?

Probably to have more of a consistent “paper trail”

7) Do you think your approach to assessment is viable for other art educators to use as a tool to assess his or her students works of art, why or why not?

I can't answer for other teachers, but I focus on the process of creating, problem-solving and personal decision making