

CAUGHT WITH OUR PANTS DOWN: Art Teacher Assessment

“I sought to discover whether the standard forms of teacher evaluation and teacher observation procedures related appropriately to visual arts educators, especially when being evaluated by administrators from a non-arts background.”

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Teacher assessment is a hot topic in today’s high-stakes, test-driven, accountability-focused educational environment. My recent research addresses how high school art educators, under the umbrella of non-tested subjects and grades (NTSG), are assessed in their classroom teaching practices in the United States, Virginia. Based on my findings, it is clear that while the teachers surveyed do not fear accountability, they are wary of being evaluated by those who lack content knowledge in the arts, by methods that are subjective, and with criteria that are inflexible. This article addresses the need to develop open forums that include educators’ voices in order to create better teacher assessments that focus on student learning achievement in authentic and holistic ways. By learning about and sharing resources regarding how teachers in NTSG are evaluated suggestions are made to organize resources that may help develop more authentic assessments for art teachers focusing on meaningful student learning and achievement.

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Jonathan James has taken his pants off. He stands in the front of my ceramics class in his boxer shorts wielding a blow dryer. He stands there because there is an outlet for the blow dryer and he has taken his pants off because Chris Fox sprayed him with a water bottle in an inconvenient location. Jonathan also happens to be standing right by the door of my classroom, the door which the Dean of Faculty, Arnold Trundleburg, is due to walk through in no less than five minutes for a scheduled formal observation of my art teaching. As I stare in horror at Jonathan, a large and athletic star lacrosse player, who is gently waving the blow dryer across the inseam of his khakis, visions of my assessment feedback flicker across my mind . . . *“Ms. Palumbo allows partial nudity in her ceramics class. This is UNACCEPTABLE! Not to mention a violation of Notre Dame Academy’s strict uniform policy.”* In a flash, I unplug the blow dryer and command, “Jonathan James, put your pants on!”

This story, in which the names have been altered, illustrates an extreme example of an art educator’s experience with teacher assessment. I remember the situation vividly. I was a first year art teacher, feeling like I had been unwittingly thrown into a baptism of fire, struggling with classroom management. Many moments of my first year classes were comprised of chaos, and I, as a new teacher, sometimes felt in terror of looming administrators tasked with judging my teaching.

I often felt isolated in my teaching practice due to a lack of visual arts colleagues with whom I could compare notes. I was unsure of what criteria were even being used to assess me, as I come from a fine arts

background with no formal teacher preparation training. I often wondered what other visual art teachers thought about their assessments and observations and where art was considered in the hierarchy of their school’s academic programs. Did these teachers also, during times of assessment, feel unprepared like they were caught with their pants down, so to speak?

Alternatively, were there schools with evaluative strategies that gave meaningful feedback to their educators that, in turn, helped them improve their teaching practices? I certainly hoped so.

These thoughts became the foundation for my research, and were planted in my mind over several years ago while teaching in a small private high school in rural northern Virginia. In order to answer my questions regarding art teacher assessments and evaluations, I designed a survey that addressed how, by whom, and in what ways high school art teachers are assessed in their classroom teaching practices in the state of Virginia. Additionally, my survey addressed the opinions of these art teachers regarding the validity and purposes of their assessments.

Assessment: “It’s Nothing Personal”

Assessment and evaluation both inform each other. Assessments are formative observations that are meant to provide useful feedback for the improvement of teaching practices. Evaluations result in summative judgments and appraisals regarding a teacher’s performance (Assessment & Evaluation, n.d., para. 1). Teacher evaluations vary from state to state and from school to school. In my research, I sought to discover whether the standard forms of teacher evaluation and teacher observation procedures related

appropriately to visual arts educators, especially when being evaluated by administrators from a non-arts background. The very nature of evaluating the arts at all, let alone evaluating how one teaches the arts, poses some very specific difficulties such as the subjective nature of aesthetic preferences (Gholson-Maitland, 1988; Soep, 2004). Educational reform writers at The Hope Street Group stated that, “quality evaluation programs that provide professional development and constructive feedback have the potential to elevate the teaching profession and lead to greater learning in the classroom, benefiting students” (Teacher evaluation playbook, n.d., para. 14). Meaningful evaluation schemas such as these could be relevant to art educators as well as general educators, particularly if the professional development and constructive feedback offered is discipline-specific.

However, the road to developing better assessments has been bumpy. Education reform advocate Stu Silberman (2013) summarized this dilemma:

It is fair to say that bureaucracies, red tape and a checkered reform history all certainly create obstacles to common sense solutions ... Teachers say the system must reflect their unique student populations, and policymakers say hard data must inform decisions. In fact, both needs can be satisfied, but only if diversified teacher voices sit side-by-side with student-centered policy makers. (para. 1)

Silberman (2013) acknowledged the rich opportunity for collaboration that exists between policy makers and educators in non-tested subject areas, “ultimately building trust between stakeholders” (para. 6). He also recognized that “fair assessment of an art teacher... cannot be based on school-wide student scores” (para. 6), and that the project of developing standardized assessments for all grades and subjects was a logistical quagmire, requiring states to invest more time and resources than they had originally expected. Impersonal top-down forms of teacher assessment thus seem doubly harmful: they fail to adequately evaluate the teachers, and they drain the resources of states and districts that try to develop and implement them.

When speaking specifically of art education, we find that the relationship between art teaching and assessment is “best characterized as awkward, if not overtly hostile” (Soep, 2004, p. 579). Of concern to art teachers is the correlation of their evaluation linked to measurable student learning goals that may be outside of their subject area. Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, summarily stated, “Everyone agrees that teacher evaluation is broken. Ninety-nine percent of teachers are rated satisfactory and most evaluations ignore the most important measure of a teacher's success - which is how much their students have learned” (2010, para. 65). Yet, the matter of effectively measuring student learning in art as a tool to evaluate teachers is a complex matter with which districts, schools, and individual educators are still grappling. We can hope and strive for an educational system that trains, employs, and develops competent teachers, however rating 99% of teachers as

satisfactory creates a far too narrow curve and ignores both issues of underperforming teachers and the recognition of high achieving teachers.

The Non-Tested Subjects and Grades (NTSG) Majority: We're All in This Together

Teachers of NTSG comprise the majority of the educators in schools in the United States (Prince, Schuermann, Guthrie, Witham, Milanowski, & Thorn, 2009). Nationally, art educators and, in general, NTSG educators, are assessed in exactly the same way as all other teachers, with little or no differentiation of approach (Education Week, 2013; Regional Educational Laboratory, 2013; TELL survey, 2011). Research about how visual art teachers are assessed is folded into literature that addresses the assessment of NTSG educators who have a curriculum framework, but no standardized testing to indicate student growth performance. Thus, visual art educators are grouped with educators who teach a wide range of disciplines, including drama, music, vocational education, health, foreign languages and even subjects like math and language arts taught in non-tested grades (Regional Educational Laboratory Central, 2013). This group of educators is large and diverse, yet according to the literature, these teachers tend to be assessed in the same ways.

Methodology

To address the problems embedded in the overgeneralized methods of teacher evaluation, I researched what several states are doing to address the educator assessment in non-tested subjects and grades and how the related to the visual arts programs in secondary schools. Examining art

educator evaluation requires an extensive comparative study of educational programs, policy, and even curriculum that scrutinizes the very aims of education. I sought to identify where and how the evaluation of visual art teachers landed within that spectrum.

Survey methodology was well suited for this study because it enabled me to query a potentially large participant group and it was flexible in that I was able to gather both qualitative (written responses) and quantitative (demographic information) data (Adler & Clark, 2008, p. 216). Prior to my survey implementation, I reviewed a variety of assessment tools in order to understand the various ways in which teachers are evaluated and to create relevant questions for inclusion.

Background to the study

In considering questions to include in the survey, I examined existing surveys and questionnaires in educational databases from the New Teacher Center including the "Teaching, Empowering, Leading & Learning: TELL survey"(2011) and "The Widget Effect" by Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, Keeling, Schunck, Palcisco, & Morgan (2009) in order to see how other researchers in the field have approached the evaluation of arts educators and teachers in general (e.g. Burton, 2001; Weisberg, Krosnick, & Bowen, 1996). I reviewed the literature to examine what previous researchers have surveyed in order to reduce possible redundancy of questions, gain relevancy by triangulating appropriate questions, and discover missing questions that ought to be addressed in my survey.

I also used my experience moderating a roundtable at the Annual Assessment in the Arts Conference in

Denver, Colorado 2012 to solicit relevant topics to be included in my survey questions. This conference was especially salient since its purpose was to “add to the body of knowledge of assessment; specifically, how creative academic programs can be appropriately assessed for accreditation, instructor feedback, and the improvement of student learning”(A. Ostrowski, personal communication, November 22, 2011).

Design of the study

The survey consisted of 47 questions grouped into five sections: 1. How are you assessed in the classroom? 2. Who assesses you in the classroom? 3. Why are you assessed? 4. What next? 5. Demographics (see Appendix A). The survey was organized using a combination of five-point Likert scale questions (Likert, 1932) relating to the assessment process, and open-ended questions (Schulman & Presser, 1979) that asked about the participants’ specific experiences with the evaluation of their teaching practice in order to generate easily aggregated quantitative data (Upton & Cook, 2006) and rich qualitative information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I included a section where participants were invited to share their own questions and concerns relating to evaluation procedures as well as a demographic section.

Participants/location of research

The participants in the finalized survey were secondary school art teachers in both public and independent schools in the US state of Virginia. I was primarily interested in surveying teachers in grades 9-12 for two reasons. Firstly, high school teachers are held accountable for imparting art knowledge to their students during a time when

college preparation is considered crucial. Based on these expectations, I believed teachers in these grade levels would be evaluated in a more rigorous fashion. Secondly, as Burton (2001, p. 132) stated, “many elementary schools do not have art specialists or art programs.”

Methods of Data Collection

The survey was made active through SurveyMonkey, a web-based survey platform, on October 8th, 2012. The survey was closed and the responses were collected by March 21st, 2013. I used SurveyMonkey to administer my survey using an email listserv of National Art Education Association (NAEA). I opted to use SurveyMonkey Gold in order to take advantage of the beta statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) and text analysis software included. I used the SPSS software to generate percentile charts and graphs that organized my data visually for data analysis.

Participant Recruitment

I was able to recruit a random sampling of participants with the aid of the Virginia Art Education Association (VAEA), who disseminated my request for participation to its email listserv, for which I designed a consent form. The recruitment email was emailed on November 18th, 2012 and was included in the VAEA winter news print publication (Cubberly, 2013). The recruitment generated a response of 93 participants out of an estimated 496 public and private high schools in the state of Virginia. I based this estimate on high schools that have an enrollment of 80 or more students in order to maintain a viable visual arts program (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

This indicates an approximate 19% response rate.

Data Analysis

The qualitative findings of the open-ended and free response portion of my survey were compiled, coded and categorized. The Likert scale responses provided direction to code the qualitative data into positive, neutral, and negative responses and SurveyMonkey's beta SPSS analysis software was utilized to generate percentiles and rankings of the responses. The quantitative data also provided a comparison base for the qualitative data and was organized visually in the form of charts and graphs and compiled into relevant categories (Alreck & Settle, 2004).

Limitations

The limitations of survey methodology for my research purposes revealed themselves to be the length of the survey, the quality of the responses, and the potentially leading nature of certain questions, although I attempted to avoid any such bias. The length of my survey, 47 questions, was rather cumbersome. Out of the 93 respondents, only 45 completed the entire survey.

Another limitation to this survey may have been its implementation via the NAEA. Though I am certain I was able to survey a random sampling of high school art teachers in Virginia, the majority of the respondents were recruited directly from an email they received from the NAEA. This means that the majority of the art teachers sampled were NAEA members, who may be connected to a larger network of colleagues, more informed regarding assessment practices via NAEA publications, and more accustomed to art education advocacy than non-NAEA

members, which could have potentially skewed responses. However, limitations like this are to be routinely accounted for in many survey implementation procedures (Lavrakas, 2008).

A Distorted Reflection: Using Student Growth Measurements to Assess Visual Arts Teachers

In an article from the Education Week teacher blog, "Teacher in a Strange Land," national board-certified arts educator Nancy Flanagan (2012) summarized a collective opinion regarding the use of standardized testing in the arts to evaluate teachers. She claimed, "the tests tell us nothing about how students will apply artistic skill and expression to their real lives and careers. Further, they tell us nothing about the instructional quality of their teachers" (para. 6). She goes further to state in no uncertain terms, "We measure what we value...[b]ut we won't raise teaching quality in the arts by creating standardized tests" (para. 14). This is a concern voiced by a number of respondents that I surveyed.

The varied opinions about how to assess students in the visual arts have been quite well researched and documented (Boughton, 2004; Davis, 1993; Eisner, 1996; Hetland, Sheridan, Veenema & Winner, 2007; Stronge & Tucker, 2005). It is either a "blessing or a curse" (Boughton, p. 588, 2004) that there has been no commonly adopted state or national standardized measure implemented. Proponents of using standardized assessments and standards of learning would argue that the issue of including art in the assessed category is an interesting one. Assessment is what makes you legitimate. Flanagan (2012) opposed using standardized tests in the arts as a measure of job security and

stated, “this is like saying thank goodness for all those infarctions, because now we can staff our high-tech cardiac unit” (para. 7). The reality is that students learn in multiple ways just as teachers teach in multiple ways. There is no way to standardize this, nor should there be. Holding a teacher to standards that are not relevant within his or her curriculum or the subject they teach is demoralizing and counterproductive (Flanagan, 2012; Schmoker, 2012).

It is disconcerting that there is such an obvious disconnect among previous research regarding how art educators are evaluated when now more than ever, their evaluations are directly correlated and weighted according to student learning and academic achievement. This is a weight felt emotionally and professionally by educators across subject areas. Educators may feel wary about the purposes and aims of their assessments and may believe that, “teacher evaluation will continue to be nothing more than what teachers and administrators have aptly called a dog-and-pony show” (Schmoker, 2012, para.15) and is furthermore an unproductive use of time and resources. Art educators who at times feel isolated in their teaching practice, may even fear the process and perceive it as a way to weed out teachers “the way a victim would regard a sniper: As a way to pick them off one by one” (Randall, 2012, para.12). These are strong concerns that feed questions regarding who is actually responsible for performing the assessments of art teachers and how to provide them with the data that demonstrates measurable student learning in the visual arts.

According to Stronge and Tucker (2005), there may be many obstacles to the effective use of student performance

data in the evaluation of educators; they stressed the importance of “maximiz[ing] the benefits and minimiz[ing] the liabilities in linking student learning and teacher effectiveness” (p. 96). A significant liability is that the ways in which a student learns in the art classroom may not be apparent to an evaluator who is not knowledgeable about the field of visual arts. Stronge and Tucker addressed this question stating that “measures of student learning are vitally important to judging the effectiveness of teachers and schools, but should never usurp professional judgment that integrates knowledge of other factors that affect instruction” (p. 96). The dilemma for art educators arises when the evaluator does not have a background or appreciation of visual art. Baeder (2012) brings some clarity to the conversation of teacher assessment and accountability. He stated, “Teacher resistance to evaluation is a red herring. The skill of evaluators, not the nature of evaluations, is the real issue” (para. 9).

The Heart of the Matter: Who is Assessing Us?

Understanding the visual arts is an important factor to consider when determining the assessment of art educators. The disadvantage with evaluation structures that attach a disproportionate significance to student learning outcomes is that their designers may not know how to measure aesthetics, conceptual development of creativity, (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) or studio habits of mind (Hetland, et al., 2007). Understanding the visual arts is a complex journey that fosters not only critical thinking and problem solving strategies but curiosity and a connection to culture and our place in society.

The people tasked with providing and implementing educational personnel evaluations are generally administrators such as principals, vice principals, department chairs, and deans of faculty (Bergsen, 2004; Dobbs, 1972; Eisner, 1996; Schmoker, 1999) within the school. Increasingly, art teachers themselves are asked to practice a reflective praxis and participate in their assessments. In what follows, the findings from the survey reveal the scope of how these art teachers are assessed and how they feel about their assessments.

Survey Says: Art Teachers Provide the Data

Out of all my survey questions, the responses from Questions 19 and 20 revealed the very heart of my research. Question 19 asked: *Do you feel that the person or people assessing you have a good understanding of the arts?*, and question 20 followed up with: *Is it important to you that the person assessing you have and understanding of the arts?* In question 19, the overwhelming majority, 63.8%, of the respondents indicated that their assessors ‘infrequently’ or ‘never’ had an understanding of the arts. 22.4% marked ‘sometimes’. Only 13.8% of the respondents indicated ‘frequently’ or ‘always’.

The response to Question 20 indicates that teachers truly desire to be assessed by those who have an understanding of the arts. 82.5% of the respondents indicated that it is ‘extremely’ and ‘very’ important to be assessed by those that possess knowledge about art. 15.8% of the respondents marked ‘somewhat’, 1.8% marked ‘not really’ and no respondent marked ‘never’. This supports my

hypothesis that art teachers are assessed by those who may not comprehend the arts, and simply, that these teachers wish to be assessed by those who do. One respondent made the humorous comparison, “How is a ballerina to assess a plumber?”

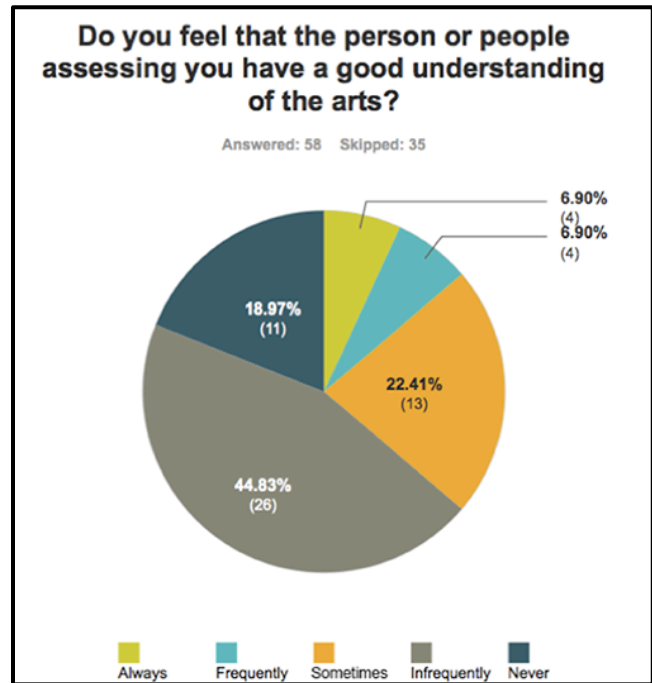


Figure 1. Art teachers perception of their assessors understanding of the arts.

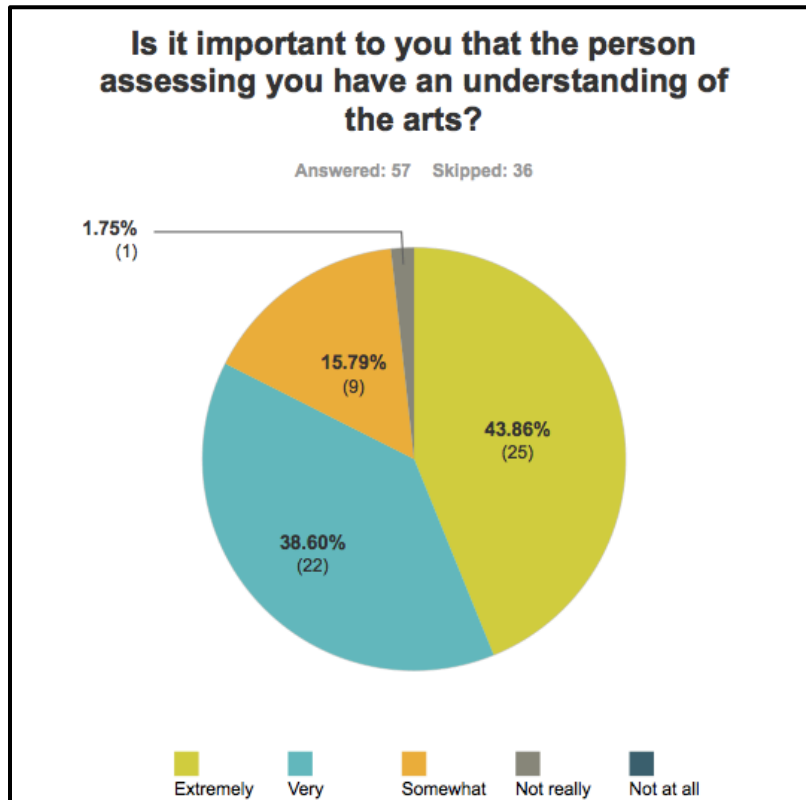


Figure 2. Importance of assessors understanding of the arts to art teachers

**The Results Are in: “How is a Ballerina to Assess a Plumber?”
Concluding Thoughts**

Several recurring themes emerged in the resulting data analysis that relate to the art teachers personal experiences in the classroom. I coded and categorized participant statements into positive, neutral and negative grouping. Within the positive spectrum, art teachers are 1. Vested in their pedagogy, 2. Desire high expectations, 3. Want meaningful feedback, and 4. Crave collaborative evaluations.

1. VESTED IN THEIR PEDAGOGY: Art teachers love what they do. According to my survey, art teachers are primarily focused on student achievement, wellbeing, and engagement, and consider their jobs to

be extremely rewarding because they genuinely enjoy working with students. Statements from the responses included, “my students are terrific. It helps to love the people you work with,” and “I get to help the next generation to become thinking, productive members of society.” These teachers are vested in their pedagogy and have their students’ best interests at heart.

2. DESIRE FOR HIGH EXPECTATIONS: Also, art teachers do not fear accountability; they desire it. One respondent even went so far as to write that his/her assessment went, “too well - I received a perfect evaluation - no one is perfect.” The respondents did not express any wariness of constructive criticism, but lamented the superficiality of their assessments. One admitted, “They are measuring a rather low bar of general teaching. They are not measuring what it means to be a good art teacher.”

3. MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK:

Relatedly, art teachers crave consistent, honest, and meaningful feedback. One respondent wrote that his/her feedback was, “nothing that helped me to teach better.” Another complained about the feedback quality, “It was basically you are doing a great job, keep it up, sign here,” while another wrote, “the written report was 1 sentence stating that I meet standards. There was no real feedback.”

4. COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION:

Art teachers desire a collaborative role in the development of their assessments and also desire open dialogue. One respondent wrote, “A self-evaluation lets me advocate for myself, giving information that cannot be determined from a few classroom visits; being observed by multiple people brings objectivity.” Other respondents welcomed the assessment process as a form of self-advocacy, stating, “[Administration] can see the results of my efforts” and “It is important for administration to know what we do and why.”

Overall, art teachers indicated that they would welcome more rigorous and frequent formative assessment that involve collective goal setting and self-reflection practices. One respondent wrote, “We were doing amazing things in the art program and they knew we'd won awards so they said it was all great. They really had no idea what I was doing with the kids to get those results,” while another claimed, “My personal goals for [my students] exceed the administrations’.” One art teacher with many years of experience replied that his/her assessments were,

“meaningless and unhelpful. Administration doesn't see that even a 33+ [year] teacher can get better.” The responses I gathered consistently indicated that this particular set of art teachers desired to be assessed in a more meaningful and rigorous fashion that honored the accomplishments of students and the methods that art teachers utilized to foster learning.

Areas of Concern

Throughout my analysis of survey responses I was impressed and touched by how art teachers advocated for their passion to teach with such positive and proactive statements, however, major areas of concern surfaced as well. Significant themes emerged and I coded and grouped them as follows: Art teachers desire: 1. More depth, 2. A differentiated approach, 3. Less babysitting, 4. Time and resources, and 5. Evaluations by those *who know art*.

1. MORE DEPTH: Art teachers are wary of ‘snapshot’ assessments that result in a summative evaluation. One respondent wrote, “Sometimes there are efforts unseen in the observation. Evaluators should be privy to the time and effort that goes into your planning.” Other respondents stated, “I do a lot more than what an AP [Assistant Principal] observes in 20 minutes,” “I feel like they are just getting it done” and one participant wrote, “It is only a glimpse of what I do from a perspective of someone who does not teach my subject.” Many of the art teachers surveyed hold themselves to high standards of self-imposed criteria. One respondent wrote, “I'm hard enough on myself and understand what is required. I make adjustments constantly. I usually

don't need some person to see a dog and pony show for 30 minutes and let that tell others if I'm a bad teacher or not."

2. A DIFFERENTIATED

APPROACH: Many of the art teachers perceive the majority of their assessments to be unhelpful, superficial, and unrelated to their specific teaching practices. One respondent wrote, "We are not assessed differently and I always feel they are trying to force us into a universal mold" while another curtly stated, "Exact same process for everyone." It would be beneficial to administrators and art teachers alike to directly focus on developing assessments that are specific to art teaching strategies.

When asked directly how they felt about their assessments one respondent wrote, "There are no areas in my assessment that relate to my own content area or address the relevancy or impact of my teaching pedagogy." One respondent wrote, "They are cumbersome and provide little concrete information to help me improve instruction." and another participant boldly asserted his/her assessments were "a farce." One respondent summarized, "I don't like the new assessment standards. I think they put too much weight on things we as art teachers cannot control and do not include peer reviews for teachers in the same content area. It relies on assessors with no art content knowledge." Clearly, there is room for improvement and open discussion.

3. LESS "BABYSITTING": Art teachers are weary of being assessed on their classroom management skills, especially when their classes are overloaded and consist of a population

of students with varied learning needs.

One respondent felt that his/her assessment focused on if there were "no fights in the classroom." Other participants lamented that administration only cared that they were "babysitting" troublesome students. Some of the teachers surveyed also expressed concern regarding the fairness and objectivity of their evaluations. One respondent wrote, "I have found the greatest difficulty comes ...when personal differences cloud a fair evaluation."

4. TIME AND RESOURCES: Art teachers are also deeply concerned with developing authentic assessment tools that can realistically measure individual and collective student learning in their classes.

One respondent wrote, "What they are looking for is for all students to improve on measurable criteria - in art we see everyone as an individual, so across one class 100% improvement is unrealistic." Another conceded, "I have an issue with having to produce data to show student progress. Administrators want numbers to throw around, which are often very difficult to produce for art assessments." Yet another participant wrote, "Some of the standards determined for SOL [standards of learning] testing don't fit in the art room."

Art teachers also expressed a vested interest in having the flexibility to develop and use quality arts curriculum. One teacher wrote, "Curriculum needs to grow and change to meet the needs of the current students so being able to adapt or change curriculum is important to student learning." Some of the respondents expressed a desire to have their assessors recognize that lesson plans need not be followed exactly. One

art teacher wrote, “[There is] a lot of pressure to do lesson plans a set way that feels a bit like putting a square peg in a round hole” while another stated, “Lesson plans should not always be followed to the letter, there must be room for spontaneity and innovation as the conditions reflect.”

5. EVALUATIONS BY THOSE WHO KNOW ART: Ultimately, art teachers *emphatically* expressed a desire to be evaluated by those who have current art content knowledge. When asked if their evaluators had any art knowledge one teacher responded, “In the past, not at all. This year I have a person with some art experience but from long, long ago - so they really do not know what is current in the arts.” Another bluntly stated that his/her evaluator “does not have a clue.” When asked if it was important to be evaluated by people with art knowledge one teacher wrote, “What a crazy idea, having someone actually know what they are looking at!” One respondent summarized “I want someone who knows what great art instruction looks like to tell me what I can change or add to enhance instruction for my students. I want them to see how we educate beyond the classroom and be provided with other options that would benefit the students and me.” In other words, this respondent does not want any more ballerinas assessing plumbers.

These concerns appear to result from a lack effective communication, not finger pointing or blame shifting. The art teachers surveyed expressed a desire to be on the same page as those evaluating them and generously presumed that their evaluators valued the same criteria for education that they did as illustrated. Two participants who responded illustrated this, “[Evaluators]

do [value the same criteria as me], they just don’t know what it looks like in art” and “I believe our administration wants us to become better teachers.” A final respondent put his/her foot down and asserted, “... schools need a separate VISUAL ARTS Instructional Specialist. Someone who has been educated, trained, and has experience in art education. Not music. Not P.E. Not theater. VISUAL ART.”

Suggestions for Change: Learning to Dance Together

Throughout my investigations I learned visual art teacher evaluation research is rare but quite useful. I believe that it is important to continued evaluation research with newly practicing high school art teachers. The attrition rate for novice teachers is dramatic and concerning. Less than half of newly licensed teachers continue in the education profession after their 5th year of teaching (Jacob, Vidyarthi, & Carroll, 2012). This statistic applies to art teachers as well. Educational reformists and policy makers would be wise to address issues of retention in the teaching field and teacher evaluation research directly relates to this area. Researchers could gain a fresh perspective and new insights on this topic by connecting with art teacher preparation programs and asking enrolled students how they would like to be evaluated when they begin their careers.

On the other hand, we must learn more about those responsible for evaluating visual art teachers. Do they indeed lack background knowledge in the arts, and do they consider this a relevant concern that may affect their ability in conducting appropriate evaluations? Would these evaluators be

receptive to information to help inform them what art teaching looks like? A rich area for continued research would be to survey administration and those tasked with implementing teacher assessment in order to gather their opinions and feedback regarding the evaluation of visual arts educators.

The next logical step would be to cultivate informational tools that help inform administration about what they should look for in art teaching. Suggestions include creating an assortment of short videos, handouts, and brochures for art teachers to select from that specifically illustrate pedagogical aspects related to art education, curriculum, and how students learn in the arts classroom. This could give administrators the resources and tools to be more effective observers of good art teaching practices.

Because teacher-evaluation reform is a relatively new movement, very little technical assistance or best-practice advice is universally available. Realizing resources might be useful, Hope Street Group designed an online one-stop resource center to help states, school districts, policymakers, administrators, and teachers plan and design quality educator evaluation programs (Teacher evaluation playbook, 2011). It makes good sense to track and compile what has worked and what has not when it comes to evaluation reforms so policymakers can learn how other states have overcome obstacles and build the best systems possible.

Finally, research in developing mentorship programs for novice art teachers is worth investigating. Imagine a network of re-certified National Board Member art teachers that mentors, coaches, and peer assesses newly practicing art teachers in their first 1-3

years of teaching. These veteran teachers could revitalize their own teaching practice by working with a younger set and help enhance the professionalism of art teaching.

Measuring Value, Not Valuing Measures: The Way Art Teachers Teach

An art teacher may encourage “studio habits of mind” such as stretching and exploring, expressing, envisioning, understanding community, and persisting within their students (Hetland, et al., 2007). These may not appear as tangible or measurable outcomes, but are intrinsically related to the process and concepts of aesthetic development and understanding. Although it is important to showcase the art products of our students, it does our teaching a disservice to be evaluated on mere tangible art outcomes, especially when the evaluator may not have a background to understand the aesthetic meaning of such artifacts. However, many art teachers may feel the need to have their students learn about and produce conventional pieces using traditional media in order to please a community within the school, rather than explore other authentic and personally meaningful avenues because they might run the risk of being misunderstood. To go the conventional route is to paint ourselves into a corner. Sadly, many art teachers feel that their hands are tied when it comes to teaching lessons that the “parents and administration will like” (survey results, 2013).

The lack of differentiation between the evaluation of teachers, regardless of their subject, raises the question: what person or group of people would be the most appropriate assessors of visual art teachers? Based on my

findings, these evaluators would ideally be people who understand the criteria, philosophy and aesthetic meanings and approaches in art teaching and learning. These evaluators would have better resources and background knowledge to inform formative and summative evaluations regarding how an art teacher performs in their classroom and teaching practice, as supported by documentation of student learning and outcomes.

Teacher assessment and evaluation is a complex and, at times, emotionally charged aspect of the educational system in the United States. Though teacher evaluation reform is currently in the forefront of discussions held by stakeholders and policy makers, more research must be conducted that connects the voices of educators in content specific subject areas and non-tested subjects and grades. Art teachers who responded to my survey expressed a fundamental desire to be evaluated by those who *understand the arts*. This uncomplicated appeal is a natural response to convoluted, yet perfunctory evaluation systems that appear to value only that which they can measure.

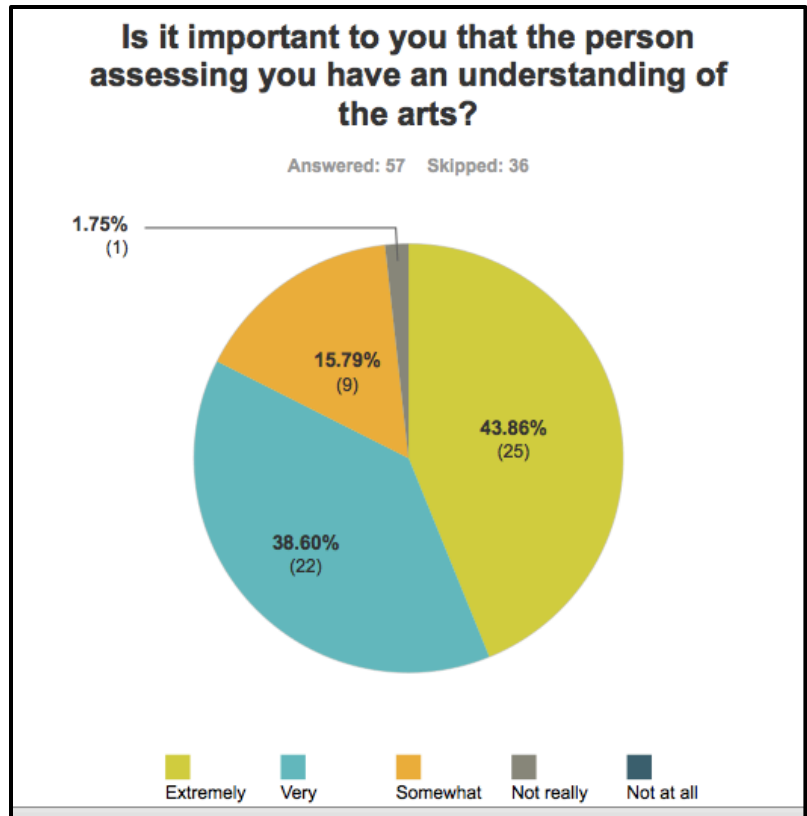
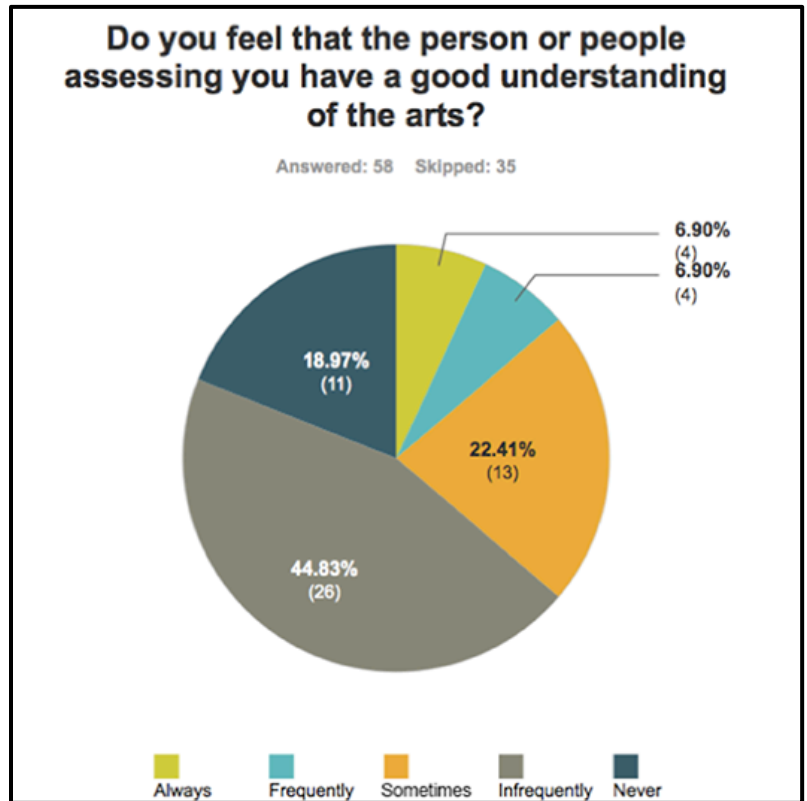


Figure 1. (top) Art teachers perception of their assessors understanding of the arts.

Figure 2. (bottom) Importance of assessors understanding of the arts to art teachers.

Appendix A

Q1. Are you currently a high school visual art teacher in the state of Virginia?

Yes, No

SECTION I: HOW ARE YOU ASSESSED IN THE CLASSROOM?

Q2. How are you assessed in your teaching practices? (Please check all that apply).

Observation (administration), Written feedback (including email), Peer evaluation
Student feedback, Parental feedback, Self-evaluation, Other

Q3. How often are you assessed in your teaching practice?

Very frequently, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never

Q4. Do you feel that you are provided with criteria to understand why and how you are assessed?

Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never

Q5. Do you understand the criteria on which you are being assessed?

Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never

Q6. Do you agree with the criteria on which you are being assessed?

Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never

Q7. When was the last time you were assessed?

Q8. How were you assessed? Please list assessment tools/methods.

Q9. Who assessed you? Please list.

Q10. How did this assessment go?

Extremely well, Well, Fair, Poorly, Very poorly

Q11. Was there feedback regarding this assessment?

Yes, No

Q12. Please describe the form of your assessment feedback. Check all that apply.

Verbal formal (ie: Meeting), Verbal casual (ie:

Hallway conversation), Written formal (ie: report), Written casual (ie: email/memo), Other

Q13. What did your assessment feedback focus on? Check all that apply.

Classroom management, Standards, Learning goals, Art outcomes/products, Curriculum implementation, Professional development, Housekeeping (paperwork, grading . . .), Extracurricular duties

Q14. What do you think are the most important areas to receive feedback on after you have been assessed? Check all that apply.

Classroom management, Standards, Learning goals, Art outcomes/products, Curriculum implementation, Professional development, Housekeeping (paperwork, grading . . .), Extracurricular duties

Q15. Please describe the quality of your assessment feedback.

Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, Negative, Other

Q16. Are you able to provide feedback regarding your assessments?

Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never, Other

Q17. Are all faculty in your school/district assessed in the same way that you are?

Yes, No, Not sure

SECTION II: WHO ASSESSES YOU IN THE CLASSROOM

Q18. Who assesses you? (Check all that apply)

Administrator (within the school), Peer, Self, Student, Evaluator (outside of the school), Other

Q19. Do you feel that the person or people assessing you have a good understanding of the arts?

Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never, Other

Q20. Is it important that the person assessing you have an understanding of the arts?

Extremely, Very, Somewhat, Not really, Not at all, Other

Q21. Do you believe the person/people assessing you value the same criteria for education that you do?

They agree completely, They agree most of the

time, They agree some of the time, They do not agree often, They disagree, Other

SECTION III: WHY ARE YOU ASSESSED?

Q22. What are the purposes of your assessments? Please give three.

Q23. What do you think the purposes of your assessments should be? Please give three.

Q24. What is your preferred method(s) of being assessed? For example: observation, peer evaluation, self-reflection, a combination of, etc. If you have experience and a preference using a particular and/or specific type of evaluation tool, please briefly describe this method.

Q25. Why is this/are these your preferred method(s)?

Q26. Are you aware of national assessment standards for art educators?

Yes, No, Not sure

Q27. By what standards do you feel you are held accountable in your teaching practice? Please list three.

Q28. Are you aware and informed of professional development opportunities?

Yes, No, Not sure

Q29. Are professional development opportunities made available to you?

Yes, No, Not sure

SECTION IV: WHAT NEXT?

Q30. Do you feel your assessments accurately reflect your teaching practice? In other words, do your values/standards mirror the values/standards you are being assessed upon?

Always, Frequently, Sometimes, Infrequently, Never, Other

Q31. Please explain your reasons for your previous response.

Q32. Do you feel your assessments are useful for administration?

Q33. Please explain your reasons for your previous response.

Q34. Do you feel your assessments are useful for your own professional development?

Q35. How satisfied are you with your job?

Very satisfied, Satisfied, Somewhat satisfied, Unsatisfied, Very unsatisfied, Other

Q36. Please give three reasons in order of importance (one being the most important reason) why you ARE satisfied with your job.

Q37. Please give three reasons in order of importance (one being the most important reason) why you are NOT satisfied with your job.

Q38. Please tell me how you feel about your assessments.

Q39. What suggestions can you make regarding other areas of concern that I should ask about?

SECTION V: DEMOGRAPHICS

Q40. What category below includes your age?

17 or younger, 18 – 20, 21 – 29, 30 – 39, 40 – 49, 50 – 59, 60 or older

Q41. What is your gender?

Male, Female, No response

Q42. What is your ethnicity?

American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Island, White, Other

Q43. What is your educational background?

Check all that apply.

High School or GED, Associate Degree, Some College, Bachelors Degree, Some Masters, Masters Degree, PhD, Other

Q44. How long have you been teaching art on the secondary level?

0-3 years, 4 – 7 years, 8 – 11 years, 12 – 15 years, 16 – 19 years, 20 – 23 years, 24 + years, Other

Q45. Do you have other art teaching experiences? Check all that apply.

Art on a cart, Camp, Museum program, Continuing education program, After school program, Private tutor, K-8th grade, University

level, Service learning and/or Charitable volunteer work, Other

Q46. What type of school do you currently teach it?

Public, Private, Charter, Other

Q47. What is your annual salary?

10,000 – 20,000, 20,001 – 30,000, 31,000 – 40,000, 40,001 – 50,000, 51,000 – 60,000, 61,000 – 70,000, 71,000 – 80,000, 81,000 – 90,000 – 90,001 – 100,000

Thank you for choosing to participate in this survey.

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