

When I was a visual arts educator, a staple of art class was the art project: the kind that gets hung in the hallways and displayed at district-wide art shows. Typically, each unit included a culminating art project. They may have been 2-dimensional or 3-dimensional, digital or physical, and comprised of any of a variety of materials. I used this assessment genre for all my classes, kindergarten through high school. Even when I was a student in my visual arts education classes, I made artwork for the same reason: so that my teachers could assess my understanding of the concepts we had been learning in class through my creation of artwork.

The artwork that is made for this purpose is typically created after a period of learning in the form of a final, summative assessment. Depending on teacher preferences, the amount of experience the students have, and the format of the class, there may be whole-group instruction or individual learning before the summative assessment. Regardless, the creation of an artwork at the end of a unit is quite common.

In my experience, the art project is made over several class periods during in-class studio time. When students have studio time to create art, they talk with each other and they talk with me. This time of communication allows students to continue to develop their understanding of the concepts we learned in class. We are able to ask each other questions, continue to form our respective understandings, and the assessment can be formative in nature, too. As the student is creating, I can ask questions and give guidance to help them better understand the concepts from class.

Critical Analysis

Since the practice of assigning art projects as assessments is so common, and because I may use it again as an art teacher someday, it makes sense to step back and examine it critically. I did this using [Rubric 2.0](#), the assessment rubric that I have been developing for CEP 813, as well as the principles of Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) and formative assessment. So far with Rubric 2.0, I have identified five criteria by which to assess other assessments.

RUBRIC 2.0 - CRITERIA 1, 2, 3

The first three criteria of Rubric 2.0 are: (1) provide direct and specific feedback, (2) provide transparent learning targets, and (3) allow for self-assessment. When used in conjunction with a well-crafted rubric, those three criteria are all met. I wrote about this in a [blog post](#) in which I critically examined a rubric that I used to assess students' comic strips. Comic strips are one example of the type of student art projects that I am writing about here.

If a teacher were to assign an art project without providing a clearly written rubric in advance, it is much less likely that the student will know the learning targets or have the same opportunities for self-assessment. It would also likely be more challenging for the teacher to provide direct and specific feedback in writing, although it could be provided verbally.

Also, according to the guidelines of backwards design, Stage 2 of Understanding by Design requires the teacher to determine evidence for understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). It is in this stage that the teacher must consider what evidence should be produced by the students, such as an art project, and create rubrics or other criteria-related guidelines to assess those projects. Again, using a rubric would help to show that the teacher used backwards design in determining the projects to be assigned.

RUBRIC 2.0 - CRITERION 4

The fourth criterion I identified in Rubric 2.0 is that the assessment requires only target knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to complete. Target KSAs are the skills that the assessment is truly meant to assess, whereas non-target KSAs are those that are assessed even though they are not intended to be. For example, if a math quiz includes a story problem, the KSAs are the math skills necessary to solve the problem. Non-target skills that are inadvertently assessed may include the reading skills that are required to decipher the story problem unless an accommodation is made for the reading. Eliminating non-target KSAs from the assessment is one way to create valid and fair assessments (Trumbull & Lash, 2013).

The creation of an art project in art class would usually assess only target KSAs, such as the understanding of a particular artist's style, how to use certain techniques or the use of the elements of art and principles of design. However, non-target KSAs may also be assessed if the student has a language barrier or reading challenge that prevents them from understanding the assignment. Non-target KSAs may also be assessed if the student has a physical disability that prevents him or her from demonstrating their understanding of course concepts.

RUBRIC 2.0 - CRITERION 5

The final criterion I identified in Rubric 2.0 is that the assessment requires transfer of knowledge to demonstrate understanding. According to Bloom (as cited in Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), "To understand is to be able to wisely and effectively use—transfer— what we know, in context; to apply knowledge and skill effectively, in realistic tasks and settings" (p. 7). A well-crafted assessment that assesses students' ability to transfer what they know should include an authentic performance task (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The creation of an art project to demonstrate understanding of technique and style is an authentic assessment. It requires transfer of knowledge. That is why this assessment genre is still so prevalent in art rooms.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AND UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN

In addition to the criteria of Rubric 2.0, I examined the genre of the art project in the context of formative assessments and Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

The social environment of the art studio is conducive to the kind of "joint productive activity" that Vygotsky referred to (Trumbull & Lash, 2013, p. 5). In this productive work environment,

students may learn from and be guided by others with greater expertise, such as a teacher or classmate. Thus, even though this assessment is summative, it can also be formative, with students continuing to learn from teachers or classmates.

Formative assessment is best when it can be used to provide an understanding for teachers of students' thinking. One way to accomplish this is through teacher questioning, either formal or informal (Trumbull & Lash, 2013). Again, this can be accomplished during work time through questioning.

Recommendations

The creation of artworks to demonstrate an understanding of techniques, artists' styles and elements and principles of art and design has been done for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. This continues to be a standard in art rooms. Based on the readings over the past few weeks, I recommend the continued use of the art project to allow students to demonstrate their understanding of course concepts.

When used in conjunction with a carefully crafted rubric, the art project is an assessment genre that can provide students with direct and specific feedback (Black and William, 2008), provide transparent learning targets (Shepard, 2000), and allow for self-assessment (Shepard, 2000). Art projects are an authentic assessment that requires students to transfer learning to demonstrate understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

In the social atmosphere of the art room, students have the opportunity to learn from teachers and other students in a "joint productive activity" (Trumbull & Lash, 2013, p. 5). Teachers are able to use both formal and informal questioning to understand students' learning (Trumbull & Lash, 2013).

Digital Context

The creation and sharing of art projects in a digital context can be challenging. Because the social environment of the art room cannot be replicated in a digital context, it has been difficult to find online art programs.

Nevertheless, it appears there is a continuing increase in demand for digital classes. With the advancements in technologies, more opportunities to find new solutions are being created all the time.

For now, sharing final artworks and works in progress could be done through photographing and sharing work online. One option for sharing would be through a personal website like Weebly. Another option would be through Photobucket or Flickr. A digital group hangout, such as Zoom, used in conjunction with a digital photostream, like Photobucket or Flickr could be a potential solution for sharing and discussing artwork.

Another option could be sharing through a course management system. A favorite CMS of mine currently is Seesaw, which is so simple elementary students can use it independently, yet so fun and sophisticated, even college students typically enjoy using it. Through Seesaw, students and teachers can share work and others can comment on it. This might be one solution for the formative part of the assessment, where students can ask questions and others can comment or share advice.

References

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