stage of development of the child
technique and skill
organization of the work

expression
reaction
behavior

measuring progress
measuring product

Historical Analysis of Assessment in Art Education
Historically, the field of art education has not emphasized assessment. For a large part of the 20th century, significance of the art experience was placed not so much on learning in art as on art as a tool for self-expression. Assessment as a measure of student learning in art was generally relegated to the category of irrelevant necessity.

Assessment did enjoy a brief period of respect in the 1920s when scientific approaches to education were undertaken. Then, the primary purpose was measuring artistic aptitude or intelligence. The McAdory Art Test of 1929, the Meier-Seashore Art Judgment Test of 1930 (Gaitskell, 1958; Meier, 1966; Gaitskell & Hurwitz, 1970), and the Goodenough Measurement of Intelligence by Drawing (Goodenough, 1926) were examples of such instruments. These tests were not meant to be a means of determining cognitive growth or progress in art on a day-to-day basis in school. Gaitskell (1958) referred to them as “more a guessing game than a serious measuring device of appreciation” (p. 400). Eisner (1966) in some ways applauded this failure, pointing out that the scarcity of standardized testing in art has enabled art education to escape many of the evaluation problems prevalent in other academic areas.

But in the immediate post-WWII era, suggestions for assessment began to appear in some art education texts. However, the strength of the child-centered and self-expressive educational movements, inspired in the earlier part of the century (by among other writings, those of Freud and Dewey) still prevailed. As a result, there was less emphasis placed on the assessment of student art products and more on the artmaking process itself (e.g., the behaviors and interactions of students while drawing, painting, and sculpting). Even so, evidence of the inclusion of evaluative procedures in texts prior to the 1960s is sparse. Art Today by Faulkner, Ziegfeld, and Hill, published in 1941, a popular secondary-level text that emphasized problem-solving skills, made no mention of assessment or evaluation. The following year, Victor D’Amico’s Creative Teaching in Art and the subsequent second edition of 1953 did not reference evaluation in any form. Instead, D’Amico focused on art processes entirely.

The first edition of Lowenfeld’s Creative and Mental Growth in 1947 focused on the psychological development of students through unhindered creative activity, but made no mention of evaluation or grading. However, “exercises” at the end of each chapter were, in a sense, a form of evaluation, but were not identified as such. In the 1952 second edition, Lowenfeld endorsed evaluation at every stage of a child’s development and included charts of evaluation criteria. He defined evaluation in terms of growth: emotional, intellectual, physical (in creative activity), perceptual, social, aesthetic, and creative. He called for the development of objective criteria based on three points: (1) the stage of development of the child, (2) technique and skill, and (3) the organization of the work. Lowenfeld was careful to point out, though, his belief that the evaluation of children’s art products limits their creative freedom by forcing them to focus on the finished product and not on the creative process (Lowenfeld, 1952).

By 1957, in the third edition, Lowenfeld, who had been less than enthusiastic about assigning grades in art, acknowledged the reality of grades within the educational environment. He suggested that progress indicated learning, and that progress could be measured. Thus grades could be used to indicate progress and, therefore, learning. Lowenfeld continued to warn, however, that grades that focus on the product divert the child’s attention from the creative process and are consequently detrimental to the child’s healthy psychological development.
In the elementary grades, especially, art teachers continued to emphasize creative art production and self-expression at the expense of structured lessons and measuring the progress of students. Prior to the 1980s, their mission continued to be that of fostering healthy child development. The role of the art teacher was primarily that of media facilitator.

moreover, suggested a list of appraisal techniques for use by art teachers: objective and essay-type tests, anecdotal records, observations, checklists, interviews, and cumulative records. He continued to refine his ideas and by 1970, in the second edition, had modified the categories to expression, reaction, and behavior. In both editions, he advocated objective-based appraisal. Also, in the second edition, he introduced the idea of using Bloom’s taxonomy (1954) in the appraisal process, a concept that continued to reappear in subsequent editions including the sixth edition of 1965.

June McFee’s 1961 first edition of Preparation for Art advocated the then popular, but short-lived, trend away from letter grades for children. Furthermore, she flatly stated a belief that would soon be echoed by Brittain “letter grades have little value in art” (p. 209). McFee, who placed little emphasis on the evaluation of learning or the assignment of grades in the first edition of Preparation for Art, altered her position in the second edition published in 1970. In it, she included an entire chapter on evaluation. This chapter listed several techniques that teachers could use to obtain information about student learning in art. She recommended observational strategies and provided examples of observational criteria and corresponding forms for recording data.

Manuel Barkan was well known for being perhaps the most influential figure during the 1960s in leading the field toward greater structure and discipline. Indeed, we will have more to say about Barkan later. Surprisingly, however, in his 1960 book, Through Art to Creativity, Barkan made little reference to evaluation and no recommendations regarding assessment or the assigning of grades.

In 1965, Frank Wachowiak and Theodore Ramsey co-authored Emphasis: Art. The book was well received, and a second edition was published in 1971. Emphasis: Art was aimed at the elementary art teacher and provided comprehensive guidance and instruction in art processes appropriate for elementary age students, but did not address evaluation.

Thus far, we have reviewed the checkered history of assessment theories and practices in art education up to about 1970. From this point, we will briefly review a transition in the field that began to ferment in the 1960s and eventually became a major development. This has to do with the growing interest in structure, as well as teachers’ reactions to that development.
An important catalyst for this change of view were the writings of Jerome Bruner, particularly his 1963 *The Process of Education*. Although Bruner’s work was limited to the teaching of language arts, art education writers applied his ideas to their field. One of Bruner’s basic arguments was that learning is more effective if it takes place within the framework of a discipline. Building on Bruner’s ideas, Manuel Barkan (1962, 1963) proposed the concept of structure and discipline in art education. This theme was the focus of the Penn State Seminar in Art Education for Research and Curriculum Development held at the Pennsylvania State University in 1965. The ideas generated at this conference resulted in an influential publication popularly known as the *Penn State Papers* (Mattil, 1966), published the following year.

Two anthologies appearing in 1966, Ralph Smith’s *Aesthetics and Criticism in Art Education* and *Readings in Art Education* by Elliot Eisner and David Ecker further promoted the idea of art as a distinct academic discipline. Smith brought together several essays on art history, art and film criticism, and educational theory. Eisner and Ecker assembled a number of writings by curriculum theorists, psychologists, educational philosophers, and aestheticians, as well as art educators, past and present. One chapter contained five, mostly theoretical, articles on evaluation. Eisner’s “Evaluating Children’s Art” (pp 384-388) was the most valuable in this regard. In it, the author addressed a number of issues—philosophical, theoretical, and practical—but in the end, Eisner, like others, advocated evaluating progress rather than product.

The transition from an emphasis on self-expression to a focus on structure and content was occurring primarily in the academic literature, namely, *Art Education Journal* and *Studies in Art Education* and in some art education graduate programs, but not in the schools—in many instances, not even in teacher-training programs. Indeed, this disconnect existed not only in the 1960s but continued right on through the 1970s and into the 1980s.

It is not surprising then that, given this fact along with the lingering effects of the child-centered and self-expressive movements in the post-war period, teachers of art largely ignored the exhortations of structure advocates. In the elementary grades, especially, art teachers continued to emphasize creative art production and self-expression at the expense of structured lessons and measuring the progress of students. Prior to the 1980s, their mission continued to be that of fostering healthy child development. The role of the art teacher was primarily that of media facilitator.

But all of this began to change in the 1980s. The movement of Discipline-Based Art Education, or “DBAE,” materialized, along with the influence of a significant outside source, The Getty Center for Education in the Arts. Without chronicling these developments or ignoring the fact that they are not without controversy, there is no doubt that DBAE and Getty have dramatically changed the mood and outlook in art education, right down to the classroom.

Without chronicling these developments or ignoring the fact that they are not without controversy, there is no doubt that DBAE and Getty have dramatically changed the mood and outlook in art education, right down to the classroom.
Doug Boughton (1997) reported that in a survey of Studies in Art Education written between 1959 and 1974 he found, “that the smallest category, only 5% (14 articles), dealt in any way with evaluation, and these were concerned mainly with program evaluation, rather than student assessment.” (p. 199). Things haven’t changed much since then. In an informal survey of Studies in Art Education covering the years 1988 through 2001, the writers of this article found that of a total of 376 articles, 18 dealt with assessment or evaluation. Of that number, only 9 described any form of methodology or application. (Boughton’s article in the fall 1997 issue did indeed address application, but it focused on a model called “Community as Arbiter” model, rather than a practical assessment model for an art teacher working alone.)

Conclusion
Over the years, there has existed a sort of love-hate relationship between art education and assessment—with most of it being on the hate side. Some art education writers openly denounced evaluation. Others, as if in a state of denial, ignored the issue all together. Still others reluctantly accepted a limited amount of evaluation, while warning against its harmful effects on creativity or free expression. Finally, many felt comfortable by controlling the issue under the aegis of measuring progress rather than product. But even these advocates rarely explained how to establish a defensible baseline for doing so.

Even the advocates of structure in the 1960s and 1970s ignored the issue, and continued to do so even when their agendas evolved into DBAE in the 1980s and 1990s. Now, with the call for accountability in all of education, including art education, assessment has come to the forefront with a vengeance. And art education has not adequately done its homework.

The authors of this article acknowledge that no single kind of assessment can provide a representative and accurate measure of student learning in art. What is probably needed is a variety of strategies that include testing, observation, products, and portfolios. But in any case, the field of art education needs to give much more attention to the issue in terms of not only scholarly analysis, but especially in terms of developing understandable guidelines for classroom art teachers.

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REFERENCES


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While many recognize great American artistic icons, few citizens know the artists who created them. The reason may be that over half of the nation’s elementary schools do not have art teachers, 40% of public secondary schools do not require art as a part of graduation requirements. Thirty-nine states do not require arts for statewide university admission, and 65% of the higher education institutions computing GPAs do not count arts grades.

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