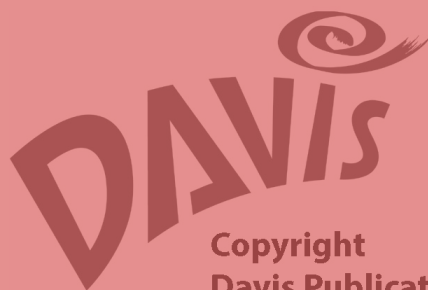


Chapter 1

Developing a Student-Centered Assessment Practice

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What Is Assessment?

A book about assessment is likely to start with the author's definition, but first I want to acknowledge that you, reader, already have a definition of assessment that has been shaped by your experiences. You may never have been asked to articulate a definition, but you do know and understand things about assessment already. How have your experiences as a student, as an educator, or in other roles shaped your understanding of what assessment is?

As a student, you may have been offered generous feedback from a teacher or classmate who noticed something unique about your work. You may have experienced a teacher's harsh disapproval of your work during a critique. Perhaps tests and quizzes produced anxiety for you. Were your needs ever considered or accommodated? As an educator, you may be required to give five-year-olds grades in art class. Perhaps you answer multiple emails a week from parents questioning the grades their children received on assignments. Maybe it's difficult to separate assessment from digital paperwork and grading. How have you experienced assessment?

Based on your experiences and current situation, you also have *feelings* about assessment. You may look at the large number of assignments that have been submitted and feel a sense of dread. You may feel excited to talk with students about their work and take pride when they win awards or score well on their Advanced Placement portfolio review. Perhaps you feel overwhelmed at the thought of assessing so many students or unsure about how to do so fairly. Your feelings and experiences have likely shaped what you *believe* about assessment. You may believe assessment is mostly pointless and a big waste of time or that it's unfair to assess students' art. Perhaps you can only articulate that you believe assessment for your students should be different from how it was for you. Perhaps you have opened this book hoping there's a way assessment can be different for you and your students from the way it is right now.

My own experiences with assessment have produced feelings of both excitement and dread. The number of students I've taught, changes in the student population, and the dynamic complexities of assessing learning in the arts are exciting challenges that keep me committed to assessment as an ongoing practice.

REFLECT

Assessment Basics

- What do you understand about assessment based on your experiences? How would you define assessment?
- What feelings do you have about assessment?
- What do you believe about assessment?

TERM TO KNOW

Assidère

The Latin root of the word assessment, *assidère*, means “to sit with” or “to sit beside.” It is pronounced *ahs-see-DEH-reh*, with the emphasis on the third syllable.

I am a teacher-educator; I work at a university and prepare art educators by teaching undergraduate and graduate methods courses and supervising field experiences. When I teach about assessment, I often share my own beliefs with my students. Here are some of the things I currently¹ believe about assessment:

- Gathering information about student learning is the main purpose of assessment.
- Offering information about student learning back to the students in the form of well-timed, specific feedback is at the heart of a sound assessment practice and can fuel further learning.

- Involving students in assessing their learning will foster their inclination and skills for assessing and revising their work outside of and beyond educational settings.
- Grading and assessing are not synonyms.
- Grading is often detrimental to learning. Minimizing grading to the extent possible can maximize the role of feedback and other more meaningful assessment practices.

As I attempted to work from my own statements of belief toward a working definition of assessment, I found myself describing assessment by its processes. Assessment is gathering information about student learning; fueling students' learning with well-timed, specific feedback; and designing useful ways to analyze and share students' progress. How would you define assessment?

In my work, I've heard many art educators describe working with students as the best part of their job and assessment as one of the worst parts. I suspect we would dread assessment less if we involved students more, but reducing one's dread is not the only reason for engaging students in assessment practices. I believe assessment is something we should do *with* rather than *to* students. The Latin root of the word assessment, *assidère*, means “to

sit with” or “to sit beside.” Another translation of *assidēre* is “to camp near.” These translations suggest that assessment is relational and involves an active presence with and among others. This view of assessment may expand your previous notions. As we think about engaging in assessment with students, it’s equally important for us to consider *why* we assess, and how engaging students in that process can help us toward those goals.

What Is the Point of Assessment?

There are many reasons we assess student learning. The most basic reason is because we want to understand what students have learned. But *why*?

One reason is because we want to know how well we’ve taught something and if we need to re-teach it. Asking, “Who can tell me what the first thing is you’re going to do when...?” is a common question that art teachers use to informally assess whether students understand the first step in a process they just explained in a demonstration. If a student correctly answers that question, that student has offered information to the teacher and

REFLECT

Sitting Beside

The strengths and limitations of using the metaphor of sitting beside for assessment can be uncovered with some reflection and inquiry into our own experiences and assumptions. Use the questions below to reflect alone or with others about the idea of sitting beside.

- When you think about sitting beside someone, what comes to mind?
- What types of things do we do while sitting beside other people?
- How does sitting beside someone put us in relationship to them, even if that person is a stranger?
- Have you ever formed a relationship (however ephemeral) while sitting beside a stranger, perhaps on a plane, a bus, or at an event?
- Who are the people you find yourself sitting beside most often?
- What does the metaphor of sitting beside conjure up when you think about the following words: interaction, space, relationship, boundaries, care, attention, safety, belonging, isolation?
- How does the metaphor of sitting beside expand your thinking about assessing student learning?

a reminder to the rest of the class indicating that the teacher and students can move on to another idea or part of the process.