Handbook of Research and Policy in Art Education

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Handbook of Research and Policy in Art Education

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Visualizing Judgment: Self-Assessment and Peer Assessment in Arts Education

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A crayon-wielding toddler draws a wide oval, adds some energetic marks, and then proudly pronounces, “Mommy!” to the babysitter supervising her play. A 9-year-old examines the heavily muscled comic book character drawn on his classmate’s binder: “That’s tight,” he says, “Wish I could draw like that.” Members of a middle school art class gather with their instructor to critique the week’s assignment, considering 1 by 1 the 15 self-portraits tacked on the wall. A senior voted “best artist” in her high school class makes selections from a year’s worth of drawings and paintings for her AP portfolio. During a feedback session at a community-based youth media project, one participant challenges his peer’s stereotypical description of a lead character as they prepare to create storyboards for a collaborative video. Five young people who have never met in real life communicate through e-mail and digital message boards to design an online fantasy role-play game, hoping their product will someday compete on the global market. Graffiti artists travel in small groups through their neighborhood at night, creating, admiring, ridiculing, and obscuring images on cement walls.

These snapshots of visual culture highlight the variety of ways that self- and peer assessments shape art objects, individual minds, and social worlds. In the field of education, researchers and policymakers tend to focus on teacher evaluation as a primary force that influences young people’s short-term choices and lifelong trajectories within visual arts learning. Although that emphasis is unquestionably worthwhile, self and peers also play an important role in determining arts education experiences and destinies.

This chapter draws from numerous fields and orientations—from anthropological theory to critical pedagogy to cognitive developmental psychology—to explore self- and peer assessments in visual arts education. Out of this range in perspectives, a kind of conceptual framework crystallizes, perhaps to a greater extent than one would normally expect from a standard research review. Emphasis here centers on a sociocultural view of human and artistic development. Artmaking is a social practice (Pearson, 2001), whether an individual is working privately in a sequestered studio or collaboratively in a public art space. Self-assessment is a process of perceiving, interpreting, judging, and transforming one’s own projects. Even
silent and solitary moments of self-assessment are social, to the extent that the artist’s choices are informed by and help shape histories of personal interaction and cultural tradition. Peer assessment is a process of seeing and responding to the current state of someone else’s work, in some cases, offering clear value judgments (“this part is great... here it falls apart”); and in other cases, describing or otherwise interacting with the work in a way that is less obviously evaluative, and perhaps not even verbalized (e.g., by copying a peer with an admired style).

There are several viable alternatives to this sociocultural view. A psychoanalytic approach, for example, might focus on the dreams, fantasies, and pathologies of artists more than on their material social practices and entanglements. An emphasis on gifted and talented young artists (Bireley & Genshaft, 1991: Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, Whalen, & Wong, 2000) would identify the traits, processes, and environments associated with those with exceptional arts potential in contrast to others who are less remarkable. A review of artists’ memoirs and biographies for evidence of self- and peer assessments might probe contemporary artists’ personal correspondence or published statements (Cahan & Kocur, 1996; Stiles & Selz, 1996). Clinical perspectives would reveal the potential for art making to improve self-esteem and organize group therapy-based interventions (Carolan, 2001). All of these approaches bear considerable merit and to varying degrees inform the review offered here. But adopting primarily a sociocultural orientation makes sense for three reasons. (1) The expansiveness of this approach makes it possible to include a rich array of perspectives on art work and art worlds. (2) This focus represents a dominant interest within current arts education literature. (3) Given this interest, the sociocultural framework merits serious and critical consideration if it is to provide a generative basis for future research.

THREE TENSIONS

Before turning to specific theory and research, it is useful first to foreground some tensions that resonate through the work reviewed here. The first pertains to the pairing of self- and peer assessments as twin topics. Taken together, these processes suggest that producing visual art means knowing how to look critically at one’s own practices and knowing when to turn to others as resources for critical response. Turning inward and reaching outward can be deeply interdependent, as personal assessments of a developing piece of work build on what the artist learns by hearing from others. The reverse is also true. Peer assessments are primarily meaningful to the extent that emerging artists can integrate classmates’ judgments into their ongoing practices.

But there is also something of a contradiction built into this dual emphasis on the self and peers as sources of assessment. A focus on self conforms to the tradition in arts education research and practice that prioritizes individual development and self-expression. The child or adolescent generates and refines his or her own projects, with guidance and instruction from teachers, based on personal vision and meaning. Peer assessment, by contrast, invokes an educational ideology that privileges the social dimensions of learning and making. This second process foregrounds the idea that every work of art emerges through joint participation in communities of practice. Some of the most interesting work reviewed in these pages maps out the territory where these two emphases overlap, when the individual student emerges as an artist whose mind “extends beyond the skin” (Wertsch, 1991).

A second tension surfaces with respect to the function of assessment according to arts education literature. There is a strong tradition for researchers to explore how young people learn to make specific judgments about particular works, and eventually to develop more generalizable (but never universal) standards and strategies for assessing their own work and
that of their peers. This focus inflects self- and peer assessments with positive connotations, framing these processes as integral to continued interest and productivity within the arts. But there is a grimmer side. The research also suggests that many young people, at some point in middle childhood, assess themselves out of art making entirely. These students decide they are no good at drawing and abandon the activity altogether. In this latter sense, self-assessment may alienate young people from the arts, rather than empower them to continue to create. This tension highlights the importance of identifying just what modes of self- and peer assessment foster, rather than discourage, ongoing involvement in arts learning and making.

The third tension revolves around a familiar question in the field of education: What counts as assessment? Included among the studies reviewed here are those that may not be sorted in a library database as pertaining directly to “evaluation” as it is typically defined. The boundary that distinguishes description, interpretation, even free-flowing classroom conversation from assessment is difficult to pin down. To limit the scope of the chapter only to those studies that specifically consider formal evaluation conventions in visual arts education would overlook highly relevant inquiries into communication, interaction, and mental operations that have much to teach us about how young people develop judgment in and through the arts.

THEORIES OF MIND AND MAKING

This chapter may be a bit unusual in its foregrounding of theory alongside empirical research. I have chosen to organize the chapter in this way based on the contention that what we know about self- and peer assessment in the visual arts depends on how we know these things, and on which principles shape the inquiries researchers undertake. All research draws from and builds theory, whether the author spells out guiding concepts or implies them through the selection of methods and modes of analysis. Some of the theoretical luminaries considered in this section—people like Soviet psychologist Vygotsky and French critical anthropologist Bourdieu—would probably not identify as scholars of visual arts education. Yet their data, methods, and arguments derive from studies of people producing, interacting with, learning through and assigning value to visual texts. And their ideas have clear and often explicit ties to arts education research. The inclusion of these theorists situates their work within our field, where I would argue it rightfully belongs.

This theoretical discussion sets the stage for what follows—a review of contemporary studies relevant to self- and peer assessment, primarily those appearing in refereed journals and volumes, organized roughly (but not absolutely) along developmental lines. The review is, by necessity, selective and partial; my aim has been to include a body of work that is both representative and provocative. The chapter closes with a reflexive turn, where I consider evidence of recent efforts among arts education scholars to assess our own selves and peers, through influential critiques, debates, and meta-analyses with important implications for future research.

Sociocultural Minds

A major theoretical resource behind the sociocultural conception of mind is Soviet psychologist Vygotsky. His most significant contribution to studies of self- and peer assessments in visual arts education is the argument that thinking develops not inside the head but through engagement with other people, tools, practical activities, and “situations” (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). In Vygotsky’s view, “higher mental functioning in the individual derives from social life” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 19). Language is a key resource in this development, as words constitute one symbol system that mediates thinking, conceptualization, and problem solving. A
thought “may be compared to a cloud shedding a shower of words,” says Vygotsky (1986, p. 251), meaning language both produces thinking (just as moisture creates clouds) and develops out of thinking (just as rain flows from clouds). When applied to arts education, this view implies that even the youngest children depend on others to learn about visual conventions, categories, and vocabularies; and to master tools and materials. Three concepts pertaining to this socially mediated view of learning are especially relevant and influential in visual arts education literature: (a) egocentric speech, (b) the zone of proximal development, and (c) the idea that cognitive development occurs through participation in communities of practice.

**Egocentric Speech.** Anyone who has worked with or raised young children knows that toddlers often burst out in spontaneous speech, apparently talking for and to themselves. Vygotsky (1986) found that children tend to talk out loud to themselves especially when they hit a disruption in the flow of activity. A crayon may snap in half from pressing too hard on paper, for example, or a child has to figure out how to make the most of a misplaced or accidental mark, or to narrate a new approach that is not yet automatized. Vygotsky called the language children use under these conditions “egocentric speech,” a concept he developed in part by observing what and when children spoke as they drew. Vygotsky described egocentric speech as a critical cognitive achievement that expresses “the process of becoming aware” (p. 30) heralding the onset of purposeful behavior. Without egocentric speech, said Vygotsky, children would never obtain inner speech—the capacity to reason through internal dialog. Egocentric speech is an intervening stage that allows children to transfer social or collaborative ways of knowing into intramental operations. Hence, when young children spontaneously assess their own drawings out loud, their words are not just charming outbursts. Rather, this language is a way for them to assign meaning and value to images while developing a private and interior source of judgment.

**Zone of Proximal Development.** The second sociocultural notion with relevance to visual arts education is what Vygotsky (1978, 1986, p. 187) called the zone of proximal development (ZPD): “the discrepancy between a child’s actual mental age and the level he reaches in solving problems with assistance.” A child drawing his mom, for example, might add new features, like ears and eyelashes, when prompted to do so by an older sibling. It is problematic, then, for researchers to look only at children’s finished art works and reach conclusions about what they are capable of conveying graphically at a given stage of development. Such an approach ignores the potential influence of social environment and, specifically, that of peer assessment. Feedback can expand a child’s evident performance within a certain range of cognitive and mechanical capacity. The existence of ZPD demonstrates that development in visual arts learning does not follow an inexorable pathway through identifiable stages corresponding neatly to a person’s age. Rather, the logics and instincts young people exercise in visual arts activities are malleable, to some extent, based on the support or discouragement they receive from others in their environment.

**Communities of Practice.** Although Vygotsky himself is not known for this phrase, contemporary theorists (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1994) have adapted his broader sociocultural theory to propose a conception of learning that is highly social and situated. Knowledgeability in this view is not a product one acquires through transmission but a mode of participating, with increasing sophistication, in communities of practice. Knowing how to judge one’s own activities and respond to those of one’s peers is necessary for achieving full participation in communities of visual arts practice. This notion of situated learning through joint activity, when applied to arts education, lends itself to analyses of collaborative creative undertakings—neighborhood murals, community garden projects, youth film festivals—as well as the study of social contexts for assessment shaping individual arts practices.
Artworld Geographies

Communities of practice are not neutral spaces. They are social worlds governed in part by assessment systems directed toward the self and others. Among adult working artists, assessment is the mechanism that determines which practitioners gain recognition and which get overlooked. More and more researchers interested in self- and peer assessment in visual arts education are considering these practices in light of the institutions, ideologies, and habitats that shape the criteria by which young artists and their works are judged. Three theoretical concepts are especially useful: (1) The notion of field derived from systems theory, (2) the concept of art worlds developed by Becker, and (3) Bourdieu’s idea of cultural capital.

**Fields of Creativity.** Systems theorists define creativity as “any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 28; see also Feldan, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner, 1994). Complex factors, including standards of social evaluation, determine how creative works acquire value. Judging performance within a given domain depends on understanding how a field operates and on how participants in that field assign value to individuals, ideas, and objects (Csikszentmihalyi). A field is comprised of gatekeepers for a given domain—those who govern systems of inclusion and exclusion. Clearly young people in arts classrooms are not transforming domains with every family portrait or macaroni necklace or graffiti art piece or Web site interface they create. Nevertheless their assessment practices play a critical role in shaping and shifting domains. In their conception of fields, systems theorists tend to focus on evaluators with obvious power—for example, teachers and critics. Arts education researchers expand this view by accounting for how individual students themselves can serve as gatekeepers of inclusion and exclusion through formal and tacit standards for self- and peer assessments.

**Art Worlds.** In his sociological study of networks for art making, distribution, and interpretation, Becker (1982) focuses on interactions, institutions, and power relations. Complex artworld mechanisms sort out artists from nonartists, as well as good artists from bad artists. An individual art object is not the product of a single maker, according to Becker. It is an outcome of all the people and conventions that bring that work into existence and recognition (as well as critics of that work and those who aim to block resources from its maker). Self-assessment by arts learners derives at least in part from judgments channeled through peers and institutions. Young people’s practices are shaped by the art worlds that contain their efforts—whether they participate in underground zine or comic book popular culture, excel in competitive Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate classes, or manifest their artistry by producing camcorder tributes to screen legends like Jackie Chan and Francis Ford Coppolla. Becker’s sociology tends to focus on networks of professionals. But arts education researchers have used this notion of artworlds to illuminate the networks of people and practices, standards, and values that come alive within visual arts learning environments. Self-reflection and peer review shape young people’s pathways, propelling some toward recognition and exhibition and leaving others as casualties of unexamined assessment systems.

**Cultural Capital.** Pierre Bourdieu expands this interest in artworlds by framing aesthetic “taste” as a process that organizes whole societies (1984, 1991, 1993). Bourdieu argues that discourses of direct or disguised celebration transform a given work of art into an “object of belief” (1993, p. 35). Student artwork acquires value through the beliefs attached to it: estimations of worth; interpretations of meaning; associations with other objects, artists, and traditions; and so on. School classrooms are fertile grounds for the growth of these beliefs. A capacity to create objects that draw positive appraisal by peers and teachers is more than an
aesthetic achievement. This ability can serve as a kind of “cultural capital,” using Bourdieu’s terminology, meaning bodies of knowledge, skills, and techniques that carry influence and authority within a given field of practice. Especially in the arts, cultural capital can pass for an innate gift. Nowhere is this belief more widespread than among peers, who often single out individual classmates as “great artists” without recognizing the systematic training—whether in homes or neighborhoods where art is valued, or in schools that educate children in the arts from an early age—that prepares some children for achievement. Arts education researchers use these ideas to frame assessment as a site of negotiation where identities and dispositions are formed, meanings are legitimated, and consequential choices are made. This view suggests that a fully realized education in the arts includes students in thoughtful discussions about not only the quality of their own images and those of their peers but also the criteria that shape categories of artistic performance and judgments of aesthetic quality. This kind of arts education includes young people as active participants in the complex workings of artworlds.

RESEARCH ON ARTWORK, ARTWORD, AND ARTWORLD AS SITES OF ASSESSMENT

This theoretical sketch suggests that art making is a mindful and mediated experience. Habits of mind, and experiments with the materials, tools, and techniques that mediate arts production, are shaped by participation in complex artworlds. Those artworlds are never value free, and as a result assessment of self and peer emerges as an especially important force that influences how minds and social contexts develop through visual arts activities. Arts education researchers have informed, responded to, and in some cases challenged this set of “big ideas” through careful study of young people actually making art under experimental conditions, as well as in their homes, classrooms, and public community spaces. Language is one, but not the only, data source that reveals self- and peer assessments at work. There is a tendency in the broader arts education research to dichotomize visual and verbal modes of expression, as if the two were hostile to one another, or even mutually exclusive. Although self- and peer assessments are not always verbalized, highly productive relationships exist between language and learning (Arnheim, 1998; Heath, 2001; Stibbs, 1998; Wolf, 2000; see also Eisner, 1992; and Richmond, 1998, for cautions), and words provide a key site of inquiry for arts education researchers interested in assessment as a dimension of production. “[W]e have limited access to culture without language,” says Parsons (1998, p. 111) “and without language artworks have very limited connections with culture...to distinguish sharply between thinking visually and thinking linguistically is also to keep apart art and culture.”

Youngest Children: The Onset of Self- and Peer Assessments

Freedman (1997) argues that it was once commonplace for scholars of drawing development to assume a linear trajectory through natural stages of graphic activity. Although yielding important findings, this “stage-by-age” approach fell out of favor in the 1960s and 1970s, says Freedman, eventually giving way to the realization that drawing was not a process of individual growth following a universal path. New models were necessary to account for the influence of context and history, the impact of collaborative art-making activities, and the extent to which arts fields are themselves cultural constructions.

These models recognize the role of self- and peer assessments even among the youngest children. Wolf and Davis Perry (1988, p. 21) demonstrate that children as young as 18 to 30 months monitor their own developing marks by “reading” meaning into them: “one loopy profile overlapping another can be called ‘a pelican kissing a seal,’ ‘two pajamas,’ or ‘noodles...
in soup.’’ This process, sometimes called “romancing” (Adijapha, Levin, & Solomon, 1998), provides evidence that young children assess, interpret, and translate their own drawings very early in life. By age 3, children have the capacity to match their form of graphic representation to dimensions of the task as a culturally defined endeavor, demonstrating responsiveness not only to their own personal meanings but also to larger social determinants (Wolf & Davis Perry). Similarly, Kindler and Darras’s semiotic approach (1997) reveals that even before age 2, children begin to respond to feedback they receive about the relative value of different kinds of marks and shapes, and the significance of interaction dramatically increases among 2- and 3-year-olds, who “mimic each other’s iconic gestures and sounds” (p. 28). This same focus on sociocommunicative context surfaces as well in Vinter’s (1999) study of slightly older children (6-10-year-olds) engaged in drawing tasks. However, although the youngest children in her study demonstrate some effect of meaning on how they draw, generally the older children are more likely to modify the graphic syntax of their images based on semantics introduced by experimental conditions.

Berk (1992) as well as Ramirez (1992) also report the use of drawing tasks to analyze the emergence of self-assessment and self-regulation among preschoolers, in this case using egocentric speech. These researchers identify the conditions under which egocentric speech promotes problem solving in visually oriented tasks. A “receptive social partner”—for example, an adult or more expert peer—enhances both the volume and the utility of egocentric speech, enabling young children to accomplish tasks that lie just beyond their independent capacity—in other words, within their zone of proximal development (Berk, 1992). Boyatzis (2000) analyzes drawings produced by his own stepdaughter, Janine, using Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) notion of ZPD to argue that the young child’s art making from the earliest age takes place not in a social vacuum but through relationships with those around her, whose prompts encourage Janine to elaborate and interpret her imagery as it evolves, in effect integrating meaning and making.

Studies of Naturally Occurring Interaction. Although laboratory conditions and prompted interactions are one way to study the onset of self- and peer assessment in visual arts development, naturally occurring interactions lend further insight. Attention to real-life settings reveals how the artworlds educators and researchers create around children affect pedagogy and assessment. Using this term artworld explicitly, Pufall (1997, p. 176) argues that “early markmaking is neither private nor culturally unstructured.” Children can judge whether their creations are socially valued and whether they are valued for making them. This process of valuing transpires through conventions like hanging finger paintings on refrigerators and seeing a classmate copy one’s image. Wilson and Wilson remarked back in 1981 that in everyday life young children tend to draw together—not in isolation. As a result they imitate, model, and borrow what they see in peers’ imagery through replication and reinterpretation. Debates about the educational implications of peer influence, as well as that of other kinds of models that can impinge on young children’s “pure” instincts, were significant enough in the late 1980s to warrant a review article published by Duncum (1989) in Studies in Art Education. The review alludes to widespread agreement that an art education program comprised entirely of copying is not advisable; however, “sharing” imagery and technique among peers can be worthwhile.

In their study of preschool drawing practices, Thompson and Bales (1991) characterize drawing as “a performance unfolding in time, in which speech and gesture, word and image, are intertwined” (p. 43). Even when children work alone, they draw on social practices; even when they talk to themselves, they mimic social speech. These authors find that children’s talk about their own images does not depend on instigation or facilitation by a teacher. By age 4, youngsters reflect on and monitor their own drawings, as well as raise questions about and evaluate images produced by peers. Their egocentric speech is “self-regulatory, marking those
points in an activity when a child confronts a problem which requires thoughtful resolution” (p. 46). By age 7, egocentric speech can operate as a kind of spontaneous self-assessment process, one that eventually transforms into inner dialog. Key in this analysis is Thompson and Bales’s observation that children’s egocentric comments set off dialog, and “when children withdrew for more sustained consultation with themselves, their retreats were strategic and purposeful... [C]hildren spoke to themselves in order to plan or revise works in progress” (p. 53).

Thompson and Bales find that children can assess one another’s drawings in harsh terms—the kinds of categorical evaluations one child relayed to the researchers by saying, “Michael doesn’t like my dinosaurs” (p. 47). But critical comments often invigorate subsequent drawing activity among preschoolers in this study, as if in defiance of their peers’ value judgments. Through peer feedback, children identify which aspects of their work draw admiration and which meet with criticism. This process moves them toward an ability to “modify their drawings to allow the graphic medium to carry their meaning, unassisted, to anonymous viewers” (pp. 47–48). In this sense, the spontaneous peer assessment that arises when young children converse about their artwork is preparation for eventually producing images that stand on their own and require no verbal explanation.

In a more recent study, Thompson (2000) once again looks into peer dialogs among young children, noting instances where children spontaneously develop mentor/tutor relationships within drawing tasks. Conversations are a dominant force during drawing time among preschoolers and kindergarteners. Ideas and images are freely circulated, admired, criticized, and copied. Solitary moments are uncommon, contends Thompson, in the lives of young children. Using Vygotsky’s notion of ZPD, she argues that even preschoolers learn to judge and advance their own efforts and those of their peers through mediation by adults or more experienced children. The development of artistry is both personal and social—dependent not only on the intentions of the child but also on the extent to which those intentions are “mirrored or deflected in the response that one’s work evokes in others” (p. 67).

Overall, contemporary efforts to understand the onset of both self-assessment and peer-assessment habits of very young children in the visual arts adumbrate multiple, uneven courses of artistic development, indicating the formation of aesthetic judgment at various points and within specific situations in the life of a child (Duncum, 2000). Self- and peer assessments help determine how, and whether, children develop into makers and interpreters of art.

Older Children: Assessment as Enhancement or Exit Strategy

The social dimensions of arts learning become further complicated as researchers locate older children’s activities within specific environments and cultural contexts. Their vulnerability to peer opinion points to a risk in visual arts education. As children increasingly tune in to the sensibilities of their peers, ideals that dominate peer groups may actually discourage brave departures from conventional approaches to drawing, making children who “visualize otherwise” feel ashamed of their efforts and eventually abandon art making or modify their techniques to win admiration from classmates (Davis, 1997a).

**Effects of Assessment Conditions.** In a study of the impact of evaluative comments on artistic performance and motivation, Gerhart (1986) investigates precisely what assessment conditions inspire or discourage further engagement with art projects. An impetus for the study is the hypothesis that children’s motivation to continue drawing tends to diminish in late elementary school because young learners begin to question their abilities.

The author arranges four assessment conditions. In the case of teacher evaluation, Gerhart tells students the results of their drawing are important and will be graded. The peer comparison
condition asks children to consider their own drawings in relation to other fourth-grade work, and to imagine how other fourth graders would evaluate their images. Researchers tell children in the self-evaluation group to assess their own work, based on whatever standards they deem appropriate. Finally, the control group receives no explanation. All children in the study are asked after they complete the assigned art task whether they want to come back to do more drawing and whether they would spend free time on similar tasks.

Gerhart’s findings suggest that the different assessment conditions do not affect the quality of the children’s drawings, but they do influence how children respond to the final questions. Self-evaluators express the highest degree of interest in continuing to participate in the drawing activities, whereas it appears that the teacher and peer evaluation conditions suppress participants’ desire to continue with similar tasks. This finding conforms with an influential, though not uncontested, theory derived from creativity studies by Amabile (1989), who claims: “People will be most creative when they feel motivated primarily by the interest, enjoyment, challenge, and satisfaction of the work itself... and not by external pressures” (p. 54). Key to continued involvement with creative tasks, according to this view, is “the feeling that you are working on something for your own reasons and not someone else’s” (p. 55).

In her analysis of how “children talk, write, dance, draw, and sing their understanding of the world,” Gallas (1994) notes the diagnostic value of self-assessment. She focuses on how children communicate with her (the teacher), with one another, and with themselves as they participate in arts-infused projects with cross-disciplinary relevance—for example, a unit on the life cycle of an insect. One of Gallas’s students began drawing an oversized insect that was supposed to be rendered to scale, and then she stopped, saying: “Oops, that’s way too big,’ and she grabbed an eraser once again. After drawing a line that was much smaller, she continued, ‘Aren’t I smart? ‘Cause I was thinking of him in the buttercups, so I had to make him smaller, or someone would come along and be terrified’” (p. 141). Observing this self-narrated artistic experience (a kind of egocentric speech), Gallas witnesses the student’s conceptualization process, seeing that the girl had misunderstood some basic information but could correct herself and think through problems. When teachers attend to their students’ spontaneous self-assessments, they gain access to thought processes that might otherwise remain hidden.

The same is true when an educator eavesdrops on peer conversations. When Adam, another of Gallas’s students, grew frustrated with drawing and appeared ready to give up, Gallas encouraged him not to stop. Another student chimed in: “You don’t have to make it perfect today. Just draw it, then do more tomorrow” (p. 135). In this encounter, the boundary between peer assessment and peer mentoring blurs, as students with varying degrees of comfort and proficiency in the arts are resources not only for evaluation but also for small moments of instruction. This kind of observation points to the tension produced by making sharp divisions among self-, peer, and teacher assessment.

Gallas’s study reveals that students have their own ways of evaluating their works that can be distinct from the teacher’s perspective—an observation Hafeli (2000) echoes in her analysis of art room conversations. Building on her own field work and prior scholarship (Swann, 1986; see also Taunton, 1984, 1986), Hafeli notes that the anticipation of teacher evaluation can shape even private conversations among peers: Because students are frequently asked what their images mean, “children tended to make up ‘wild tales’ based on adult questions and peer competition, in an effort to have their achievements acknowledged” (p. 131). Hafeli focuses on two middle school art classrooms, finding that student–teacher conversations tend to center on the assignment, subject matter, skill, and aesthetic codes. Resistance and negotiation also manifest themselves in interactions between students and teachers, as the teacher’s suggestions can conflict with the students’ sense of what they are capable of or what they want to convey in the artwork under review.
The content and style of teacher evaluations have significant impact on the standards students use to assess themselves and one another. Hafeli (2000) calls for further research to uncover the specific strategies teachers can use to promote and reward independent judgment and autonomy among students. She also makes the important point that the field needs new ways to integrate students’ judgment capacities not only into how they individually are evaluated in a given class but also how large-scale assessment policies operate in the arts. When the latter derive from abstract public policy priorities, they can fall out of step with the concrete assessment practices that unfold within moment-to-moment classroom interactions.

Kakas (1991) considers student–teacher and student–student conversation in arts classrooms in her analysis of fifth-graders’ drawing lessons. Kakas is specifically interested in the potential benefit of peer conversation for performance and interest in the arts. Concurring with Hafeli (2000), Kakas contends that teachers’ expectations and evaluations clearly affect peer interaction and help determine which standards of quality students exercise. Analyzing peer interaction among 54 fifth-graders in nine classrooms, Kakas systematically introduces three conditions of student–teacher interaction: minimal feedback, questioning feedback, and directive feedback. Her main interest is the impact of these three conditions on peer communication. Conversations among students cover a wide territory: The fifth-graders comment on subject matter and task difficulty, evaluate themselves (usually negatively) and others (usually positively), offer advice, express frustration, raise questions, and inquire about procedure.

Feedback conditions affect the frequency and nature of evaluative comments. Students in the directive feedback mode rely less on each other for advice and evaluation, apparently because they receive that kind of attention from the teacher/researcher. Peer interaction in this group tends to center on “nonteaching talk” about their pictures, procedures, and materials. Far more self-assessment takes place when the drawing task called for realistic representations. Students who appear more “insecure” about drawing are more likely to seek approval, consult other people’s drawings more frequently, exhibit greater degrees of frustration, and self-evaluate. “Confident” children are more likely to mimic their teachers’ modes of communicating—for example, offering support and advice and helping to manage classroom interaction.

Kakas’s (1991) findings are instructive—and complex, when considered in light of other related research. When students evaluate themselves, they often deprecate their work. The fifth-graders in Kakas’s classrooms who are least comfortable with drawing are the most likely to evaluate their own efforts verbally—and negatively. Peer evaluation is more likely to be positive, but it appears that primarily the more adept students in the class offer these kinds of appraisals, mixed with more explicit offers of instruction and guidance.

Contested Assessments and Developmental Trajectories. The stakes associated with self- and peer assessments among older children come into extreme focus, given the finding within arts education literature that many young people reach a point where they lose faith and interest in visual art making entirely. In her influential study of the U-shaped curve in drawing development, Davis (1997a) argues that although five-year-olds gleefully produce images that resemble the work of professional artists in terms of expressive characteristics, this early prolific facility does not last. When youngsters in the United States enter middle childhood, they find themselves in classrooms that tend to privilege verbal language over visual modes of representation. Older children become increasingly perceptive about what drawing can do, at the same moment that visual arts opportunities often take a back seat to instruction in writing and math. With little reinforcement for drawing in contexts increasingly dominated by academics, and in light of the children’s own frustration with a mismatch between their capacities for perceiving and making, Davis finds that many older children and adolescents abandon art making altogether. In other words, the social environment conveys
that drawing matters little, and children themselves often regard their own efforts as falling short of increasingly sophisticated expectations.

Although analysts of the U-shaped curve do not centrally focus on self- and peer-assessments, their studies highlight the important role these procedures play in drawing development at middle childhood. Davis (1997a, 1997b, 1997c) argues that peer culture becomes increasingly influential for older children and adolescents, precisely at the time when popular-culture references gain favor over the more freely “expressive” images produced by younger children in her study. Self-assessment also holds sway here, as negative appraisals appear to factor in children’s movement away from drawing as they struggle to achieve desired results.

Although pivotal in raising these matters, Davis’s study also contributes a foundation for subsequent analysis of whether the U-shaped curve in graphic symbolization is a “universal” cognitive developmental pattern or a culturally mediated phenomenon (Davis 1997b, 1997c; Pariser & Berg 1997a, 1997b). The judges responsible for evaluating drawings in Davis’s study used criteria derived from Western aesthetics to determine relative levels of expressivity (see, e.g., Goodman, 1976). Pariser and Berg set out to replicate Davis’s study with drawings by a group of Chinese-Canadian children scored by U.S. and Chinese-Canadian judges. The Chinese-Canadian judges in Pariser’s study, implementing both Davis’s scoring protocol and another devised by Pariser, did not confirm the U-shaped configuration and assigned higher scores to the drawings by older children, compared to those by the youngest subjects. Once again, assessment surfaces as a process that is neither neutral nor natural. Evaluations—whether by adult judges, as is the case in these studies, or by classroom teachers, or peers, or young artists themselves—are influenced by subjective priorities, training, and culturally grounded artworld ideologies.

In a recent study of drawing development that takes up this question of the U-shaped curve, Kindler (2000) builds on Davis’s original methodological protocol by adding a new dimension. To investigate systematically the judgment process itself, Kindler introduces several distinct panels of judges; some composed of adult artists and art educators and others made up of older children (ages 8 and 11) and teens. These various panels assessed over 600 drawings by Taiwanese children. Kindler finds that youth judges tend to be more critical in their appraisals than are the adults, perhaps due to different sets of standards in operation within the groups. That many of the adults are art teachers with an orientation toward positive affirmation of children’s efforts may also play a role. The child and adolescent judges award their highest ratings to drawings they deem beautiful or lovely. They reject monotony, messiness, and nonsense imagery, regardless of expressive quality. The most robust difference between youth and adult judges comes down to priorities: Children in this study care about content, whereas the adults at this time and place focus on expressivity. This analysis holds significant implications for developmental theory and arts education policy: “If students’ aesthetic criteria, artistic aspirations, and standards of satisfactory performance are at odds with those of their teachers, the grounds for effective educational interventions become seriously compromised” (Kindler, 2000, p. 27). (Further data on this point are contained in studies including those by Cunningham [1997], Kim [1998], and Kindler and Darras [1998], which identify qualities children from diverse cultural contexts admire in drawings, pointing to features such as beauty, expressiveness, color, neatness, evident effort, representational accuracy, and balance).

In his study of Japanese children’s art-making practices, Wilson (1997) lends further insight into these matters. He compares children’s drawings produced in the style of an enormously popular comic book called Manga with the imagery of formal arts training in Japan (see also Toku, 2001). In the U.S.-based literature, researchers have also noted the strong influence of comic book and commercial imagery on the artwork of older children, often characterizing these drawings as “crass forms that young people teach one another” (Wilson, 1997, p. 159).
Wilson unsettles the notion that “high art models” are superior to more readily accessible materials such as comic books and cartoons. He argues that Manga-inspired image making allows Japanese children to produce “their own little graphic worlds”—another artworld of sorts—through which they can experiment with significant life themes. Participation in peer culture then has the potential to channel back into new conceptions of self in society, as depicted and shaped through graphic configuration.

Overall, research reviewed in this section reveals a significant tension in the literature on self- and peer assessment in visual arts education. On the one hand, studies regard peer evaluation as a potential problem—a source of pressure that may rob the art-making experience of its intrinsic pleasure and sap children’s imaginations. On the other hand, peer assessment can function as a source of learning for students, who perceive their own efforts in new ways by seeing them through others’ eyes. Artworlds increasingly influenced by peer culture make their mark on the graphic productions of older children. Judging those images becomes increasingly complex, due to the various ways that scholars have linked child art to “high art” and popular culture models in diverse cultural locations. Literature on self- and peer assessments among adolescents further reveals the influence of artworlds and cultural fields, as adolescents experience and produce visual culture within school classrooms and inside arts-based communities of practice beyond school walls.

Youth: Social Participation, Community, and Critique

In 1976, Efland published a highly influential essay called “The School Art Style” in *Studies in Art Education*. In that essay he analyzes the school as an artworld that shapes student artwork in strong but sometimes subtle ways. School functions and philosophies—a humanistic orientation and the use of art as a kind of therapy, for example—register in the art style teachers and students value (see also Siegesmund, 2002). The work should be “relatively free of cognitive strain,” liberated from external influence, and perceptually inviting (Efland, 1976, p. 42). Schools have changed in significant ways since Efland first described the school art style, but his larger point that educational institutions shape youth art production continues to resonate through arts education literature.

A key question in that literature centers on how young people learn, reproduce, and, in some cases critique institutionalized artworld values through their own practices of self- and peer assessments. Cotner (2001) approaches this question by focusing on “classroom art talk.” Just as Efland identifies a particular style that marked the images students produced inside classrooms in the abstract expressionist-oriented 1970s, Cotner notes patterns in the modes of communication adolescents in art class use today. Like Efland (1976, 1995) Cotner finds that school conventions and priorities—assignments, grades, evaluation systems—shape what students come to value in their own work and that of their peers.

A Call for Self-Assessment. Researchers and practitioners are currently reexamining school evaluation systems in the arts and beyond to create more meaningful opportunities for students to participate in self- and peer assessments. This orientation is not new. In 1985, Szekely pointed out that teacher evaluation alone says nothing about how students value their own images or the experience of making them. The ability to self-assess, he argues, is key for goal setting and continued improvement: “Students therefore need to be taught a slower pace of seeing,” with time to pause, reflect, and transform unfolding work (Szekely, 1985, p. 39). As students carry increasing responsibility for “active seeing” and reevaluation of their own efforts and those of peers and established artists, teachers move into the role of audience for student reflections—a thoughtful questioner who facilitates young people’s involvement in self-assessment.
With Szekeley (1985) as an early example, contemporary researchers intensify this interest in understanding and facilitating practices that foster self- and peer assessments. Hicks, Hicks, Powell, and Simonton (1996) call for a shift in arts education’s evaluation “landscape” away from an emphasis on numbers, comparisons, and competition and toward an emphasis on personal assessment processes and outcomes: “Self-evaluation skills are a key to the future for everyone. This means that each of us must internalize evaluation options and be able to manipulate criteria appropriate for different settings” (Hicks et al. 1996, p. 55). When students are expected to generate, and not just respond to, assessment questions, these authors find improvement in student work, self-confidence, and overall skills with evaluation tasks. Like Hicks and colleagues, Anderson and Milbrandt (1998) advocate for new assessment strategies in “authentic” art instruction, with “self-reflection” playing an especially important role. This emphasis amounts to a shift toward shared responsibility for student learning, where young people are expected to discover the “real-life” relevance of specific arts tasks and skills and construct meaning from those connections. Anderson and Milbrandt (1998) emphasize that personal reflectiveness depends on high levels of social support and substantive conversation, once again pointing to the deep interdependence of self- and peer assessments, which they say together motivate and transform arts learning environments (see also Fowler, 2001).


**Self- and Peer Critiques.** Critique in arts education takes its most prominent position in college and university art departments (cf, Barrett, 1988, 1997; Bulka, 1996; Cline, 1994; James, 1996; Laing, 1976; Lerman, 1993; Rogers, 1996; Roth, 1999), where students periodically display work and spend several hours discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each piece. Together with instructors, students describe what they see in the images displayed, offer advice, suggest new techniques, and notice connections with works by well-known artists (Soep, 1996, in press).

Although few theoretically grounded and empirically based studies of critique exist (Bulka, 1996), the practice has attracted attention from practitioners and scholars interested in the proper place for self- and peer assessment in arts education. Literature on critique highlights sessions that center on a completed piece or body of work, primarily within college or university art departments and dependent on skills and habits of the instructor. In her study of college critiques, Rogers (1996, p. 124) finds that discussions driven by aspiration (what a person wants within a given set of circumstances) promote more “integrative solutions” than does talk entrenched in position (what ideology a person claims). Art objects function as “interactants” in discussion, argues Rogers, as the works themselves help structure conversation. Tensions related to the status of the object as interactant emerge in an essay by Roth (1999). The contentiousness of a critique he describes intensifies, and the utility diminishes, when discussion veers away from the work itself; participants search for answers from the artist, entertaining theoretical debates with tenuous connection to paintings under discussion.

In her analysis of learning and teaching in a college-level sculpture studio, James (1996) takes a sociocultural approach. She characterizes critique as the final phase of instruction—coming after a foundational phase, where the instructor introduces basic techniques, and a
studio phase, where students experiment heavily with materials. The critique phase should, according to James, create a safe environment through “spontaneity, empathy, and equality” (1996, p. 153), and the teacher should conclude the discussion by instilling key concepts using student work as examples. When this kind of positive educational environment fails to materialize, critique can give rise to an experience of painful self-exposure, argues Wernik (1985) in his study of the psychological aspects of critique in an art and design academy—as if the artist is “being hung naked on the wall and ridiculed” (p. 194). Wernik says critique should operate as a thoughtful dialog rather than as a judgmental verdict, and he is wary of sessions that lead students to negative self-evaluations or to create asymmetries within the group. Drawing on early work by Gibb (1961), Wernik identifies the characteristics that generate a supportive climate for critique. Along with spontaneity, empathy, and equality (the same features noted by James), Wernik also calls for a focus on description, a problem orientation, and a commitment to “provisionalism” in commentary offered in critique. Overall, research on college-level critiques demonstrates a marked duality: Critique can motivate learners on the one hand, fortifying their efforts, and intimidate on the other hand, with potentially counterproductive effects.

Few researchers have published refereed studies of critique in K-12 arts classrooms. Barrett (1994, 1997, 2000) is perhaps the most notable exception (see also Blythe, Allen, & Schieffelin Powell, 1999; Cotton, 1981; Ende-Saxe, 1990; House 2001). Artwork produced by peers constitutes a starting place for teaching students to think critically about art and its place in the world, says Barrett (1994, 1997, 2000)—a habit of mind that has the potential to translate into the strategies students develop to analyze adult exhibited art. Critique among young artists should not be judgmental, negative, prescriptive, oblique, lacking in approval, or directed exclusively by the instructor (1997, pp. 2–3). The process should have a purpose, invite participation, include positive and negative judgments supported by reasons, emphasize interpretation over evaluation, and privilege the viewer as the most important participant. Facilitators of critique should be prepared, says Barrett, to ask and elicit good questions, and to address fundamental issues pertaining to intent, content, subject matter, form, relationship of media to materials, sources of artistic influence, and social issues. In essence, Barrett (1994) views critique as a mode of argumentation and evidence-based persuasion. When students assess their own work and that of their peers, their interpretations reflect personal and communal ideologies. Barrett (2000) sees the model of mentoring as a useful way to approach critique facilitation, with the instructor playing the role of an “elder” who is affirming, loving and nurturing through a “reciprocal” relationship with learners marked by shared responsibility.

Whereas Barrett’s work suggests that critique can play a role in classroom settings, this process occupies an especially important place in youth-based environments for art making beyond school walls. Relatively little research is available that considers the impact of nonschool conditions on how peers communicate and collaboratively produce in the arts. A 10-year national study of community-based youth organizations directed by Heath and McLaughlin (1994a, 1994b; Heath, 2001; Heath & Ball, 1993; Heath with Soep & Roach, 1998; Heath & Soep, 1998) is one exception (see also Davis, Soep, Maira, Putnoi, & Remba [1993] and Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis [1998]). Heath and McLaughlin’s research initially centered on the organizational features and cognitive and linguistic processes associated with educational experiences youth deem worthy of their discretionary time. Investigators later focused especially on arts-based activities—after-school mural-making projects, teen theater troupes, drum corps, and the like. In young people’s eyes, some of the most robust features that distinguish the effective community-based arts sites are directly linked to self- and peer assessments.

Activities in these settings involve high levels of risk. Youth are expected to reveal personal stories, invest in projects with unpredictable outcomes, and collaborate with diverse groups of
peers. These conditions make assessment of self and peer an ongoing, necessary process—the only way young people can move forward with the work and continually monitor its quality (Soep, 2002). There are no grades or tests—only collaboratively negotiated standards and anticipated audience or viewer reactions. As a result, young people use episodes of assessment not only to voice their own opinions but also to imagine how outside evaluators will respond to the work. An ongoing process of peer critique surfaces in these settings. The conditions of risk, responsibility for consequences, and continually shifting rules that characterize these sites promote an environment where self- and peer assessments are not assigned by an instructor, who ultimately serves as final arbiter. Rather, dimensions of the arts projects they undertake drive young people to turn to one another for advice, inspiration, and critique as they subject their work to internal group evaluation and prepare their work for release to outside audiences (Heath & Soep, 1998). Dimensions including mutual accountability, forced interdisciplinarity, and negotiated standards create conditions where critiques of self and peer provide a foundation for learning and making (Soep, 2003).

Communities of Critical Arts Practice. Studies of nonschool settings for arts education illuminate how various communities of practice shape learning and assessment conventions. Contemporary researchers—especially those focused on adolescents—increasingly explore the ideologies and interactions that characterize community-based arts experiences (Campbell, 2001; Fleetwood, forthcoming; Keifer-Boyd, 2000; Paley, 1995; Trend, 1997) as well as the potential for the notion of “communities of practice” to transform arts learning inside classrooms (Fehr et al., 2000; Holloway & Krensky, 2001; Lowe, 2001; Neperud, 1995; Yokley, 1999). Many of these studies describe visual arts projects tied to local conditions and social justice concerns and organized through new media technologies and collaborative practice. The arts in this sense are a means to “act upon” communities (Marche, 1998) and act within communities through joint undertakings that matter for participants and for real audiences whose opinions count. The orientation of these visions for visual arts education range from critical pedagogy-inspired conceptions of the arts as engines of social change (see prior citations) to models derived from the design world that forefront the role of audience and joint problem solving (Davis, 1999) to paradigms based in visual culture as a site of critical understanding and empowerment (Duncum, 2002; Freedman, 2000), as well as to a system of “rhetoric” for everyday life (Cintron, 1997). These arts learning scenarios, diverse as they are, share the function of recasting the role of self- and peer assessment. Young people working in critical communities of arts practice hold themselves to standards that derive not solely from a personal expressive instinct, nor from an externally prescribed set of outcomes, but from a complex combination of these factors negotiated through ongoing reflection on one’s own place in the world and the kind of work worth doing. As Sullivan (1993) argues in his call for a “meaningful, authentic, critical, and pluralist” arts education, when students plan projects, share responsibility for creative choices, and reflect critically on questions of meaning and cultural authority, self and peer emerge as key sites for assessment. At stake in such environments is not only the artwork as object, but the personal and collective meanings that object sustains.

CONCLUSION: VISUALIZED WORLDS

Although contemporary researchers call for meaningful, socially engaged, critically motivated orientations to the arts, they also continue to wrestle with an enduring debate in the field of arts education—whether participation in the arts boosts academic achievement (Darby & Caterall, 1994, 1998; Eisner, 1998; Hetland & Winner, 2001). A commitment to socially
engaged arts experiences by no means precludes positive academic outcomes, as the former can promote cognitive skills and habits often linked to academic performance (Heath & Roach, 1999)—including capacities for self regulation (Jones & Davenport, 1996); creativity, fluency, originality, and elaboration (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999); metacognition (Sullivan, 1993); thinking "within" a medium (Eisner, 2001) and integrated learning (Darby & Catterall, 1994). One might in fact argue that a capacity to assess the self and peers is among the most important determinants of achievement in more institutionally privileged domains like math, science, and English, as well as in the arts.

However, recent research calls into question the suggestion that these capacities necessarily migrate from one field of practice to another (Hetland & Winner, 2001). And very often researchers do not focus so much on these capacities anyway, because documented improvement on test scores in math and English, or elevated grades in academic courses, are the data that draw the most attention in academic, policymaking, and public debates. The pull toward these outcomes takes us two steps away from arts education. First, we translate the original arts experience in terms of academic implications. Second, we translate academic learning into a language of quantified measurement. The scenario can start to feel like a game of telephone, where the final message bears little in common with the original meaning.

That is not to say the arts should be fetishized within a sacred domain unto themselves, divorced from other related fields of practice, including academic pursuits and popular culture experience. Quite the contrary. A view of the arts as social practice reveals just how interconnected art making is with learning how to see the self, others, objects, and contexts in new ways. Several clear empirical questions surface out of this review of research on self- and peer assessments. What conditions promote self- and peer assessments as necessary activities rather than as empty exercises, and as edifying experiences rather than as encounters that ultimately turn young people away from art making? How can researchers better account for nonverbalized assessment? Although we have a sense of how young people communicate feedback to peers, more research is needed to understand how assessment recipients actually interpret, selectively heed, and in some cases totally reject the specific comments and implicit ideologies they gather from classmates and artworld institutions.

There are also more profound tensions evident in this body of literature. There are debates over what fields merit inclusion inside arts classrooms—not only “fine arts” models but also those operating within popular culture, underground artworlds, and digital environments. It is likely that young people would bring to these expanded fields new forms of authority and new systems of interpretation that would significantly shape the conventions of self- and peer assessments. A second key tension pertains to the relationship between large-scale assessment policies and moment-to-moment assessment-laced interactions young people and teachers experience on a daily basis. If the field primarily prioritizes external evaluation procedures distant from the kinds of things young people actually care and talk about in practice, not only do qualities of the art-making experience recede, but also potentially meaningful modes of self- and peer assessments are suppressed under the weight of institutionally sanctioned accountability demands.

These are the kinds of tensions that might shape new research questions within the field of visual arts education. But perhaps the most promising indicator of where the field is headed appears in the sense that more and more researchers are subjecting themselves to brave encounters with self- and peer assessment (Gee, 2001). Investigators are increasingly reflexive about how they use art world categories and assumptions about learning and child development. Meta-analyses and ongoing debates are opportunities for researchers to challenge one another and face hard truths about their own practices as analysts of arts experience. In this sense, arts education research is exactly like arts learning experience: deeply personal and absolutely social, at the same time.
REFERENCES


29. VISUALIZING JUDGMENT


