

Utilizing Ungraded Portfolios for Evaluation in Fine Arts

by

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Abstract

In this thesis the use of portfolios to assess and evaluate fine arts students is examined. It is argued that the best and most authentic form of evaluation in the fine arts is the ungraded fine arts portfolio.

A philosophical overview of the debate is presented by examining traditional versus progressive models of education. Literature reviews present the background of research surrounding both portfolio assessment in education and the use of letter grades.

The argument for ungraded portfolios proceeds with an examination of how art is assessed and evaluated 'authentically' within the field outside of the educational context, a review of the history of assessment in fine arts within and outside of the realm of public education, an examination of the interplay between creativity, student motivation and assessment and an overview of curriculum theory as it relates to assessment in the fine arts.

Examples of the classroom use of ungraded fine arts portfolios are presented, with concrete suggestions on how to proceed. Discussions include the use of digital formats, what to include in the portfolio, collaborative planning with the students, emphasizing metacognitive processes, goal-setting and self assessment in the portfolios and creating a culture of art in the classroom with the portfolios as a central component.

In conclusion, there is a discussion of how to adapt the ungraded fine arts portfolio for use should letter grades be required institutionally.

Keywords: fine arts assessment; fine arts evaluation; portfolios; letter grades; ungraded portfolios; authentic evaluation

Dedication

As was the case with my Masters Thesis, this work is dedicated to my family. My wife Megan and my daughters Catherine and Elisabeth let me spend family finances on tuition and books, and gave me time and space to attend courses and work over the several years that I worked on this thesis.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank my Senior Supervisor, Dr. Carolyn Mamchur, who allowed me time and space to immerse myself in research and writing but took care to bring me back to focus with timely prodding as required. Her enthusiastic support was critical in helping me to finish this. I'd also like to thank Dr. Linda Apps whose suggestions and careful edits and corrections were well appreciated. I was also thankful to have Dr. Richmond on the committee. His teaching has been critical to my growth.

My work with teaching colleagues, administrators and parents at the schools I have worked at over the past twenty-four years has deeply influenced my thinking and my work. In particular, as a teacher working in a classroom with a wall that opens to the next room for ten of those years, I have had the immense pleasure of working collaboratively with a series of fellow professionals who I stand in awe of. Thank you Andrew Stublely, Ryanne Rajora, Erin Kieneker, and Jennie Cole. I am also indebted and in awe of the dozens of teachers who have co-directed and helped build the many musical productions I have engaged in over the years.

I cannot calculate the number of students who have passed through my classroom doors through my years of teaching. I also cannot calculate the amount they have taught me, other than to speculate that this amount surpasses all other learning I've done as a teacher.

Special thanks to my family; Megan, Catherine and Elisabeth. I love you. I could not have completed this stage of my education without your love and support.

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List of Acronyms

AACRAO	American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers
AP	Advanced Placement program-offered by The College Board
ARCT	Associate of the Royal Conservatory of Music
ARTS PROPEL	Production, Perception and Reflection-this acronym reflects Harvard's Project Zero's vision of the main cognitive processes in Fine Arts Education
BCeSIS	The British Columbia Enterprise Student Information System
CET	Cognitive Evaluation Theory (a sub-theory of SDT)
CLASS	Center on Learning, Assessment and School Structure – based in New Jersey
CPESS	Central Park East Elementary and Secondary Schools-Deborah Meier writes about her Harlem schools.
CSC	Cecchetti Society of Canada
DBAE	Discipline Based Art Education
ETS	Educational Testing Service-headquartered in Princeton, New Jersey
GRE	Graduate Record Examinations-product of ETS
IB	International Baccalaureate Program
KTEA-II	Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement-2 nd Edition
MAAP	Models for Assessing Art Project-study out of Florida, Indiana and Illinois reported on by Dorn.
NAEA	Consortium of National Arts Education Associations
NBPTS	National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
QUASAR	Quantitative Understanding: Amplifying Student Achievement and Reasoning-mathematics program led by Edward A. Silver at the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SPS	Side Presentation Software-this author's acronym for presentation programs like Microsoft's 'Powerpoint' or Google's 'Presentation'
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language-product of ETS
TOEIC	Test of English for International Communication-product of ETS
WISC-R	Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised

Introduction

Let's get real. Let's look at the kinds of things that we really value in the world. Let's be as explicit as we can. Let's provide feedback to kids from as early as possible and then let them internalize the feedback so they themselves can say what's going well, what's not going so well.

I'm a writer and initially I had to have a lot of feedback from editors, including a lot of rejections, but over time I learned what was important. I learned to edit myself and now the feedback from editors is much less necessary. And I think anybody as an adult knows that as you get to be more expert in things you don't have to do so much external critiquing, you can do what we call self-assessment. And in school, assessment shouldn't be something that's done to you, it should be something where you are the most active agent. (Gardner, Howard Gardner: Multiple Intelligences and New Forms of Assessment)

If you are forever doing formal tests and waiting for someone to give you marks, then you never learn the skills of assessing yourself and measuring your own knowledge and ability against genuine, outside challenges. The constant neurotic focus on grades stops teachers from encouraging connections and fostering creative flexibility. (Libby Purvis, cited by Abbott and MacTaggart. (Abbott & MacTaggart, 2010, p. 175)

I can only hope that with responsible and articulate interpretation, authentic assessment will be understood and valued by the public-at-large. If it is, assessment will not only contribute to better schooling for children, it will also contribute to a broader, more generous conception of education itself. (Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, 2002, p. 201)

Imagine a friend has returned from an art gallery where a much-lauded new painting by a well-known local painter has been hung. You want to know what it's like. "B+," your friend says, "Good use of color, effective use of negative space and good effort." You're not likely to be satisfied with this. Even if your friend is a respected art critic whose assessment might have some merit, it's only a single opinion and there's certainly not enough information here to gain even a small understanding of the painting.

If the work of this artist interests you, you're likely to seek other opinions and ultimately set out to form your own opinion by going to see the painting yourself.

As Maxine Greene notes:

This means that a painting, play, film, or piece of music must be grasped by some individual consciousness, grasped imaginatively, if it is to function as art. There is no way of bringing about an aesthetic experience in another by describing or summarizing or interpreting a work that person does not know. A direct encounter is required. Time must be taken, so that the work of art has some opportunity to inhabit the individual's consciousness. (Greene, 1978, p. 192)

It is certainly unlikely that a single number or letter grade will do in critiquing a work of art, or the work of an artist.¹ Assessment of a work of art, and the value and strength of an artist's body of work, has always hinged upon a single, important act; viewing the work.

Portfolios present the opportunity to gather actual pieces of work, or images of work along with self-assessments, peer reviews, draft copies, work in progress and reflections. Portfolios can be used in conjunction with traditional letter grading or other forms of assessment. They can also be used as an assessment and reporting tool in their own right.

Much work has been done on the use of portfolios to facilitate assessment in education. Many available sources of information, however, focus upon the use of portfolios in language arts education in particular, especially where use of the writing

¹ Some might wish to argue at this point that this is something done on a regular basis. Consider movie reviews, and the number of reviewers who use some form of 'grade' system in their critique of any given movie (thumbs up, sideways or down for a three point system, out of four or ten stars, or even some summation of a dollar value given, as in "I believe the viewer would feel this movie is worth \$7"). These 'grades' are never given, however, without an accompanying thorough critique of the movie (plot, acting, characters, script, etc.), and these movie reviews are never 'summative' grades, or the final word on the worth of a film. One can read multiple reviews for any given movie, many of which form a lively conversation with various levels of agreement or disagreement over the work.

process has formed a particularly apt fit with portfolio assessment. Mention is often made of the well established use of portfolios by professionals in the various fine arts, but details around the use of portfolios in the fine arts in the educational setting are often sparse or vague in conception. Boughton states, "Portfolio assessment has its origins in the visual arts and, interestingly, has been recognized as a useful solution to the shortcomings of paper-and-pencil testing in other subject areas but is largely ignored by both the high-stakes assessment programs and by teachers of the visual arts in the United States" (Boughton, 2004, p. 268).

Gruber and Hobbs, in an historical survey of art assessment in education, note "Scholarly articles often present rationales for assessment, but seldom offer technical procedures for implementation. For example, one recent survey of 89 articles on portfolio assessment over 10 years found only 7 articles that reported any technical data or methods (Herman & Winters, 1994)" (Gruber & Hobbs, 2002, p. 15). It is telling that any searches for studies or articles linking terms 'arts' and 'assessment' will turn up many more articles dealing with assessments of fine arts programs than assessment of students in fine arts. In the interest of economy, these two sorts of assessment are often combined.

Data gathered from system-wide assessments of student learning is used to judge the effectiveness of programs and data gathered to look at program effectiveness is also used to assess individual students. While it may be less expensive to try and combine these two forms of assessment, it is dangerous business. What we need to know in order to improve a program or curriculum, and what students need to know or understand in order to improve their learning is not necessarily or is maybe even seldom the same thing. Eisner notes, "Program evaluation, teacher evaluation, and student evaluation are the major areas of focus for any form of educational assessment" (Eisner, 2002, p. 202). Describing how problematic it can be to use a tool developed for one of these functions to assess in another he states, "One important realization that has emerged in the past few years is that different forms of evaluation – or assessment – are required for different function" (Eisner, 2002, p. 202).

Boughton goes on to state that part of the problem with running portfolios for student assessment in the arts has been the sheer problem of storing the work given the

number of students working through art classes. He notes that the advent of digital portfolios provides the solution. For example, where one used to have to create large physical folders and use shelf space to store a student's art in the classroom through the year, we can now take digital photos, send the work home, and maintain a detailed electronic portfolio of student work (or have them do so). Christian Fasy and Brad Asay are two Junior High School art teachers in Utah. A recent online newspaper article details their work creating an online program portfolio or art gallery for student work. Students are able to post their work, and respectful online critiques are offered. "The idea of the machine is, you put in the raw materials, the kids' ideas, effort, and out comes more creativity, imagination and original ideas, as well as kids who are not afraid to take risks or try new things" (Toone, 2009, para. 8).² Madeja and Sabol include some examination of electronic formats for portfolio design in their studies of art assessment, which will be examined further on (Dorn, Madeja, & Sabol, 2004).

The College Board's AP (Advanced Placement) program does offer a Studio Art course, which takes advantage of such electronic capabilities. Students in the three course sections of 2-D Design and 3-D Design and Drawing keep digital photographs of their work as per the detailed criteria set out in the course. Portfolios are submitted to the College Board online, and are judged by readers, who are all AP Art Course teachers or first-year college art teachers. Graham calls the AP Portfolio an 'enabling constraint', noting that it "creates a structure and coherence by constraining a domain while simultaneously engendering unanticipated, imaginative, and divergent outcomes or responses (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2008)" (Graham, 2009, p. 201).

Graham notes that such large-scale assessment, with its accompanying move towards a certain level of standardization can take student artwork out of context, ignoring the relationship between process and product and focusing exclusively on the artifact. The detailed scoring rubrics, that are used to grade each section of the AP portfolio, accentuate the principles of design, to the exclusion of other aspects of art

² The website discussed can be accessed at www.theartmachineonline.org

found to be critical in more recent, post-modern ideas of art and art-making, such as consideration of the “complex relationships among process, context and culture” (Graham, 2009, p. 202). It is also notable that the AP portfolios focus on individual production, as no collaborative pieces may be included in the submission. This is very likely due to the need to provide a grade for the portfolio and the inability to tear out which individual was responsible for which element or piece of any given artifact.

The IB (International Baccalaureate) program, offered to students within selected public and private schools, offers a similar portfolio style graded evaluation process for students in fine arts. Markus notes that both AP and IB “publish descriptions of standards in addition to examples of successful student artwork. In this way they articulate expectations for final products in summative evaluations and assessment” (Markus, 2002, p. 45). In her examination of both IB and AP assessment and evaluation regimes, Markus found problems with the focus placed on product to the exclusion of process. She also noted that, “Teachers felt that they had made evaluation criteria explicit and consistent; however, they acknowledged that evaluating creative and expressive work was difficult using a number grade to represent achievement” (Markus, 2002, p. 269). I have presented, here, several examples where portfolios are used in arts education in a systematic way, but in each of these cases rubrics or panels of evaluators are used to establish a summative letter grade for the body of work presented in the portfolio.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the literature on evaluation and portfolio evaluation in the fine arts with the hope of demonstrating that an ungraded portfolio is the best and most authentic form of evaluation for visual arts students. I shall conclude this work with a description of my own practices and experiences in the use of ungraded portfolios with intermediate students. In this thesis I am advocating for a less formalistic, more qualitative way of viewing portfolio assessment that includes parts of the artistic process not included in the AP Art Portfolio, such as student self-reflection, peer critique, goal-setting and an examination of growth as well as critical evaluation of collaborative work. The AP Portfolio, while not serving as an adequate model towards these ends, does provide an interesting glimpse at a currently utilized, organized use of portfolios in arts assessment in education. The sort of structures currently being utilized

by programs such as AP and IB serve as useful starting points in an examination of how portfolios can be used to assess student work and progress in the fine arts.

I will examine the use of portfolios in the assessment of fine arts in school settings. My personal work, which I will share, is with intermediate students. I work each year with students from grades 4-7 (9-13 year olds) in creating and staging a musical production. This production has been presented on a professional theatre stage over the past six years. I work with a number of other teachers and a team of parents in order to facilitate a cast of about 90 students each year, and have been working on having students develop portfolios and reflect on their work in journals, included as part of our portfolio process. I view student involvement in a musical as an integrated, authentic fine arts experience (Bespflug, 2009). The focus of my work, then, is in using portfolios to assess students in the fine arts at the Intermediate school level. Although the first portfolios I worked with came out of a musical theatre program, I will look at the use of portfolios across the spectrum of fine arts performance (visual art, dance, music and drama).

Recently, as the teacher of a one-to-one laptop program in my school district, I have been able to work with the students of several upper intermediate classes to develop visual arts portfolios that were created electronically. Similar to methods recommended by Fasy and Asay (as discussed by Toone), I have created online course tools that provided lessons and project ideas for students, as well as providing them a space to post an ongoing portfolio and examples of their artwork online for audience input. This work will be discussed later in this paper.

My primary focus in this dissertation will be in visual art. This is because looking at the whole area of all the fine arts provides too wide a field of research and inquiry to allow for sensible conclusions to be drawn. For example, while Defibaugh asserted in her study examining the evaluation practices of elementary school art teachers that her findings “contradicted the popular belief that disparities exist between evaluation practices of art teachers” (Defibaugh, 2000, p. iii), MacGregor and his team, examining the assessment practices of art teachers in Canada, found some differences in assessment practices between art, drama and music teachers. “All three subject areas have developed specific forms and methods of assessment because they have different

priorities. Those who suggest integration of fine arts programs should keep this in mind” (MacGregor, Lemerise, Potts, & Roberts, 1993, p. 38). I have chosen to examine portfolio assessment, and develop a specific model. Although portfolios have been used in music, drama, dance and visual arts education and I will be making reference to all of these areas, they are most comprehensively used in visual arts education and so it serves best to maintain this curricular area as a primary focus, particularly in reviewing current practices in the field.

Although the conversation, at times, will be wide-ranging across grade and age levels, it will also be helpful to refocus the discussion at critical points on students at the upper intermediate levels (grades 4-7 or 9-13 year olds). To remain wholly focused on this limited age level would unduly restrict the range of research and writing I could access in service of the discussion. The refocusing, however, will help me to explore the needs of the age range of students with whom I have worked for several years. It is also certain that some of the learning needs and circumstances of students receiving an education in the fine arts are bound to be different between intermediate and senior high school students.

Defibaugh, in her examination of the teaching practices of elementary visual arts teachers, discusses how art educators are divided into two distinct groups according to their view of the goals of an education in the arts. One group holds to the view that art is a discipline that can be “taught sequentially and that proficiency in the arts entails the attainment of many highly intricate skills” (Defibaugh, 2000, p. 5). The other group “believes that young children use art as a means of learning and the value of an art experience is in the process and not in the resulting product” (Defibaugh, 2000, p. 5). We see, in these statements, two views of education that have been in conflict at least since John Dewey challenged the ideals of traditional education with those of progressive education (or perhaps longer). It will be helpful, at this point, to position the discussions to be found in this thesis within the philosophies envisioned within these two ideals. In discussing matters that range from curriculum design to educational programs to assessment devices, these two philosophies will often be revisited.

Traditional Versus Progressive Education

There is no doubt that technicist approaches to the management of complex systems have great appeal. In some situations, especially those in which raw materials with which one works harbor no intentions, have no aspirations, do not daydream – the leather or steel used in the production of shoes or jet engines, for example, - such methods can bring about a systematically efficient system. (Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, 2002)

In Defibaugh's description given in the previous chapter, two different philosophies in elementary art education are evident. Perhaps, we can trace this disagreement in philosophy within public education between those who teach art to younger students, and those who teach older students. As her statement implies, teachers of younger children tend to subscribe to the philosophy that the process of self-expression in the arts is the critical factor. As the age of the students that teachers work with increases, approaches to arts education that move from stressing the process towards a more discipline-oriented set of goals become more common (though perhaps not as dominant as the process-oriented approach is amongst primary and pre-school teachers). Different disciplines in the fine arts inspire different mixtures of these two approaches. Though most fine arts education at the pre-school and early school levels feature experiential and process-oriented approaches, some disciplines tend to move more quickly towards an emphasis on product. In drama, where many teachers still subscribe to Dorothy Heathcote's 'Drama in Education' approach, we can see a resistance to moving away from the process-oriented approach even in later years. Many of the commonly subscribed to approaches towards music education, however, involve a fairly quickly increased emphasis on skills development, technique and repetition that point to a more product-oriented approach.

The interplay between these two different approaches to fine arts education closely resembles a divide that has existed within education in general for a long time. John Dewey described the ideas of 'traditional education' as opposed to 'progressive

education' in 1938. Traditional education carries with it the ideal that "The subject-matter of education consists of bodies of information and of skills that have been worked out in the past; therefore, the chief business of the school is to transmit them to the new generation" (Dewey, 1938, p. 17). Dewey goes on to summarize the ideals of traditional education;

The main purpose or objective is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life, by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of information and prepared forms of skill which comprehend the material of instruction. Since the subject-matter as well as standards of proper conduct are handed down from the past, the attitude of pupils must, upon the whole, be one of docility, receptivity, and obedience. (Dewey, 1938, p. 18)

The more complex and organic process of 'progressive education' cannot be as neatly defined. Even Dewey has difficulty in summarizing what he means by 'progressive education'. His book *Experience and Education* serves to propose a 'theory of experience' to summarize or propose an alternative to traditional education. Dewey discusses some of the principles central to progressive education where he notes that:

to imposition from above is opposed expression and cultivation of individuality; to external discipline is opposed free activity; to learning from texts and teachers, learning through experience; to acquisition of isolated skills and techniques by drill, is opposed acquisition of them as a means of attaining ends which make direct vital appeal; to preparation for a more or less remote future is opposed making the most of the opportunities of present life; to static aims and materials is opposed acquaintance with a changing world. (Dewey, 1938, pp. 19-20)

At first glance, my proposal to assess fine arts learning using non-graded portfolios might appear to place me squarely in the camp of progressive education, or seem to fit more naturally with those arts educators who stress process over product. However, in examining assessment practices, I am not advocating the supremacy of either process or product-based outcomes. Both, presumably, can be assessed and evaluated. It may seem that progress towards more flexible, negotiable or individualized process-oriented goals might be better evaluated using a more open-ended approach such as ungraded portfolios. Does this mean that ungraded portfolios don't serve well when examining more skills-based outcomes?

Three arguments must be made to establish that graded portfolios should be used to assess work within any discipline or domain. Firstly, one must argue that specific skill outcomes or skills-based curricular objectives can be established at specific age or grade levels of development, and that such outcomes are appropriate to teach towards and assess. Secondly, in order to establish the validity of letter grading, an argument must be made that progress or achievement in all of these objects (skills based or not) can be quantitatively and reliably measured. Related to this idea, if some objectives can be measured reliably and others cannot, where letter grading is chosen as an indicator of learning in all areas those objectives that can be reliably measured are the objective that take on the highest value. Lastly, it must be argued that both setting these goals and assessing them numerically or with letter grades will contribute to (or at least not harm) the educational outcomes.

On the matter of the first argument, I'm content to allow that there are contexts where a skills-based approach to arts education can and has been used. It has not been the focus of my research, but my experience in coursework learning with a diverse group of adults, some from other countries, has led me to understand that a more skills-based approach to arts education is still commonly used in other cultures and countries. Further on in this paper, though, where I discuss authentic assessment in fine arts, I will endeavour to establish the point that there is a field and practice of 'art' towards which it makes sense to educate students, and that this field, while certainly involving skills and a knowledge base, is a wider, more diverse and complex field than would be served by focusing solely on such matters. In addition, I will be discussing the historic interplay between arts and crafts in arts education that will help to further clarify not a turning away from but certainly limitations placed on skills-based objectives in a fine arts curriculum in North America, in this era. As Eisner notes, "Craft has been defined as the process in which skills are employed to discover ends through action" (Eisner, 2002, p. 155).

The second matter, the validity of measurement, rests greatly upon the choice of skills-based or other curriculum. If it is determined that the learning in a field can be broken into a set of discrete steps or skills, each learnable in a sort of isolation from the others, and that each piece of learning can be unambiguously and somewhat accurately measured, then such a curricular structure is perhaps justified. Spear argues that such

a field is pretty rare, perhaps limited to a factory worker who must be trained to do something with a widget before passing it down the line. “Judgments about the extent to which students are operating on the inside of a practice are not at all amenable to unambiguous measurement. Most attempts to make such judgments amenable to measurement, moreover, end up doing damage to the original point of the enterprise” (Spear, 1991, p. 56). Spear (1991) also has concerns over what Gerald Bracey calls ‘deflection’ or Wideen and others see as ‘curriculum narrowing’, where a curriculum is hijacked away from higher level or creative thinking skills towards objectives that are easier to measure and grade.

“If an institution uses expedient means for the management of students that, while doing so, interfere with the realization of some of its primary purposes, there is a reason for questioning such ‘expedient’ means” (Eisner, 2002, p. 90). Many writers in education have struggled with the use of letter grades to assess or report on student learning. Much of this work will be referred to here. I will examine how letter grading interferes with an education in creativity and the fine arts in particular. John Dewey points out in *Experience and Education* that the trick is not to build a negative philosophy, or make decisions about how education is to be played out based on doing the opposite of what is advocated for in a philosophy one is in opposition to. Therefore, I seek in this thesis to argue against letter grading in the fine arts but to also argue for their replacement with a viable and discipline or field-relevant tool – the ungraded arts portfolio.

The best place to begin this conversation is with Howard Gardner’s thoughts. He explores the idea that different fields of knowledge or understanding can influence how education is to progress. He speaks of the ‘mimetic’ style, where, “the teacher demonstrates the desired performance or behavior and the student duplicates it as faithfully as possible. A premium is placed on precise mastery of information or slavish duplication of models, and any deviation from the model is immediately challenged and rejected” (Gardner, 1995, p. 119).

He contrasts this mode of education with transformative education, where “the teacher serves as a coach or facilitator, trying to evoke certain qualities or understandings in the students. By posing certain problems, creating certain challenges,

placing the student in certain situations, the teacher hopes to encourage the student to work out his own ideas, test them in various ways, and further his own understanding” (Gardner, 1995, p. 119). Gardner points to the mimetic approach as being apt for fields or disciplines that emphasize basic skills and the transformative approach as being critical where creativity is critical.

The reader, hopefully, will recognize the earlier discussion of traditional versus progressive education being referred to here. Trivializing the debate to examine these two styles of education, and then begin to slot fields and disciplines into one or the other might be too simplistic an approach. The curriculum itself, for example, can have a guiding effect over which form of education best serves. If the learning objectives in a history or social studies curriculum stress that students know the dates in which certain wars were waged and treaties signed or even to come to certain predetermined essential understanding about how specific industries were critical to the establishment of a nation, perhaps a unit of study will naturally unfold along more mimetic lines. If, however, curriculum objectives allow for more student choice in what is to be studied or learned and what kinds of conclusions or answers may be drawn from the study as well as how learning is to be demonstrated, then a more transformative approach is apt. Such learning objectives can be found in the social studies curriculum, at grade 7 level, in British Columbia. One learning objective calls upon students to “defend a position on a contemporary or historical issue” (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 30).

We must not ever lose focus on the larger role the arts play in the curriculum. Speaking of forms of assessment that support a democratic education, Falk and Darling-Hammond discuss the ideals and educational philosophies that flowed from the works of Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel. “Those who followed these educators built on their ideas and practices, developing schools and schooling based on the assumption that the purpose of education was to create the conditions for children to develop autonomy while establishing a pattern of support for each child’s continuous progress within a school community nurtured by a democratic ethic (Dewey, 1916/1968)” (Falk and Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 73). They go on to discuss how the works of John Dewey, Francis Parker, the McMillan sisters and Maria Montessori, “emphasized teaching children to think independently, as well as to see themselves as active and responsible members of the community of learners inside the school and the larger society outside of

school (Feeney, Christensen, & Moravcik, 1983)” (Falk and Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 73). Further on in this thesis, I will demonstrate the critical role fine arts can play in this social and democratic vision of education where I discuss ‘communities of response’ and espouse a vision of fine arts education that approaches the arts as a system involving all aspects of the artistic process from making through presentation, viewing, and responding.

Though we can see both the mimetic and transformative styles of education played out in modern public schooling, one standard of reporting on progress and learning, the letter grade, commonly serves all purposes. As we come to the conclusion that not all forms of knowledge and understanding can be taught or learned in the same way, we also begin the discussion of whether it is apt or sensible to assess students’ learning from discipline to discipline or field to field in the same way. As the organization and structure of public school systems evolved from a dominant industrial philosophy that was influential as they were coming into existence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the practice of letter grading evolved and took today’s more standardized form (A, B, C+ ...) in the early twentieth century during a time when psychology was being utilized to transform education and the behaviourist philosophies of Watson and Skinner were highly influential. It was a sort of overwhelming paradigm shift in psychology. Describing the era, Kihlstrom describes how behaviourism “quickly came to dominance, and psychology – so the joke goes – lost its mind” (Kihlstrom, 1994, p. 124).

In this thesis, I argue for portfolio assessment in the fine arts that minimizes or eliminates the letter grade. I will explore why the letter grade is an inappropriate tool for fine arts assessment, and how eliminating the letter grade can improve assessment practices in the fine arts, encourage better learning and motivation and more efficiently drive the learning environment. There is certainly an excellent amount of extra-curricular engagement involved in the production program I run with my students, but I do see these students on Thursday afternoons each week as part of an intra-curricular fine arts

program at my school, so I am obliged to provide letter grades to their classroom teachers.³ In my ideal future the arguments I lay out in this thesis would be accepted by those in a position to make changes and the students' portfolios would stand alone as a form of comprehensive assessment. I will, however, be discussing how our group of teachers approaches letter grading within the current system in order to minimize the damage.

Having established a philosophy to help guide the process of portfolio assessment for fine arts in this first section, I will now turn to examining various processes and methods of creating, collecting, and building portfolios, focusing first on the visual arts, where there is some literature to support my work and a well-established practice amongst professional practitioners in the artworld. Next, I will examine the use of portfolios in drama and theatre arts, where most of my work has been. Finally, I will look at ways in which portfolios might be used in music, dance and other arts that, of course, cross over into work that I've done within musical theatre.

³ This was not always the case. For over ten years the productions I ran were entirely extra-curricular. The students came out because they wanted to, they learned and experienced, they took risks and there was no expectation from teachers, parents or students that letter grades would be provided. I believe they would have, in fact, been seen as rather an odd thing to come up with and totally out of keeping with authentic practice. Only bringing a portion of the time spent on productions into 'school time' or making the production curricular rather than just extra-curricular produced the need to generate letter grades for the students.

Establishing Terms

The word 'assess' is derived from the Latin ad+sedere meaning 'to sit down together.' (Ross & Mitchell, 1993)

Before proceeding, certain confusion in terms needs to be addressed. The terms assessment and evaluation are sometimes used interchangeably. Much of the literature I've read tends to distinguish between the two. Where distinction is made, which has become more common, the two are often defined in relation to each other. **Assessment** is often described as an ongoing process whereby a teacher collects information on a student's progress in order to properly address the learning needs of the student and provide feedback. A recent discussion paper published by the BC School Superintendents Association distinguishes assessment from evaluation by noting "Assessment information is intended only to describe learning" (BCSSA, 2009, p. 3). **Evaluation** is described as a gathering of information on how the student is doing, often in relation to curricular objectives, with the purpose of providing a summation of some sort, be it a letter grade, a report card or some final evaluative information. Again, the distinction made in moving from assessment to evaluation is that evaluation "refers to judgments made on the basis of assessment evidence" and evaluation "may be provided anecdotally and/or in the form of a letter grade" (BCSSA, 2009, p. 3).

Two important matters to note are firstly, these definitions are generally but not universally accepted in the literature and secondly, this may well be due to the fact that within some forms of curriculum and classroom strategy the difference is unimportant. Some forms of evaluation, for example, may simply take the form of describing the student's work or the student's learning. In this example, assessment and evaluation would essentially encompass the exact same set of information. The only distinction between one and the other might be as inconsequential as 'the notes in my notebook that I took while observing the student were assessment, the notes as transcribed or provided to the student become evaluation' The distinction, then, between assessment

and evaluation only becomes critical where the additional step of 'judgment' is made. We can see that the root word of evaluation, or value, helps to clarify this. In judging, or evaluating a student's work a teacher sets a value on the learning. Where letter grades or numbers, for example, are used the learning is not only being described or demonstrated, but quantified and measured (or an implication is made that this is being done).

Assessment or the feedback process between teacher, student and curriculum is universally seen as being necessary to the educational process. Evaluation, particularly in the form of summative assessment, is widely regarded as being more of a regrettable necessity or a sort of bureaucratic or institutional task. We see this push and pull between the notions of assessment and evaluation where Warburton comments, "The aim of assessment and evaluation in education is to improve learning. This central fact differs from traditional views in the United States of educational assessment and evaluation as a basis for promotion, grade reporting, tracking student achievement, or maintaining documentation systems required by law" (Warburton, 2006, p. 3). To be more precise, some of the 'regret' that encompasses ideals of assessment arises from the very intimate relationship that exists in the current educational culture between assessment and grading. Below, I revisit the idea suggested 35 years ago by Bellanca and Kirschenbaum that we need to see evaluation, grading and reporting as being quite distinct ideas.

In establishing evaluation as an extension of assessment, with the addition of a value judgment, it should then be apparent that this value judgment spans quite a range of options. Evaluation, in this sense, can move from gentle or innocuous statements as 'nice work', or 'good effort', or 'next time you try this you might consider...' to quite involved value statements such as 'this is the best work in the class' or 'you are not yet meeting grade-level expectations'.

Marcia Seeley writes about a group of mathematics teachers at the middle school level who are experimenting with alternative assessment tools, including portfolios. She notes, with enthusiasm and optimism, Kleinsasser's belief that "Classrooms are moving from a *testing culture* – where teachers are the sole authority, students work alone, and learning is done for the test – to an *assessment culture* –

where teachers and learners collaborate about learning, assessment takes many forms for multiple audiences, and distinctions between learning and assessment are blurred (Kleinsasser et al. 1992)” (Seeley, 1994, p. 6). Philip Taylor’s words, in regards to the differences distinguishing assessment and evaluation, are most apt here: “We cannot separate assessment and evaluation from the learning experience. There is always going to be product in process, and process in product” (Taylor , p. 114).

Bellanca and Kirschenbaum suggest an additional distinction in terms that is logical to make here. Assessing and evaluating are seen as being distinct from both **grading** and **reporting**. (Bellanca & Kirschenbaum, 1976, p. 52) The book in which these authors write is a critical resource, often cited by researchers working in the field of evaluation and assessment. A grade is a compact number or symbol that is meant to summarize a student’s learning. In the older sense it might be meant to represent a student’s learning in comparison to other students or a theoretical average (called normative grading). In more recent terms, it might be meant to represent a student’s learning in relation to the learning goals or curricular objectives (called criteria grading). Generally, grades are meant to represent a student’s learning in a particular course or subsection of the course over a set amount of time. Grading, for example, might be done three times over the span of a given course. Grading can also be broken down into subsections. A teacher in a mathematics course might generate one single letter grading, meant to represent the student’s learning over the whole course, or might generate grades for smaller subsections of the course (such as curricular strands⁴ or individual objectives). Once, of course, the number of letter grades, meant to be a compact and efficient way of reporting, rises above a certain number one is left to ask why they need to be used at all.

Setting grading as a distinct term and concept from assessment and evaluation is sensible. Assessment is, as stated above, universally seen as being intimately tied in with the educative project. Evaluation forms the next step, whereby judgements are

⁴ In math curricular strands used often bear such titles as ‘number operations’, ‘number concepts’, ‘shape and space’, ‘patterns and relations’, etc.

made about evidence gathered in assessment. Some of these judgments can be used to help communicate assessment information to the student (and parents at the grade-school level) and some can be used to make decisions about the next step in the student's learning. It is not necessarily true, however, that a given act of assessment or evaluation needs to lead towards the assignment of a grade.

Bellanca and Kirschenbaum also distinguish the act of reporting from assessment, evaluation or grading. Communication between the student and teacher is a necessary part of the acts of both assessment and evaluation. As I've stated above, distinguishing assessment and evaluation can be quite difficult. If the difference between assessment and evaluation is the mere inclusion of a value judgment, it might be the case that merely choosing to assess or look at a piece of work implies such a value judgment. There is a sort of implied evaluation in the fact that 'I am choosing this piece of work to assess. This piece of work matters.' Neither assessment nor evaluation need include reporting.

Reporting is the act of communicating information about the student's learning to others, be they parents, university or college admissions boards, prospective employers, government agencies or anybody else having a right to be privy to this information. Reporting is generally a formalized process. Reporting can occur in response to the entire collection of evaluations done, a chosen subset, or some type of formalized, single, cumulative evaluation. While I believe that accountability is required within the public education system, and I am not arguing against the act of reporting, reporting is not integral to the educative project as assessment and evaluation are. For example, in defining reporting within the context of 'mastery learning' schemes, Bellanca and Kirschenbaum note that "The reporting and recording processes are considered essential as administrative tools and are not considered as integral to learning" (Bellanca & Kirschenbaum, 1976, p. 56).

A concept closely related to assessment and evaluation is that of **authentic assessment**. Authentic assessment is assessment focusing on tasks, projects or work performed by students within a contextualized space. Perhaps the easiest way to define authentic assessment is through example. Providing a student a pen and paper multiple-choice exam in order to gain a driver's license would not be authentic

assessment. Sitting in a car with a student and observing their driving skills for a reasonable amount of time to determine whether they should be issued a license would be a good example of authentic assessment. Likewise, having students create projects in art class in a similar context to that in which artists work in the same society, and assessing those projects in the same manner in which artwork is assessed in society would be a form of authentic assessment.

Discussions around authentic assessment, of course, open up further debate over letter grades. Culbertson and Jalongo note that, "Alternative assessment operates on the assumption that students should be evaluated according to criteria that are important for the performance of a given task" (Culbertson & Jalongo, 1999, p. 133). In the context of a driver's test, the logical course of action is not to issue drivers an A, B or C+ grade. Either the prospective driver is capable of controlling a vehicle following the regulations of the road to the extent that it is sensible to issue them a driver's license, or they are not yet seen as capable enough to be issued the license.

I have discussed, above, that student **self-reflection** and collaborative work are critical components of the portfolio work I envision. All work in the fine arts can be seen as being essentially collaborative. The very process of seeing something as 'art' entails an artist communicating with an audience, and an artworld that engages in discussion about the work, audience with audience or audience with artist. Bonnie Sunstein makes the difference between reflective and reflexive work in portfolios. "I'd imagine assessment involving three close encounters: a reflective encounter (self to self), a reflexive encounter (self to other), and a dialectical encounter (a teacher who can act as mediator between self and other)" (Sunstein, 1996, p. 14). Sunstein is concerned that reflection, where the student examines their own thinking processes or describes their work from within a purely self-centered perspective, is too limited a process to effectively drive growth. She notes, "Too much reflection becomes self-centered. It ignores what the other wants. Assessment must also be reflexive, looking at others' expectations, understanding them, and representing the self to another. Yet, too much attention to external expectations ignores the individual" (Sunstein, 1996, p. 14). I agree with the ideal that self-reflection in portfolio work must never be a purely inward-looking process, and that this balance between reflective and reflexive thought needs to be found. Making the difference between reflexive work and reflective work, however, would only

serve to bog down this paper in the fine differences. Where I refer to student self-reflection, I am referring to the grander narration of reflexive/reflective work that Sunstein refers to.

Reflection is a sub-process in the wider range of thinking skills that can be referred to as **metacognition**. The term metacognition itself was first used by J.H. Flavell in the late 20th century, but the processes that it encompasses go back at least as far as the great Greek philosophers. Metacognition refers to an individual's 'thinking about their thinking'. Perhaps the most efficient and relevant way to define metacognition, in this paper, is by example using thinking processes we value in artists and students in the arts. In creating and presenting a work of art we call on students to think about why they chose the medium used, what they were trying to communicate, how they manipulated materials and processes to try and create an effect on the audience, what they learned from their work and how they will apply that learning in the future. Likewise, students asked to reflect on what they do best, how they learn or how their thinking has changed over the course of a project or unit of study are engaged in metacognition, or thinking about their own thinking. Educational process that go beyond rote learning, memorizing facts or 'training' all approach ideas of metacognition, and so the discussions in this paper will turn to metacognition.

Some working definition of **grade** is called for in this thesis. I call up the account of what a grade is given by Paul Dressel, and reported by Peter Wood: "An adequate report of an inaccurate judgment by a biased and variable judge of the extent to which a student has attained an undefined level of mastery of an unknown proportion of an indefinite material" (Wood & others, 1990, p. 5). Grades are given in the form of symbols, in B.C. these are usually A, B, C+, C, C- and I (Incomplete) or F. It is common to the point of universal in the literature to note that the assignment of a grade represents a value judgment, whereby a teacher is communicating to what extent the student has learned the knowledge or skills set out within the curriculum. Adding complexity to the working ideas of grades, given that they are usually advertised as communicating a student's knowledge or understanding of the curriculum set out, grades often involve a complex mix of 'achievement' and 'not achievement' criteria, as reported by Nava et al. (Nava & Loyd, 1992, p. 18).

Mastery learning is an alternative system of curriculum delivery. In traditional academic course in the public school system, students are provided with a preset length of time to attend classes, show their learning and are given a summative letter grade, as discussed above at the end of the 'term', often five or ten months.

Mastery learning, on the other hand, holds achievement constant and lets the time students spend in pursuit of the objectives vary. In the same college course, a few students might meet the standards in ten weeks; most might meet the standards in sixteen weeks; but a few students might take twenty-five or thirty weeks to meet these standards." (Purdue, para. 1)

As students under mastery learning situations are provided solid goals to reach in demonstrating 'mastery' of the given curriculum, **mastery grading** schemes are usually highly truncated versions of the standard grading scheme discussed above. The two-grade system of 'Pass' or 'Fail' is often used as a mastery grading scheme, although given the underlying philosophy of mastery learning, 'fail' is a completely inadequate term. More common are grading schemes such as that suggested by Sue Howell in Rick Wormeli's book *Fair Isn't Always Equal*, "A, B, and 'You're Not Done'" (Wormeli, 2006, p. 98).

A **portfolio** is a collection of student work. It can contain both work in process or finished pieces (in writing portfolios this is often referred to as 'draft' and 'published' work). Portfolios can also include recordings of student thinking or an account of the processes used to create the work. These are often in the form of journal entries, notes, student self-assessments or reflections. Portfolios can often include peer assessments as well as teacher feedback or assessment. Howard Gardner developed the term 'processfolio'. He notes that the processfolio differs from the standard portfolio in that a standard portfolio traditionally contains only a student's best work as fully completed. He notes that the portfolio is thus traditionally used to apply for a job, a program, or awards. (Gardner, 1996, pp. 143-144) This may have been a common or traditional approach to portfolios at some point in time, but much of the research I've done demonstrates a very wide acceptance for inclusion of all the process-oriented bits and pieces noted above in portfolios today, particularly learning portfolios, so I pay respect to Gardner's work here

but will maintain use of the single term 'portfolio' in this paper rather than confusing the issue by using the additional term of 'processfolio'.

I will be using the term **artworld** to refer specifically to the discipline, field and community of artists, galleries, critics, and consumers of art that one encounters in the world outside of the educational context. In examining an ideal of authentic assessment within education, the practices and procedures to be found in the artworld are of practical importance.

Literature Review: Portfolio Assessment

I have sought in this Literature Review, where possible, to run the discussions about articles, books and theses in a chronological order. When and in what order work was published matters in the domain of educational assessment perhaps more than in other areas as legislation and trends in educational assessment in both the United States and Canada have changed and developed over time. Much discussion about methods of assessment and curriculum swirls and develops around the pressures being created both by academic and pedagogical research on the one hand, and demands and conditions being placed upon schools by legislation and political demands on the other. I have wandered away from sticking vehemently to chronological order in publications where arguments and counterarguments in the wider discussion make it logical to do so. An example might be a journal article or thesis that is followed by a later article or thesis that appears to be produced in reply. In these instances, I have sought to keep discussion and reply in proximity to each other.

A conference was held on assessment and evaluation in the visual arts in the Netherlands in December, 1990. The series of papers, featuring arguments and responses, have been published in book form. Howard Gardner, in his article, discusses his work with Harvard's Project Zero and ARTS PROPEL. The latter acronym encompassing Project Zero's vision of the three main cognitive processes involved in arts education: production, perception and reflection. Working with ARTS PROPEL, Gardner suggests two main means of demonstrating student achievement and learning in the fine arts; domain projects and processfolios.

A domain project is:

a rich curriculum module that ranges in duration from a few days to a few weeks. Each domain project focuses on a concept (e.g., style, composition) or a practice (e.g., rehearsing a piece of music, executing a

portrait) that is unquestionably central to an art form. In every domain project, the student adopts all three of the aesthetic stances, having multiple opportunities to *make* works (or parts of works), to *contemplate* works, and to *reflect* about the processes involved in making and critically evaluating works. (Gardner, 1996, p. 143)

Processfolio is an obvious variation on the word portfolio, designed in order to highlight what Gardner sees as a critical difference between what is usually meant by portfolio and what ARTS PROPEL wishes to implement.

In the familiar version of a portfolio, a student assembles the best of his or her work, usually in the effort to gain admission to a selective program, to win some kind of prize, or to secure showing of works. In contrast, our processfolio is oriented to the furthering of the students' own learning. In a portfolio a student records progress on a project: an initial idea, early sketches, false starts, pivotal pieces (where an idea gels), journal entries (in whatever medium seems appropriate, interim critiques and self-critiques, the final product, critiques of that product, and plans for further revisions of the project or for new projects that in some way built upon the works in the processfolio." (Gardner, 1996, pp. 143-144)

TheodoreSizer, in his book *Horace's School*, suggests two very similar tools. He speaks of Exhibitions, being complex multi-dimensional projects in which the students become engaged much as PROPEL's domain projects. Sizer also discusses having the students maintain portfolios, "a collection displaying evidence of progress and of performance over time on Exhibitions. This portfolio should be maintained with the help of the student's advisor and should be open to inspection by the student's parents, faculty members, and authorized representatives of the district and the state department of education" (Sizer, 1992, p. 161).

There is a critical difference between the two proposals. Both of PROPEL's devices, the domain project and the processfolio, are seen as being evaluation devices. Of the domain project, Gardner notes:

The students' drafts and final products, along with their reflections, then are assessed along a variety of qualitative dimensions such as engagement, technical skills, imagination, and critical evaluative skills. While the primary assessment for the domain project occurs within the class, it also is possible to assess these projects off-site; such assessment sessions have been carried out with reasonable success by

'external' art educators brought together under the auspices of the Educational Testing Service. (Gardner, 1996, p. 143)

Sizer, on the other hand, sees the Exhibition as being at the core of the curriculum, or classroom experience, and it is as such to remain distinct and separate from assessment or evaluation. "We wish also to stress that Exhibitions are primarily educational tools rather than assessment tools. They are designed to help students rather than to help those who would sort out those students" (Sizer, 1992, p. 161). The portfolio that Sizer discusses is designed not to show the student's progress in relation to required curriculum objectives at set developmental, grade or age 'stages', but serves as assessment in its function of demonstrating student progress over time.

While both of PROPEL's devices are meant to aid in the assessment or evaluation process, there is an emphasis placed in Gardner's words on the 'qualitative nature' of the evaluation thus gained. Gardner envisions a classroom of arts students working on domain projects and processfolios as being rather like a classical art atelier, with the teacher acting as lead artist. As such, more quantitative modes of evaluation such as standardized rubrics or letter grades are negated where "no single model of progress – no set of discrete levels – underlies the instruction" (Gardner, 1996, p. 144).

Joan Herman and Lynn Winters explore whether scores given to writing portfolios are "reliable, consistent, and meaningful estimates of what students know and can do" (Herman & Winters, 1994, p. 49). Most of their conversation revolves around the detailed scoring of portfolios, and whether numbers or grades generated represent some enduring truth about the students' learning. The reliability of grades generated is also seen as being critical if portfolios are to be used for large-scale assessments across districts or states.

Herman and Winters site studies showing both positive and negative results for inter reliability of scoring of portfolios in writing, using various rubrics. The article is particularly engaging where the authors discuss the gap in student classification that is discovered when portfolios are assessed as a whole and given a single grade versus having all the pieces of a portfolio graded and then averaging the individual items to arrive at a single grade. Under these circumstances:

half the students who would have been classified as 'masters' on the basis of the single portfolio score would not have been so classified when scores for the individual pieces were averaged. Thus, a student classified as a capable writer on the basis of the portfolio would not necessarily do well when given a standard writing prompt. Further, students classified as capable on the basis of an overall quality score were not always so classified when each piece in the portfolio was scored separately." (Herman & Winters, 1994, p. 51)

In their paper, Herman and Winters suggest that there is a widely held perception amongst teachers and principals in schools where portfolios are used that they produce beneficial changes in curriculum and instruction. Amongst the benefits, which will be further discussed as they bear directly upon fine arts instruction, are increases in problem-solving and higher level thinking skills.

Grant Wiggins in his book *Educative Assessment* writes about portfolio assessment. He works as the president and director of programs for an organization called the Center on Learning, Assessment, And School Structure (CLASS) out of New Jersey. Wiggins' conversation deals primarily with Language Arts portfolios, particularly writing portfolios, and so he is concerned with the differences between assessment and evaluation, and the form that writing portfolios must take if they are to be used for evaluation. In this circumstance, Wiggins suggests that the teacher or school, not the student, have primary control over what shape the portfolio will take and what will be included in the portfolio. "When the portfolio is further intended as a means of evaluation, still greater care and control in framing the guidelines for content are required of the adults" (Wiggins, 1998, p. 192). Wiggins' portfolios, then, include student 'tasks', 'prompts', and 'tests and quizzes'. Tasks are scored assignments (student chosen or required tasks). Prompts are scored assignments required locally or at the state level. Finally, tests and quizzes are scores gathered from testing at multiple levels (local, district, state and national). Because Wiggins advocates that portfolio assessment, to be valid, must reflect student performance in relation to performance standards, all work in the portfolio should be scored along those standards (or in the case of test scores not be samples of work at all – merely scores). Teachers shape and control the portfolio, as students have an unfortunate habit of choosing work they wish to showcase, often not choosing the pieces that best show their learning in relation to the imposed standards.

Wiggins cites, in pointing to the importance of teachers choosing and controlling what goes into the portfolio, a study by the Rand Corporation that detailed “serious problems with the validity and reliability of scores” given to portfolios used in Vermont (Wiggins G. , 1998, p. 193). As students in Vermont chose the work that went into their portfolios, and this work was often chosen without enough consideration given to the criteria or standards they needed to show mastery of, schools were rated poorly in the subsequent scoring. The Rand report also discussed issues created by inadequate training of the teachers and inconsistent scoring of the work and the portfolios.

Given the structure of portfolio that Wiggins advocates, he notes that the amount of work in portfolios should be very limited.

I am puzzled, therefore, why so many portfolio projects are founded on the often overwhelming idea that the entire collection of student work should be passed on from teacher to teacher. This onerous burden is unnecessary for most assessment and evaluation purposes. Tellingly, when I interview the teacher-recipients in districts that pass on all this work, they often sheepishly admit that they rarely study the material carefully. This proves that such a complicated collection has no real value except in some abstract romantic sense. (Wiggins G. , 1998, p. 192)

This discussion highlights one issue to be found in assuming that portfolios in a field like fine arts should be built on the same principles used in a field like writing. I can understand how, as a teacher, being passed on a thick folder or massive electronic file comprised of a student’s entire body of written work up to grade seven might be overwhelming. It might be ridiculous to assume, in the case of writing, that it would be best for the teacher to read through the whole portfolio from cover to cover. In the case of an arts portfolio, perhaps Wiggins’ argument to place strict limits on the amount of work included has less merit. Recently I had the pleasure of spending a day in the Louvre museum. Anyone who has been to the Louvre will attest to the fact that one would need months, maybe years to truly have the opportunity to appreciate even a healthy proportion of the work to be found within the museum’s walls. Most patrons wander through the galleries, glance quickly at most of the work and stop to really examine and ponder those pieces that catch their attention. I can imagine receiving a comprehensive fine arts portfolio that includes a substantial amount of the body of work

a student has done and browsing the same way – there is no reason to assume such a portfolio must be seen as overwhelming.

Janet Markus, in her thesis, examines the assessment and evaluation processes in three different classrooms modeled upon three different types of art curriculum; discipline-based, IB and AP. Markus notes “The tension between subjective nature of the student’s work, and the need to assign a mark or grade to each product, is a long-standing dilemma for many art teachers (Gruber, 1994; Hamblen, 1990, Taylor, 1991; Walker, 1998)” (Markus, 2002, p. 3). Markus admits early in her work that she comes out of an independent school teaching position, and states that she has been forced to adopt a more skills and product-based approach to assessment, as this is what parents demand (and have the power to expect) from a private school setting. She also notes that the parents she has worked with favour subject matter portrayed in a ‘realistic’ art style, and that the drive for skill acquisition in such classes denies the time for experimental processes (Markus, 2002, p. 14).

All three of the art classes Markus examines use portfolios in the assessment and evaluation processes. Assessment, in the manner of formative work that precedes and may be unrelated to the final summative grading process occurs to varying degrees in the classrooms that Markus examines. In the IB and AP classroom, as the whole program is structured around the portfolio that will generate a final letter grade, the evaluation process drives the instruction and class work to a high degree. Both organizations publish descriptions of standards for their portfolios, and provide examples of successful or high-scoring student artwork. “In this way they articulate expectations for final products in summative evaluations and assessment” (Markus, 2002, p. 45). Markus also notes that “The AP organization provides an annual full colour poster

showcasing the current examples of successful student work as a way of illustrating the appropriate standard of skill and ability (Markus, 2002, p. 53).⁵

In her conclusion, Markus finds 'conflicts in values' between teachers and students in all three programs studied. These conflicts come into play specifically around the assignment of letter grades to the work, and are exacerbated by the interplay and value placed on product versus process. Markus concludes that "Finding ways to integrate student-centered assessment and evaluation, with teacher-centered assessment and evaluation during the process of creating artwork, would create a more equitable environment for evaluation of studio art products" (Markus, 2002, p. 290).

Jere Turner, in *Examining an Art Portfolio Assessment Using A Many-Facet Rasch Measurement Model*, examines fine arts portfolios as a performance assessment, and seeks to design a method of making grading reliable and valid. He begins by pointing out that to be graded reliably, arts portfolios should have, "(a) clearly stated learning outcomes, (b) clearly defined achievement domains, and (c) selection of relevant assessment tasks" (Turner, 2003, p. 3). Turner finds that portfolios were scored validly provided:

Art faculty designed projects that reflect the objectives of the curriculum. An assessment instrument had been developed to provide project design criteria, scoring rubric, and rating dimensions. A validity committee monitored rater severity/leniency and made recommendations to the raters for further training. Raters used the assessment instrument to analytically score the art projects. (Turner, 2003, p. 111)

⁵ One relevant question to be pondered concerns the effect such guiding structure, packaged with a final summative letter-grade attached to the portfolio, has upon creativity and the divergent outcome that is an arguably important part of arts education. One of the teacher cited in Markus' study alludes to such when "She recognized that students would repeat a successful assignment, instead of trying something new, to decrease their chances of failing in a challenging venture. Students will also try to sense what pleases the teacher to get a better mark." (Markus, 2002, p. 143) I discuss these limitations placed on arts performance by letter grading in *Creativity, Motivation and Arts Assessment*.

The implications of this model of instruction and assessment in the arts for student-centered learning or student project choice are interesting.

Charles M. Dorn reports on the K-12 MAAP (Models for Assessing Art Performance) project in a 2003 issue of *Studies in Art Education*. (Dorn, 2003) This study, out of Florida, Indiana and Illinois, arose from the perceived need to regulate how art teachers assess art in the United States as a result of the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994*. The Educate America Act served to recognize the fine arts as a core curriculum area, but has created some consternation by calling for the development of national standards and creating a not so subtle pressure to see fine arts assessed as other subjects are.

Dorn notes, at the beginning of the article, that “What the educational reformers would like to see is a single art test that can measure what students know and are able to do in all of the nation’s art programs” (Dorn, 2003, p. 2). He calls for “a school authentic assessment model that involves arts teachers as stakeholders in the assessment process” (Dorn, 2003, p. 3). Those conducting this study set out to devise an authentic assessment model, plans for classrooms, and to create a data collection model that would satisfy the various levels of government in the United States in their demands for data in evidence of learning and school accountability. This grand design serves to limit the scope of the study. Discussions about whether authentic assessment in the fine arts is quantitative or qualitative are not to be had when the end-goal has already been set, and involves the generation of firm, quantitative data.

Participants in the study (teaching 1000 students in 11 school districts) set out to quantify student art performance inside portfolio evaluations. Using a set four-point scale, teachers worked together and alongside coaches or judges to provide scores to each portfolio (examining four works provided in each portfolio ‘holistically’). A portfolio was scored for each student at the beginning and end of the study in order to examine student improvement.

The study started with teachers receiving in-service in different studio projects and techniques that could be engaged in with students. In order to try and encourage high-level instruction in the arts, lesson plans, vocabulary sets, slides showing student

and professional work (exemplars) and suggested resources were provided to the teachers.

A standardization of instruction is quite evident in the setup of this study, and a standardization of output is implied in the focus placed upon 'exemplar' work in the setup of portfolios. Dorn notes that scoring rubrics created to look at artwork in this study were modeled on the College Board's Advanced Placement Programs in Studio Art as administered by the Educational Testing Service⁶ in the United States (mentioned above).

Four works of art for each student were scored by the study participants at the start and end of this study. It is notable, in light of the portfolio work I have engaged in, that no mention is made of student self-assessment, commentary, conversation or journal work playing any role in the scoring provided for these portfolios.⁷ In homage to the traditional unease with which teachers approach such quantitative scoring of student

⁶ The Educational Testing Service, or ETS will be encountered several more times in this literature review. ETS is a massive, influential non-profit organization that administers tests in over 180 countries including the TOEFL, TOEIC and GRE exams. Revenues in 1996 exceeded 411 million dollars. There are some very serious criticisms of ETS, including the charge that it is a "highly competitive business operation that is as much multinational monopoly as nonprofit institution." (Nordheimer, J., & Frantz, D., 1997) Operating as a non-profit organization, ETS is not subject to corporate income taxes in the United States. Nevertheless, ETS has set up a for-profit subsidiary company to compete for business in the booming testing market being generated by the current drive to standardize assessment practices across disciplines and throughout educational systems in the United States and internationally. Cole, Ryan, Kick and Mathies note, "The establishment of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in 1947 solidified the supremacy of tests as the ultimate assessment tool. (Cole DJ., Ryan, C.W., Kick, F. & Mathies, B., 1999) Because of ETS's stake in such assessment devices, I believe one needs to be careful about accepting the results from studies funded by or run in conjunction with ETS work. For more information on ETS, see the New York Times article cited above.

⁷ Focusing exclusively on assessing just product in evaluating art may serve to exclude female voices. Meskimmon finds one common theme in the work of women artists is the "shift from object to process and from representation to articulation." (Meskimmon, 2003) Teachers, in their assessment process, appear to confirm this. In the cross-Canada study of assessment practices done by MacGregor with his team female teachers showed a preference for stressing journal or sketchbook grades (66% versus 40% for males rating journals and sketchbooks as 'important' or 'very important') over items such as project grades, research projects or testing. (MacGregor, Lemerise, Potts & Roberts, 1993, p. 18)

artwork, Dorn notes that a four-point scale was settled upon as the five-point scale had created issues with teachers scoring down the middle with '3' grades.⁸

Teachers were coached into disregarding issues such as special needs students and their perception of improvement in their students' work over time as demonstrated in the classroom or by the portfolio. A single, holistic score was to be arrived at for each portfolio that could be confirmed by another teacher or judge's opinion. The idea of assessment as a form of categorization is quite evident here. What is even more interesting in light of modern authentic assessment in practice is that the study participants were asked to make sure to grade students at all levels. It was seen as beneficial that the study be proved legitimate by creating assessment results that followed a normal curve, and teachers were asked to be sure while grading portfolios that they were grading the portfolios at all levels (1, 2, 3, and 4). To be clear, teachers were to be sure, when grading their set of portfolios, to include "at least a few 1s (low) and 4s (high). (Dorn, Madeja, & Sabol, 2004, p. 117)

The same issues of utilizing assessment routines that will create a proper grade-spread and standardizing student output by focussing on exemplar work can be seen in the routines advocated by Donna Kay Beattie. She discusses the scoring of essay questions in art, and recommends that teachers:

Create model answers and a scoring guide (number of points for right answers) before finally deciding to use a particular question. For holistic scoring, place judged essays in piles of A, B, C, and D, frequently going back if necessary to reorder piles. When all essays have been read and placed, go back and examine each pile to make certain all seem to fit comfortably into their respective piles. (Beattie, 1997, p. 52)

Later on, Beattie states:

⁸ In her thesis study Markus discusses the AP portfolio grading process which occurs on a four-point scale, and notes that issues still remain where, "using a 4 point scale when assessing work but scoring is monitored by a chief reader, readers may want to stay in the 'safe' range and avoid being identified as particularly high or low scorers." (Markus, 2002, p. 76)

if an art product is to be evaluated using a rating scale, then students should be given beforehand an example of a 'Sad' artwork, a 'Not So Hot' artwork, and an 'OK' artwork, and so forth; each example is accompanied by a written explanatory description. This allows students to make comparisons with their own work before evaluation occurs. (Beattie, 1997, p. 64)

Boughton writes, perhaps as a rejoinder to the study, in the same journal several issues later, that "if we want students to exercise imagination, we need to reject standardization of content and tests" (Boughton, 2004, p. 268). He goes on to note that "The way we can do this is through enlightened use of portfolios to gather assessment data and the use of reflective debate among interested communities to clarify the values employed for judgment" (Beattie, 1997, p. 268).

Marica Schilling Meale followed up on Dorn's study with her research study examining the effects that cognitive and metacognitive goal setting, self-evaluation and self-reflection have on student's progress in creating 2-D visual art in grade four and five students. Meale scored her portfolios with the same rubric developed above by Dorn, Madeja and Sabol, noting "The scoring process was based on other portfolio or performance based assessments such as National Board of Teaching Standards (NBPTS), Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB), which require agreement of two judges" (Meale, 2005, p. 72).

Meale uses Dorn's work as a basis for her work, but her study takes interesting new directions. Where Dorn's work was designed to examine the creation and scoring of portfolios to satisfy a number of stakeholder's demands for accountability, the grading of the portfolios on a scale in Meale's work is carried out in order to look for improved performance by students who are engaging in goal setting, self-evaluation and self-reflection. These metacognitive activities, carried out in journal form inside the study by the test group, aren't included as part of the portfolio itself, but this becomes an obvious next step once such activities are found to be conducive to learning in the fine arts.

Dorn's work, in order for the comparison of quantitative results from portfolio assessments to be found valid, requires some standardization of instruction (teacher workshops, similar projects from school to school, etc.) and evaluation. Meale distances herself from this perspective in several ways. Firstly, she expresses an understanding

that art instruction is diverse and that standardization of both instruction and evaluation may not be a legitimate goal. Meale notes:

The advantage of the portfolio assessment process used in this study is that accountability was addressed through student performance, what students actually do and make in visual art classes rather than some extraneous, disembodied test or assessment. Work was scored within the context of that specific school, that teacher's assignments and those students' performances. State and national standards could be met while at the same time local and individual goals were achieved. (Meale, 2005, p. 123)

The scoring of the portfolios on a numeric scale, then, in the case of Meale's study is completed in order to look at the relationship between metacognitive activities studied and student growth in art making. The data produced is an analysis or evaluation of curriculum and instruction as it relates to outcome trends as opposed to the development of a summative evaluation tool to be used to provide grades for the individual students.

Meale concluded that "Strategies that incorporated the journal writing as an instructional tool, as a way of developing students' awareness of themselves as learners and artists resulted in improved performance scores. In cases where the value and purpose of the journal writing was unclear, the results were not conclusive" (Meale, 2005, p. 112). She further recommended that journal writing and the metacognitive strategies studied should be engaged in on an ongoing basis and should immediately follow the artwork. "Gaps in time make it difficult for students to remember what they were doing, thinking and feeling" (Meale, 2005, p. 120).

Brian Francis Donnelly, in his 2010 Thesis entitled *Digital Portfolios and Learning: The Students' Voices*, explores the thinking and listens to the voices of high school seniors and teachers in a Southern California high school where all teachers and students are "required to create and maintain an internet based digital portfolio" (Donnelly, 2010, p. iv). Donnelly speaks of how our education system originated from a 20th century industrial model, and maintains that "the transition to a 21st century, is largely inspired by the emergence of digital technologies; this shift demands major changes in thinking about the meaning of school and learning" (Donnelly, 2010, p. 2).

In the research background to the study, Donnelly discusses a number of themes that will emerge in this thesis as well, including the ability of electronic portfolios to facilitate student self-reflections and metacognition, collaboration, and cognitive apprenticeship. While Donnelly finds that his study “revealed a strong consensus among students and teachers that digital portfolios at HTH provided a highly effective method for archiving and organizing prior work.” (Donnelly, 2010, p. 133), he finds that there is some confusion over the purpose of the portfolios.

On one extreme, there were students who believed that ‘all of the work was done prior to being uploaded to the DP (digital portfolio)’, implying that the ‘real learning occurred during their project based course activities. These students seemed to believe that the primary purpose of their digital portfolio was to provide a place where they could effectively store and subsequently retrieve evidence of the learning that occurred during a project based learning course. (Donnelly, 2010, p. 133)

Donnelly discusses how the portfolios used only lead to a very limited practice of reflection amongst the students. Several reasons are suggested, including one suggested in the quotation given immediately above. As the students were graded on their projects and work before placing them in their portfolios, the portfolio was seen as a sort of secondary process not immediately linked to their learning. Donnelly never directly challenges the process of grading projects in advance of having them placed in the portfolio, but comes close to doing so where, in the conclusion, he states, “any successful integration of digital media with deep and sustained impacts on learning will require a willingness to abandon traditional roles of teacher and student. Accomplishing this will require extensive experimentation, collaboration and investment by stakeholders in government, business and education” (Donnelly, 2010, p. 154).

Additionally, all students at the school worked towards a Final Transitional Presentation of Learning where they would present their portfolio. As this presentation occurs only two times per year, students engagement with their portfolios was not continuous through the year. “For many of the student participants, active engagement in recall seemed to be confined to the periods leading up to the semi-annual presentations of learning” (Donnelly, 2010, p. 136).

Literature Review: Letter Grades

To ignore the complexity of the grading issue is to live in a fantasy world where houses are made of gingerbread, the stork delivers babies, and failure has no effect on a person's life. (Simon, 1976, p. 1)

As in the last literature review section, I have run the discussions in chronological order in order to best portray the back and forth interplay in the academic discussions. There are several distinct conversations happening around the subject of letter grades, however. One commonly examined issue, for example, is the effect letter grading has upon student learning (or achievement). Another often-discussed aspect is the effect letter grades have on student motivation. Finally, many researchers are concerned with the effect the dominance of letter grading has upon curriculum, curriculum development and 'levels of learning' engaged in at the classroom level. While some of the authors discussed below focus in on just one of these conversations, others engage in combinations or even all of the topics, so I've decided to continue with the organizing strategy of chronological order rather than trying to subdivide the conversations topically.

James S. Terwilliger's 1977 article "Assigning Grades – Philosophical Issues and Practical Recommendations" begins with the often-quoted phrase, "There are few, if any, aspects of the job of the teacher that are more distasteful than the assignment of grades to students" (Terwilliger, 1977, p. 21). Terwilliger points to some of the cause teachers have for discomfort over grades where he notes, "I can only say that any method for assigning grades will rely heavily upon value judgments made by those who are responsible for the assignment of grades" (Terwilliger, 1977, p. 22). In his article, Terwilliger points to what he sees as being three basic philosophical views taken by teachers towards grading, naming 'The Behaviourist', 'The Humanist', and 'The Pragmatist'. Behaviourists are moved towards a highly structured approach to teaching and curriculum, educate in smaller discrete units and focus on measurement that

confirms mastery at each level before moving on. Humanists are concerned with individual interests and differences and concerned with the dehumanizing aspects of curriculum delivery and measurement we see in the behaviourists' approach. The third approach Terwilliger sees is that of 'The Pragmatist', who "views education as both a preparation for life and an opportunity to develop those talents and abilities which are unique to each student" (Terwilliger, 1977, p. 25). Most of his article expounds upon the different approaches and methods to be taken towards grading under various circumstances and offers various concerns. He concludes that, "Grades should reflect only the teacher's judgment of the quality of a student's performance in achieving instructional objectives. A variety of quantitatively scored performances (quizzes, tests, projects, etc.) should be employed" (Terwilliger, 1977, p. 39).

Frederick Burton, in a paper presented to the American Educational Research Association, examines the responses of teachers, students, parents and administrators to the letter-grade evaluation system and concludes that "letter grades influence the sustenance of traditional curriculum based on behaviorist theory with a resultant 'trivialization' of content" (Burton, 1983, p. document resume). In his work, Burton examines the rationales given for grading, interpretations of the process, the consequences of letter grades, and considers alternatives to letter grading.

Burton finds a difference between elementary, middle and high school teachers with respect to the attitudes they have towards letter grading. Teachers of middle and high school students are more accepting of letter grading, while elementary teachers are less. Burton finds that elementary teachers are freer in their use of observations and the personal discretion they bring to the assignment of letter grades, whereas teachers of

older students employ more rigid numerical analysis of tests and tasks assigned.⁹ Burton conjectures that this difference is due to the 'self contained' nature of the elementary classroom.(Burton, 1983, p. 3) This may be Burton's way of indicating that teachers of older students feel the pressure of outside forces on their evaluative decisions, such as the manner in which grades come to count for college or university admissions, awards, or even employment opportunities.

The effect that this trend has on curriculum itself becomes evident. Burton notes that:

Since letter grades were to be determined numerically, teachers often planned closed-ended, paper and pencil activities calling for convergent thinking to enable them to assign numerical grades for each activity. Less frequently, teachers planned more open-ended activities, but they justified such activities through quantitative testing or grading. (Burton, 1983, p. 8)

David J. Bateson examines data collected in British Columbia by the 1986 Science Assessment survey of science teachers in his 1990 article "Measurement and Evaluation Practices of British Columbia Science Teachers" (Bateson, 1990). Although focusing on evaluation in science, his article is interesting within the scope of this paper as he quickly points to evidence of 'curriculum narrowing' in science given teacher's comments on evaluation. "Although the four goals of attitudes, skills and processes, knowledge, and critical thinking are equally important in the science curriculum, the emphasis in measurement and evaluation is on the knowledge goal, with attitudes being virtually ignored" (Bateson, 1990, p. 45). Another concern with letter grading is made

⁹ I have experienced the sort of issue that arises from such calculations. My daughter struggled early in her grade 9 math course, scoring many low grades on quizzes and assignments. She demonstrated regular progress in her learning, scoring highly on later quizzes and assignments. On the cumulative test for the course at the end she scored a 72%, and was given a C- as final grade on the course. Quizzes, tests and assignments from September, when she didn't understand the math, were averaged in with quizzes and assignments from January, when she did, to arrive at her final letter grade. The final letter grade, then, as an average of all work done throughout the term of the course was not indicative of what she had learned.

evident when Bateson finds that, in spite of the fact that assessment and evaluation is supposed to be done on a criterion basis in British Columbia, “Over one third of the teachers responded yes, they did use a preset distribution of marks! This finding is alarming given the extreme differences in ability and achievement that occur from class to class, from school to school, and from year to year” (Bateson, 1990, pp. 49-50).

Peter Wood surveys a group of teachers in the United States to examine how they distribute their term-end grades on the A to F scale, how they weigh student achievement in relation to other attributes like effort and potential, and what kinds of attitudes teachers have towards evaluation. In examining teacher attitudes, one of Wood’s hypotheses is that

The reporting of pupil ‘progress toward objectives’ should differ for teachers who have the same objectives for all students and for teachers who establish different objectives for different students. This difference in approaches to grading should be especially obvious in a comparison of teachers of students who vary most in initial abilities (e.g., handicapped students, athletes, musicians) – and teachers of more homogeneously grouped students in traditional academic subjects. (Wood & others, 1990, p. 6)

This holds to be true in the study, as Wood finds that, “Performance teachers (music, art, physical education) tended to assign more A’s and B’s (70%) than teachers of more traditionally academic classes (54%)” (Wood & others, 1990, p. 18).

Wood examines Marso’s 1985 work, showing that testing, particularly tests designed to elicit single, correct responses tend to be the dominant method of assessment where a letter grade is the required outcome.

Marso reported that the typical teacher (n=123) administered over 99 tests during the school year. The most common item type was the completion of short-answer question – followed by problem questions, matching, multiple-choice, essay, and true-false questions. Matching questions were rated as the most useful, followed by multiple-choice, completion, true-false, problems, and essays, in that order. (Wood & others, 1990, p. 8)

Wood finds confirmation, in his study, that letter grading appears to force teachers into the strategy of employing “measurement techniques that produce large and immediate

quantities of information that may be of very questionable validity” (Wood & others, 1990, p. 33). This, in spite of the fact that 70% of the teachers surveyed report that they would love to have the time to include more projects in class or have the chance to set individualized objectives for different students.

Terrence J. Crooks’ “The Impact of Classroom Evaluation Practices on Students” is a sweeping review of the impact of various forms of classroom evaluation procedures on students, student learning and curriculum itself. He reviews fourteen fields of research, examining in particular the effect evaluation practices have on learning strategies emphasized, motivation of students and subsequent achievement levels.

Crooks examines the movement towards teaching higher level thinking skills and the effect that standard evaluation practices have on such goals. He notes that “after analyzing 8800 test questions from tests in 12 grade and subject area combinations (elementary to high school), Fleming and Chambers (1983) reported that almost 80% of all questions were at the knowledge level” (Crooks, 1988, p. 441; Elton & Laurillard, 1979). He goes on to note that in spite of teachers’ objectives to develop higher level thinking skills in their students, when teachers used standard classroom exams to assess student learning the exams frequently required “little more than repetition of material presented in the textbook or class, or solution of problems much like those encountered during instruction” (Crooks, 1988, p. 442).

Crooks notes that there is a powerful relationship between assessment system used and student learning that leads to a sort of ‘law of learning behaviour’ as expressed by Elton and Laurillard that “the quickest way to change student learning is to change the assessment system” (Crooks, 1988, p. 445; Elton & Laurillard, 1979). Crooks demonstrates this powerful relationship by citing a study examining students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Snyder (1971) found that while what he called the formal curriculum emphasized a problem-oriented approach, originality, and independence of thought, the evaluation (which he called the *hidden curriculum*) tended to emphasize an answer-oriented approach and rote learning. Some students with high intrinsic motivation chose not to let the evaluation system distort their learning, but the majority were happy to focus mainly on the demands of the evaluation system. (Crooks, 1988, p. 445)

Crooks examines two goals of the assessment system, those of providing feedback to students in order to drive further learning and the job of providing a summative assessment of learning. Crooks finds that a number of researchers have noted that these two goals often come into conflict with each other. The researchers cited (McPartland, 1987; Miller, 1976; Sadler, 1983 and Slavin, 1978) all point out that “where evaluations count significantly toward the student’s final grade, the student tends to pay less attention to feedback, and thus to learn less from it” (Crooks, 1988, p. 457). It is suggested that allowing for a continuous series of evaluations that don’t count towards the summative grade and only counting a final master evaluation might serve to counter this, as is often the case in mastery learning regimes. Crooks points out, though, that reducing the number of evaluations that are used to provide summative results increases the problems of reliability in assessment.

Crooks also examines issues around extrinsic versus intrinsic motivation in students as affected by assessment routines. He points to Maehr and Stallings’ (1972) study showing that “students who worked under the intrinsic motivation condition continued to be interested in working on difficult tasks, whereas students who worked under the extrinsic motivation condition lost interest in attempting difficult tasks, preferring to attempt only easy ones” (Crooks, 1988, p. 464). Again, clearly seeing a link between assessment routines and level of thinking skills encourage students, Crooks points to Condry and Chambers’ 1978 study that found “students in their extrinsic motivation group were more *answer oriented*, trying to take shortcuts to produce the desired answers, whereas students in the intrinsic motivation group tended to use deeper, more meaningful approaches to understanding the tasks” (Crooks, 1988, p. 464).

The conclusions Crooks arrives at have obvious relevance for this study. In equating letter grading and assessment routines that are commonly used to drive this form of assessment together, Crooks notes:

It is hard to see any justification before the final year or so of high school for placing much emphasis on using classroom evaluation for normative grading of student achievement, given the evidence reviewed here that normative grading (with the social comparison and interstudent competition that accompany it) produces undesirable consequences for most students. (Crooks, 1988, p. 468)

Crooks proceeds to list the myriad of negative consequences of using the assessment and evaluation routines that include letter grading, including “reduction of intrinsic motivation, debilitating evaluation anxiety, ability attributions for success and failure that undermine student effort, lowered self-efficacy for learning in the weaker students, reduced use and effectiveness of feedback to improve learning, and poorer social relationships among the students” (Crooks, 1988, p. 468).

Robert Edward Spear’s 1991 thesis, *A Philosophical Critique of Student Assessment Practices* reviews what he sees as being the four common justifications for the assessment regimes we carry out in public schools, namely:

- 1) that the activities of testing, marking and grading are central to the activity of teaching
- 2) that a system of testing, marking and grading motivates students to learn
- 3) that a system of testing, marking and grading ensures accountability within schools and
- 4) that a system of testing, marking and grading is a necessary and defensible mechanism for sorting people on the basis of academic achievement, and thereby for deciding which students should proceed into what occupational niches. (Spear, 1991, p. 5)

Spear argues, quite compellingly, that none of these given justifications holds under scrutiny, and that current methods of testing, marking and grading are not only indefensible given any of these arguments, but are harmful to the educative process. He begins by pointing out that his thesis is neither a technical critique, with which he shall suggest improvements or ways to fix the testing and grading system so that it will work, nor a radical critique, a form of discourse that usually concludes with the assertion that the educative endeavour is by nature exploitive and the dismantling of the entire system is the only repair available. Spear argues against letter grading, in this thesis, from both practical and moral or ethical perspectives.

Leaning on the works of Alasdair MacIntyre, Spear sees education as being a key component in the introduction of students into ‘practices’. He is further concerned with rationality and the cohesiveness of the educational project. Using MacIntyre’s organizational concepts, Spear is particularly concerned about the manner in which grades act as goods external to practice, leading students away from rather than into

rational inquiry and an understanding of the various practices to which they should be aspiring.

Nava and Loyd, in 1992, examine the grading practices of 827 elementary and high school teachers from 18 districts across various regions in the United States, looking at what factors and processes are being used to generate grades. They find, replicating some of the above studies and papers, that teachers favour assessment instruments that are designed to provide objective, single-answer responses or predetermined outcomes where letter grades must be generated.

In summary, the study has identified five grading criteria that teachers indicate they 'definitely include': unit tests, announced quizzes, essays or term papers, effort, and semester tests. Grading criteria that teachers say they will 'probably include' are projects, assignments, book reports, participation in class, ability, and behavioural criteria such as cheating, cooperativeness, and attendance. Teachers also indicate that criteria such as spelling, grammar, handwriting, and aggressive or inappropriate behaviour will 'probably not' be included in grading. (Nava & Loyd, 1992, p. 15)

In their conclusion, Nava and Loyd note that letter grades, in practice, have come to represent a confusing mix of achievement and non-achievement criteria. Further, "grades become classroom-specific and must be interpreted as such" (Nava & Loyd, 1992, p. 19). Because of the highly subjective, context-dependent and varied methods of letter grading uncovered in the study, Nava and Loyd conclude that the continuation of the practice of letter grading is questionable.

Elizabeth Ann Kushniruk's 1994 thesis *Teachers' Beliefs and Philosophies About Their Grading Practices* (Kushniruk, 1994) featured 19 teachers being interviewed in order to tease out their beliefs about the functions, processes and contextual factors involved in using letter grades. Kushniruk points out how problematic letter grading is generally for teachers, as well as pointing to the dearth of studies examining teacher's beliefs and practices in grading, particularly Canadian-based studies.

Of interest to this thesis are some of the conflicting philosophical ideals teachers in the study demonstrated through the interview process. In finding discrepancies in answers teachers gave to questions in her process, Kushniruk notes "While the majority

of the teachers possess a basic philosophy and expressed, throughout the course of the interview, what appear to be solid beliefs about their grades and grading practices, in reality what exists is a compromise between these beliefs and the context in which they work” (Kushniruk, 1994, p. 1 ch. 5).¹⁰

Teachers, for example, indicated strongly in one section of the interview process that grades should only be used for communicating progress towards curricular goals with students and parents. However, “When specifically asked if they hoped to influence their students with their grades (Question 3a), 16 teachers commented that they believed that grades were useful and that they hoped grades would influence their students” (Kushniruk, 1994, p. 2 ch. 5).

Kushniruk also explores whether teachers feel that there should be different assessment systems for different school subjects. She finds an obvious divide in the philosophies of teachers, where, “One group, consisting of eight teachers, appeared to hold the view that academic and non-academic programs and subjects should be graded using a common grading system. The second group, consisting of 11 teachers, suggested that this common view is not appropriate, and that separate grading systems should be employed” (Kushniruk, 1994, pp. 11, ch. 6).¹¹ One teacher in the study comments, “If teachers say they can’t grade [art], then perhaps they [are] not teaching it right” (Kushniruk, p. 11 ch. 6). The teachers in the study agreed only that grading should be consistent across the four academic subjects.

Expressing concerns that critical thinking skills are particularly hard to evaluate with letter grades, and that letter grades should not be used where information on student progress will not be effectively or accurately communicated, Kushniruk recommends that, “They (teachers) should keep in mind that too many characteristics in a grade are certain to lead to misinterpretation and that those characteristics that can

¹⁰ The pagination in this document resets at each chapter, requiring a page and chapter reference.

¹¹ The division between academic and non-academic subjects in the curriculum is, I believe, one of the issues constraining the discussion. This will be further addressed.

best or only be evaluated using anecdotal means and/or conferences should not be included in a grade” (Kushniruk, 1994, p. 12, ch. 7).

Bonnie Sunstein is concerned with the role played by power and manipulation in all assessment regimes, noting, “Assessments of all kinds – one person designing rituals for another based on one’s interpretation, written or read, heard or spoken – are powerful ways to manipulate” (Sunstein, 1996, p. 13). She speaks of how acts of assessment can be categorized into three different types of encounters, mainly reflective (self-assessment), reflexive (where there is self-assessment, but the student examines progress in relation to standards or desires established by others) and dialectical, where the teacher becomes mediator, helping the student to negotiate between the reflective and reflexive.

Sunstein sees these modes of assessment as requiring a careful balance or precision. She sees that, “Too much reflection becomes self-centered. It ignores what the other wants. Assessment must also be reflexive, looking at others’ expectations, understanding them, and representing the self to an other. Yet, too much attention to external expectations ignores the individual” (Sunstein, 1996, p. 14). Sunstein advocates for portfolio assessment in that it is the best form of assessment for finding this balance.

The difference between portfolios and other forms of school ‘assessments’ is the voices of the portfolio-keepers looking internally at their own growth as it happens, and then looking externally toward what the school expects. They create materials, examine their progress, and design the opportunities to assess their own collections, self-evaluating and reflecting about their work while documenting how it stands up against a school’s expectations. (Sunstein, 1996, p. 14)

Sunstein argues against portfolio assessment regimes that seek to quantify or letter grade, noting that the more divergent the outcomes of an educative endeavour, the more difficult it is to call a single letter grade explanatory of the learning. “The more differences we show, the less opportunity there will be for evaluating and assessing in comparative, linear, quantitative ways” (Sunstein, 1996, p. 15). Sunstein sees the process of authentic assessment as involving that reflexive moment, where the student

negotiates a description of her own learning in response to established curriculum or standards.

Mary Krogness' article "Giving Grades: Laying and Arcane Ritual to Rest" is an impassioned plea, from a middle school English teacher, to abandon the process of giving letter grades to students. Krogness attacks the use of letter grades, noting that:

any thoughtful person quickly recognizes that even the acclaimed A can't sufficiently explain the quality of an accomplished young person's speech, exposition, essay, poem, play, or story; not even an A can pinpoint the talent inferred by a student's imagination, vision, intuition, ability to cut to the core of a piece of literature, uncanny habit of synthesizing, quick recall, penchant for making significant connections, unusual feel for language, and so many other marks of a young person's originality, personal growth, and development. (Krogness, 1996, p. 23)

Krogness is concerned with many of the issues that are often visited in literature over letter grades. She notes that letter grades can't, for instance, explain what a child is doing well or not doing well (where they can improve). She discusses the validity issue with letter grades, noting that the meaning of grades changes from teacher to teacher, context to context. Krogness is concerned with the importance of meaningful reflection inside the educational context, and notes that such reflection is hampered in the sense that the teacher-student relationship is shaped by the judgment that comes with the giving of a letter grade. Krogness argues vehemently for more authentic forms of evaluation including the valuing of questions, discussions, debates and the learning process as it unfolds as opposed to the mere formation of answers and final product.

Craig and McCormick's 2002 MA Action Research project examines two school sites with fourth and eighth grade visual art and music students in the United States. Teachers were asked to experiment with the use of authentic assessment tools such as portfolios, journals, observation checklists and rubrics (Craig & McCormick, 2002). Although experimenting with these authentic forms of assessment, no changes to the regular grading system were attempted. This created interesting results at one of the research sites, where the researchers found a negative change in one of the groups of students, where there was a decline in 'how fair' the grades in art were viewed as being, and where students after the project were less apt to enjoy seeing their work placed on

display. The authors noted that this negative outcome might be due “to using rubrics to grade because the students knew if their work was poor they did not want it displayed” (Craig & McCormick, 2002, p. 55).

This raises questions which the authors do not expand upon, but which are open to discussion and speculation. More information on how grades were arrived at before the authentic assessment tools were put into place would have been helpful. If the introduction and use of authentic assessment caused the student perception of grading fairness to drop, why was this? In the comment on rubrics above, are the authors implying that some student work was always poor, but that the students didn't know this, or are they implying that more work was judged as 'poor' within the parameters established by the rubrics used.

Some of the issues that were created by the use of rubrics are expounded upon where the authors note, “Students were unable to complete the number of projects originally intended due to time constraints,” and “Although students worked hard to complete projects, journals proved to be an insurmountable task for them” (Craig & McCormick, 2002, pp. 53-54). The researchers, in concluding their study, agreed that:

The greatest drawback to authentic assessments related to time. It was time-consuming to deal individually with students concerning the content of their portfolios as well as commenting on their journals/logs; however, the one-on-one conversations between teacher and students was very rewarding. (Craig & McCormick, 2002, p. 55)

Sylvia Bagley, revisiting ideals from her earlier educational experiences, studies a high school where students don't receive letter grades, but are provided with detailed narrative evaluations of their learning. She sees value in an evaluation regime that “requires that students learn to view assessment as a useful tool for growth, rather than simply a teacher-determined statement on ‘how they are doing’” (Bagley, 2008, p. 23). Portfolios play a central role in the program studied, as students collect their work, along with evaluations in a portfolio in preparation for a review in front of peers, teachers, administrators and parents at the grade eight and ten levels known as ‘gatewaying’. Students also present portfolios at a Senior Exhibition in grade 12 as one of their graduation requirements.

Bagley notes that the rigor and stress of this alternative form of assessment can far surpass those of the more common system. Students who were interviewed within this study frequently commented on this, but pointed out “stress isn’t necessarily a negative thing, and made a distinction between ‘bad’ stress (purely negative aspects, which they dislike), and ‘good’ stress (i.e. stress which helps them in the long run, and thus is worth it)” (Bagley, 2008, p. 22). One student cited in the study, noted that in contrast to a school where letter grades are the assessment tool, “it’s impossible to hide or ‘slip by’ at a school which places such a strong emphasis on personalized feedback” (Bagley, 2008, p. 23).

Why Portfolios in Fine Arts Education Need Not and Should Not Be Letter-Graded: Authentic Assessment in the Fine Arts

Introductory Comments

Many artists in the professional artworld keep portfolios. These portfolios serve multiple and complex purposes. They are living curriculum vitae, serving as a sort of overview of the artists work. For the visual artist, the portfolio can often contain samples and drawings and sketches, slides or pictures of finished works of art. Many artists are now moving such portfolios online in the form of dramatic and in-depth web pages that allow the viewer to examine the artist's work at various stages through various styles or phases. One aspect of my classroom teaching has been work with a 'one-to-one laptop' project over the past several years, where my students all have laptop computers to work with. This has caused me to pick up some experience creating and maintaining web pages and other online resources for my students. My mother-in-law, a long-time artist with a distinguished career, recently asked me to help her create a web page to discuss and display her work as she feels strongly that it has become a necessary part of the discipline.

Portfolios offer the opportunity for students and teachers to engage in a powerful form of authentic assessment. The authenticity of this assessment relates to the manner in which works of art and artists' bodies of work are assessed in and outside of the artworld. The insertion of a summative letter grade into this process is a negation of the process. Below, I outline the processes of assessment and evaluation used by the 'artworld' to consider works introduced into the community as art.

In addition, portfolios provide the opportunity for students to take ownership and control over their own learning experiences. One of the hallmarks of the portfolio is the reflection and metacognitive thinking done by the artist or student. In the section on

creativity and motivation, further on, I will demonstrate how letter grading intrudes upon and disrupts this process. Sizer notes, "Above all, the hungry student is active, engaged in his or her learning. It is that quality which is most appealing to many teachers. The student takes the initiative and works at teaching himself" (Sizer, 1992, p. 54). Portfolio assessment lies at the heart of an alternative or non-traditional relationship between teacher and student. This relationship might best be summarized as coach, not master. This relationship reflects the authentic forms of critical discourse or assessment used in the artworld noted above, and better supports the forms of self-reflection, metacognitive thinking and learning to be found in the fine arts.

The form of student-teacher relationship valued here not only reflects the type of authentic relationship students will benefit from whether they move on to being producers or consumers in the artworld, but is supportive of the forms of learning being advocated by a growing host of influential and forward thinking voices in the world of education in general. Whether we are speaking of 'critical thinking skills', 'domain projects', 'challenge-based learning', 'project-based learning' or '21st Century Skills', collaboration, reasoning, reflection and a growing emphasis on the importance of allowing students to share control over the direction of their learning and allow for divergent outcomes in demonstrations of learning are critical parts of the conversation. All of these aspects of learning lead to inevitable conversations about the validity or viability of letter grades.

Howard Gardner discusses the concept of 'intelligence-fair assessment', a conversation that has been taken up by other writers in the field of assessment. Gardner forwarded the theory of multiple intelligences, and goes on to discuss further repercussions of the theory:

Upon learning of the existence of a set of intelligences one's understandable impulse is to assume that each of these intelligences ought to be assessed, and that they can in fact be assessed in the canonical ways used in standardized intelligence tests. This impulse must be curbed! Precisely because each intelligence works according to its own operations and principles, it is wrongheaded to attempt to assess it using the linguistic-logical amalgam featured in most standardized measures. Intelligences, the practices based on them, and the domains in which they are customarily deployed, must be assessed in intelligence-fair ways. (Gardner, 1996, p. 136)

From the start, one frequent point of opposition to forms of summative evaluations that don't involve numeric or letter grades must be addressed. Letter grades are often viewed as being necessary, particularly at the high school level, in order to facilitate students' applications and transitions to universities and colleges. Universities and colleges do understand that letter grades are not firm ground upon which to base admission. In fine arts, in particular, Markus notes:

in B.C. 'Admission Committees stated they had no way of determining whether a student's mark of 75% in art class from one school in British Columbia was similar to a 75% from another school in British Columbia, in terms of course quality and content. They were concerned about the variety of approaches in senior art education, and the considerable variation in curriculum and textbook instruction in schools across the province. (Markus, 2002, p. 73)

This lack of standardization and resulting dearth of meaning for letter grades isn't only a point of contention in the fine arts. Writing about letter grading in mathematics, Seeley notes that in her state:

School districts vary widely in the content of their grading policies and procedures. For example, one district in our study established percentages to indicate the relative weight that should be given to certain types of evaluation (for example, 50 percent for district unit tests, 20 percent for teacher-made tests, 10 percent for homework, 20 percent for class work). Another district provided only vague guidelines (for example, pupils may receive any mark if, in the teacher's judgment, the quality of their work meets the criteria established by the teacher for that subject or course). (Seeley, 1994, p. 5)

Where letter grades can be so non-descriptive and invalid, portfolios offer a thorough insight into both students' work and metacognitive abilities in the form of planning strategies, reflections and self-assessments. Noting that the lack of letter grades need not be a liability in inter-institutional communication, Seeley notes that:

One school in the project has made an intensive effort to ensure that its high school mathematics teachers are aware of the capabilities of

QUASAR¹² students – as portrayed in portfolios, not by grades. These teachers have offered not only to send along portfolios with their graduating middle school students, but to sit down with the high school teachers and explain the contents. (Seeley, 1994, p. 6)

Curwin responds to and denies the charge that grades are required for post-secondary admissions or employers. He is writing about the American college and university system in particular, but he notes that, given the different standards and meanings of letter grades from the thousands of different schools that feed into the post-secondary system, grades are a very poor method of comparison between students. He finishes by reviewing matters such as “(a) the official position of the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO); (b) the 1973 survey by the Consortium of Experimenting High Schools; (c) the positive experience of more than 100 high school programs which use descriptive and/or criterion-referenced evaluations” (Curwin, 1976, p. 144). Finally, in discussing the reticence of fine arts teachers to grade students, MacGregor et al. note that:

The main customers for school arts graduates have traditionally been commercial or technical: the city symphony, the local theatre, the graphics studio. All relied on portfolios or auditions rather than on academic record in determining whether an applicant was suitable for employment. (MacGregor, Lemerise, Potts, & Roberts, 1993, p. 3)¹³

Colleges and universities across North America that specialize in the education of artists seem to recognize that the authentic methods of responding to, assessing and evaluating art and artists is removed from the sort of evaluation that happens in other fields. As all universities do, the Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver calls for academic records from its applicants as part of the admission process, but “creative ability in the form of a visual portfolio is the primary criterion of admission”

¹² Quantitative Understanding: Amplifying Student Achievement and Reasoning-mathematics program led by Edward A. Silver at the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh

¹³ In ‘Art, Culture and Education’ I discuss the relative importance of graded exams versus audition for a friend’s daughter who is attending the National School of Ballet in Toronto.

(Design, 2011, para. 1). Emily Carr participates in National Portfolio Days, where potential applicants bring portfolios to have them examined by university officials. A large number of art colleges, universities and institutions belong to the National Portfolio Day Association, and candidates for Emily Carr can have their portfolios examined by representatives of a large number of institutions from across North America when they show up for the annual event. Last year's list of attending institutions included over twenty colleges and universities from across North America, and one from France. According to the Association, candidate's portfolios "should include your best and most recent work, but it can also include works in progress, sketchbooks and tear sheets" (Association, 2011, para. 3).

One more point needs to be addressed in the often claimed and refuted idea that letter grading is required in the public school system, if only to facilitate the movement of students from public education into post-secondary institutions. The public school system is a vast, complex system with a commonly held and often stated mandate of addressing the learning needs of all learners from earliest admission to Kindergarten (or in some places pre-Kindergarten programs) through high school grade levels. There is constant pressure on the system to increase the number and percentage of students who get all the way through the system to a high school diploma, equivalency or better without dropping out. In the school district in which I work, there is a full-time administrative position given to a master teacher whose job is to track and support students who are seen as being 'at risk' of not seeing their public education all the way through to grade 12 graduation. Gerald Bracey points out that public education has

been extremely successful at serving more and more students whose social or economic class might have once served to deny them access to a high school education.¹⁴

This is not a mandate shared yet by the post-secondary education system, though one can dream. One applies for admission to a college or university, the university or college decides upon merit or other factors which students will be admitted.¹⁵ A government of Canada website boasts that participation in universities in Canada has been growing and has now reached a record 24% of the age 18-24 demographic. (Government of Canada, Summary, para. 1) The Canadian Council on Learning reports that in 2004, only 10% of young people from ages 20-24 in Canada “did not have a high school diploma and were not enrolled in school” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2005, p. 3) Taken together, one can easily extrapolate from these two figures that a significant majority of young people who leave high school do not go on to attend college or university (formal post-secondary programs). Given these numbers, the pure folly of claiming that assessment and evaluation routines in the public education system need to be structured, to any great degree, in order to facilitate movement from secondary to post-secondary institutions is apparent. In this case, it seems far more reasonable to assert that public schools should arrive at an evaluation regime that will best serve the needs of learners in public school, and post-secondary institutions will then face the prospect of determining how they can tap into the data stream or assessment tools thus generated in order to facilitate their admissions.

¹⁴ In fact, Bracey notes that the public education system’s success in reaching more minds is often turned against it by those who would use statistics to deliberately mislead and obfuscate. In an essay called “Those Misleading SAT and NAEP Trends” he describes a statistical ‘trick’ known as Simpson’s Paradox, demonstrating that “it sometimes appears as if test scores are not rising, or are even falling when, in fact, test scores for all groups are rising at the same time as lower scoring groups are making up a larger proportion of the total. This, it should be obvious, does not mean the same thing as falling test scores due to declining achievement.” (Bracey, 2003, p. 103)

¹⁵ By other factors I refer obliquely to the often discussed allegations that having money, socially positioned parents or political influence with an absence of academic ability can get one admitted to certain well-known and prominent institutions. Such a discussion in any more depth would wander away from the purpose of this paper, but I feared leaving as simplistic a statement as ‘universities admit solely upon merit’ would leave me looking foolish.

I think that discussion around the role served by letter grading in the educational process is one that will garner more attention in general, but to refocus on the fine arts, there are compelling reasons to question the practice within this specific domain. Firstly, letter grading is entirely antithetical to the ways in which fine arts are assessed and evaluated within the domain of the artworld outside of the educational context. In a related line of reasoning, in examining traditional, historical practices of assessment in the domain of fine arts we find that similar forms of evaluation have been traditionally used, but reflect a view and societal vision of fine arts that is no longer relevant. The use of letter grading in evaluation and reporting can be shown to disrupt processes of creativity and impinge upon student motivation. Finally, letter grading doesn't fit well with the need in fine arts to value divergent outcomes, and use of letter grades inhibits curriculum development that honours divergent outcome and allows individual students to collaborate with each other and collaborate in the setting of learning outcomes. Each of these themes is explored in the following sections.

The Community of Response

Portfolio assessment provides the opportunity to respond to, assess, and even judge works of art and bodies of work in the same manner in which they are dealt with in the wider world of art outside of the classroom. There is opportunity in a portfolio to include the responses of a number of people to the works kept within, including self-assessments, peer reviews, teacher comments and even parental responses. One reason why a non-graded approach is particularly effective here, then, is the importance of not allowing any voice to rise above the others in concluding judgment.

My Master's Thesis entitled *Examining a Community of Response Definition of Art and Establishing a Relevant Pedagogy* (Saul, 2004) had as a central component a discussion of how we make, present and respond to art in an ongoing discussion within 'communities of response'. What we choose to identify as being 'art', how we respond to it, and what values or honours we attribute to it are matters determined by an ongoing aesthetic debate engaged in by groups of people. According to Colin Lyas, "These agreements need not be universal, can be changeable, can alter as our lives alter, can

be affected by the lives we have had and will have. But that there are these agreements is all that underpins this language” (Lyas, 1997, p. 130).

Before I move on, then, to examine how we respond to and assess art within what many writers refer to as the ‘artworld’, providing a few examples of that process at work to illustrate why an ungraded portfolio is the most authentic approach to arts education, I will delve a little deeper into the ideas of authentic learning and authentic assessment that I introduced in the section on establishing terms as we come to the heart of this issue where we discuss how art is responded to in the wider world outside of the educational context.

In an often-cited article outlining the components of authentic learning, Audrey Rule outlines four defining ideals that she gleans through a literature review. Firstly, authentic learning “involves real-world problems that mimic the work of professionals in the discipline with presentation of findings to audiences beyond the classroom” (Rule, 2006, p. 2). Students engaging in authentic learning in science classes are not ‘learning about science’, but doing science. In social studies, students engaged in ‘Me to We’ activities aren’t just learning about human rights and poverty issues locally and in the third world, they’re making connections across global networks, exploring solutions to problems and applying them. As I noted in my Masters Thesis, in a communities of response approach to arts education, students’ “work is not just part of the process of learning to make art. It is not practice art. It is not developing skills to create art in the future” (Saul, 2004, p. 75). Students make art inside an authentic approach. Rule goes on to note that in authentic learning, “open-ended inquiry, thinking skills, and metacognition are addressed”, “students engage in discourse and social learning in a community of learners,” and “students are empowered through choice to direct their own learning in relevant project work” (Rule, 2006, p. 2).

Of course, the ideas of authentic learning and authentic assessment are closely related. Cummings and Maxwell follow the use of the term authentic referring to learning and assessment from Archbald and Newmann (1988) through to the use of ‘authentic assessment’ in particular by Wiggins in 1989. (Archbald & Newmann, 1988)(Wiggins G. , 1989) They note that, “authentic achievement should involve constructive learning, disciplined inquiry, and higher-order thinking and problem-solving. It should also have a

value dimension, of aesthetic development, personal development or usefulness in the wider world” (Cumming & Maxwell, 1999, p. 179). Cummings and Maxwell go on to note that, “Authentic assessment is not possible without attention to authentic achievement. A separation of the two can lead to empty rhetoric and facile assessment” (Cummings & Maxwell, 1999, p. 179).

In their conclusion, Cummings and Maxwell warn that, “Simplistic implementations of authentic assessment through camouflage, and complex but superficial implementations through simulation, miss the mark and do not improve educational practice” (Cumming & Maxwell, 1999, p. 192). They are warning about educational assessments that are ‘life-like’, where activities and assessments are conducted in the classroom, but are mere simulations and never go beyond the classroom. Thus, as Rule notes while introducing authentic learning above, there is a need inside the learning activities and assessments that surround the process to go beyond the classroom, and a need for these assessments to be engaged in authentically, using the systems utilized by the discipline within the wider practice.

This is particularly vital within the discipline of art. There is a compelling argument here that art is more than a discipline, but a behavioural system that we engage in, and that artmaking and responding are inextricably interrelated and cannot be unbound from each other. Ellen Dissanayake discusses art as an evolutionarily selected behaviour. The three pieces of evidence she gives to make the biological argument are that art is universal, people spend a great deal of time and effort in artmaking and that engaging in art gives pleasure.

The first piece of evidence given to suggest that a behaviour is selected biologically, and enhances a species’ survival, is the idea that it is universal or that all cultures and people through time engage in the behaviour. This is a difficult fact to establish, as anthropologists can examine countless cultures and their art and not be able to logically establish that all cultures have made art. Richard L. Anderson, in *Calliope’s Sisters: A Comparative Study of Philosophies of Art*, (Anderson, 1990) examines ten cultures including cultures such as the San that some researchers had felt previously had little or no art, and concludes that they do indeed practice art. “They are people who view art in terms similar to our own, a folk whose imaginative and psychic

worlds are much in tune with ours” (Anderson, 1990, p. 33). The current evidence is, then, that art is a universally engaged in activity, and such activities are engaged in as they enhance our ability to survive in the environments that we live in. Further, when people put a lot of time and effort into a behaviour, this is seen as evidence that it is a behaviour vital for survival. Finally, in respect to the importance of a behaviour being pleasurable, Dissanayake states that, “Nature does not generally leave advantageous behavior to chance; instead it makes many kinds of advantageous behavior pleasurable” (Dissanayake, 1988, p. 6).

Dissanayake links artmaking to the establishment of communities and intimacy between people. This serves to describe that importance of art for survival in that “The foraging-hunting way of life of our hominid ancestors required not only resourceful, competitive individuals but also strongly bonded social groups that could work together with confidence and loyalty, convinced of the efficacy of their joint actions” (Dissanayake, 2000, p. 9). As such, the making of the piece of art is not simply an act of making. The presentation of the piece to audience and the assessment and feedback are all systematically linked. When we examine how art is assessed and responded to in the world outside of the educational context, we are examining a model that we need to utilize inside the classroom in order to engage in authentic learning and authentic assessment. Let’s examine, then, how ‘communities of response’ operate in the artworld.

In the ongoing debate over which works of art we canonize, and at times which works we will even designate ‘art’, there are certainly power players. There are artworld authorities whose declarations can be powerful persuaders. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) refers to “the galleries and museums, and the people who guard and open these gates – museum curators, gallery owners, other artists (including peer students), and teachers. Together these gate-keepers decide whose work will be exhibited and immortalized” (Lois, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007, p. 85). Haynes notes that artwork is examined from within theoretical constructions that:

will have been proposed by cognoscenti – those who on the basis of their observation, interpretation, and appraisal of works of art, will have come to some opinion as to what counts as artistic excellence generally for that class of artifact. This process in turn rests on the intersubjective

agreements that constitute the particular universe of discourse, the rules and conventions which talk in and about the arts has to conform if it is to be understood and accepted. (Haynes, 1996, p. 32)

Schönau writes about a system for grading student artwork in the Netherlands in a systematic and reliable way, but he admits, “There are no ‘objective norms’ or standards that can be applied to studio work. The ‘subjective’ involvement of judges is essential. At best, it is possible to arrive at a certain degree of intersubjectivity between two or more judges” (Schönau, 1996, p. 162). This method of using a panel or group of assessors to examine and judge a student’s work for the purpose of grading may more closely approach the authentic ‘communities of response’ that will greet their art once they move past their formal education.¹⁶

What is important here is the fact that there is no single summative judgment given in the artworld over a piece of art. The conversations or aesthetic debates happen between many individuals or groups, and in fact occur over time. In illustration, one need only point to seminal pieces of art that are held up as icons today that were seen initially as failures, or perhaps not even worthy to be designated ‘art’.

Recently I accompanied a friend who is a movie aficionado to the Pacific Cinémathèque to see Renoir’s “La Règle du Jeu”.

Released on the eve of World War Two, the film aroused great indignation for its satirical swipes at the French ruling class, and was an unmitigated commercial disaster. France’s military censors would later ban Rules as “demoralizing,” and it would be banned again under Nazi

¹⁶ I suppose that I might take the approach that very few students will actually make a living from art, and will thus have a ‘career’ in the formal sense of the word – where one makes a living or is paid for the work that one does. I won’t. I’m cognizant of authors such as Csikszentmihalyi, Florida and Pink, all referred to in this thesis, who speak of how many people make a living in one discipline and excel in one or multiple of the fine arts as a ‘hobby’. The word hobby hardly does justice to the kinds of expertise manifested here, however. Few may be artists if the word must refer to ‘professional’, but all are artists if taken in the wider context and speaking of art engagement in the sense of make and respond and the sociological, universal notion of art spoken of above.

occupation. It is now considered Renoir's supreme masterpiece. (North Shore News, 2009, p. 21)

Here is a film that was so roundly criticized upon release that the director withdrew it, cut and reedited it. The original version is now considered one of the greatest films ever made. The respected British film magazine, "Sight and Sound" has created several 'Top Ten' film lists every ten years since 1952 (a critic's top ten, voted on mail-in style by a large group of published movie critics and a director's top ten, voted on by movie directors). In 2002, 145 film critics and 108 directors were surveyed to complete the lists. "La Règle du Jeu" ranked as the third best film ever on the critic's list, and the 9th best on the director's list. Renoir himself describes when he first realized that public reception of his film had changed, and tells why he thinks the change came about. "A quarter of a century later I gave a lecture at Harvard University. "La Règle du Jeu" was showing at a nearby cinema. There was a burst of cheering when I appeared on the platform. The students were applauding the film. Since then, its reputation has steadily grown. What seemed an insult to society in 1939 has become clear-sightedness" (Renoir, 1974, p. 173). Of further interest inside the educational context is Renoir's additional note that "the failure of "La Règle du Jeu" so depressed me that I resolved either to give up the cinema or to leave France" (Renoir, 1974, p. 173).

John Dewey, in pointing out the difficulties confronting those who would judge works of art, provides some examples of published responses by art critics to certain exhibitions of painting.

The commemorative exhibition of paintings by Renoir in Paris in the summer of 1933 was the occasion for exhuming some of the deliverances of official critics of fifty years before. The pronouncements vary from assertions that the paintings cause a nausea like that of seasickness, are products of diseased minds – a favorite statement – that they mix at random the most violent colors, to an assertion that they are denials of all that is permissible [characteristic word] in painting, of everything called light, transparency and shade, clarity and design." (Dewey, 1966, p. 355)

Dewey also points to the published comments of an American art critic who said of Cézanne that he was a "second-rate impressionist who had now and then fair luck in painting, a moderately competent impressionist who was heavy-handed (!), and who had

little idea of beauty and spoiled a lot of canvas with crude and unimportant pictures” (Dewey, 1966, p. 356).

Marcel Duchamp, who fathered the idea of ready-made art objects, submitted a porcelain urinal adorned with the signature R. Mutt to the 1917 New York Society of Independent Artists Exhibit. (Arnason, 1968, p. 305) Duchamp felt compelled to resign after his exhibit was rejected. As I’ve noted above, though, assessment of artwork doesn’t begin and end with an exclusive conversation between a small group of administrators putting together an art show, or even over the brief period of time during which the resulting controversy swirls and some groups of critics and artists defend the art, while others ask if it even qualifies as art. Conversations about the merits of Duchamp’s ‘fontaine’ continue, but there can be no denying the critical place it holds in the pantheon of modern art. In 1984 five hundred art experts voted the piece ‘the most influential work of modern art’. (BBC News, 2004, para. 1)

The Duchamp piece demonstrates the assessment of a work of art that occurs over time and amongst multiple critics, artists, members of the artworld and the general public. It also provides an excellent demonstration of how art, as Morris Weitz frames it, is an open concept. Art works depend, “on their not having a closed set of essential criteria in order for them to do the jobs we have assigned to them” (Weitz, 1966, p. 55). Weitz uses a paradigmatic model to demonstrate how we come to name art.

In the sense in which we can correctly ask whether, say, *Death of a Salesman* is a tragedy but not whether, say, *Oedipus Rex* is a tragedy, because the very concept of tragedy was invented or, to be more accurate, adapted, to cover this paradigm case; we can ask whether, say, Duchamp’s urinal, placed in exhibition, is a work of art, rather than a misplaced convenience, but not whether Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* is a work of art. (Weitz, 1966, p. 53)

Applying Weitz’ theory here, we can see how this incredibly engaging grand community of response works around the whole concept of art. Duchamp’s piece is compared and contrasted with a paradigm, perhaps Michelangelo’s work, as the community engages in

debate about the merits of the piece, whether it is assessed as valuable and whether it will be even named as 'art'.¹⁷ Today, of course, given its general assessment as both art and the high evaluation given to it as art, Duchamp's 'fontaine' is likely to be used as the paradigm against which a contemporary work of art is assessed for both its merit and possible inclusion in the world of art.

Dewey discusses why such seminal works of art can be initially declaimed as being unworthy of the title art, or evaluated poorly. Judicial criticism over works of art, says Dewey, carries with it the burden of "its inability to cope with the emergence of new modes of life – of experiences that demand new modes of expression" (Dewey, 1966, p. 356). One thing stands out here, a notion that should give any teacher of the arts who feels perfectly comfortable in applying set rubrics to fastidiously deliver letter grades as a sort of all-powerful art critic to students from term-to-term a powerful reason to question the validity of the practice. All of the above characters, from Jean Renoir (director) to his father Pierre-Auguste Renoir (painter), to Cézanne to Duchamp would have, in their turns and in their eras, lined up to take home their dismal or failing grades! Many, as Jean Renoir suggests, may have cast aside any thought of a career in the arts based upon such failure.

A further issue becomes immediately relevant in the discussion here. The community of response that forms a living, organic and constantly changing assessment

¹⁷ Is it only the art establishment and members of the artworld that have a place at this discussion? Is modern art, such as Duchamp's ready-mades, something that only the intelligentsia can appreciate? The Tate Britain is a very popular art museum. In 2000 an extension was opened to house the Modern collection in the Bankside Power Station. The Tate Modern is across the Thames and upriver from the Tate Britain. One can catch a shuttle boat to travel from one art gallery to the other. Few, it seems, do. In 2007 attendance figures for the Tate Britain were 1 533 217. Over the same year 5 236 702 people toured through the Tate Modern. (Tate Attendance Figures, 2008) Andrew Goldstein reports, in December of 2009, that in spite of the recession in the United States admissions at most art museums continue to hold steady or rise, and demonstrating the popularity of modern art amongst the general population, "institutions that show contemporary art have seen the most clear-cut increase. New York's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), one of the nation's most expensive museum's at \$20 per ticket, had the best year in its 80-year history, bringing in 2.8 million visitors between 2008 and 2009." (Goldstein, 2009)

over a work of art in the real world doesn't just exist in relation to an individual work of art created by an artist, but to the gathered body of work of an artist. Works are released into and from out of a body of work, and this body matters. What experiments the artist is engaging in, what she is trying to 'say', how the artist and the works of the artist interact and play off of the work being done by other artists at the time¹⁸ all play in the assessment of process. Art is a risky activity. One takes risks and chances in order to advance the art, and there aren't many artists who don't have works to their credit that they'd just as soon forget.

Ray Milland had a long and distinguished career in Hollywood as an actor and director. From his arrival in front of the cameras in 1929 until 1985, a year before his death, Milland acted in over 170 movies and television series, as well as directing 11 others. Judged a "film star, as well as an outstanding actor," (IMDb, Mini Biography, para. 9) Milland won the Academy Award for Best Actor in 1945 for his compelling performance as an alcoholic writer falling off the wagon in the film "The Lost Weekend."

In 1972 Milland also starred in what could only optimistically be called a 'Grade-B' movie "The Thing with Two Heads," playing a dying racist man who inadvertently causes his head to be transplanted onto the body of an African-American man. Anybody who has seen this movie surely retains the silly image of Milland's head poked up on the shoulder next to that of ex-football star Rosie Grier, as they ride around town on a motorcycle.

Do we assess Milland as an actor by examining only "The Thing with Two Heads"? We certainly do not. Do we assess him based merely on his Academy Award

¹⁸ The Mona Lisa is a perfectly nice painting, but I admit I never did understand its iconic status. I had the pleasure of visiting the Louvre last summer, and like many found myself following a crowd streaming into the room to see the painting (from behind a barrier rope and a good ten feet back-even though it's not a very big painting). After looking and admiring for a few minutes I walked around the room looking at the rest of the paintings, all quite large and contemporary with Da Vinci and the Mona Lisa. Now I understand. It was quickly apparent that what Da Vinci was doing at the time was so radically different from his contemporaries. It was remarkably different.

winning performance? Again, we don't, though I would suggest that this latter performance carries a little more weight in any discussion between critics examining his acting, his career and his contribution to the art of cinema.

Another aspect of how communities of response arise around a piece of art or the work of an artist bears consideration here with respect to my assertion that creating summative letter grades for art or artists in the school setting is a deeply 'inauthentic' approach to the assessment of art. The iconic nature artist Robert Bateman has had a long and successful career. To say that he is highly regarded in the 'art community', however, would be a piece of folly that even Bateman would laugh at. Sarah Milroy, an art critic with the Globe and Mail, recently commented on a Bateman exhibit held at the McMichael Gallery in Ontario in terms that Bateman has become quite familiar with:

The fact is that Bateman engages with a subject matter that is dear to the hearts of Canadians: the beauty of the natural world. But he describes it in terms that are essentially those of illustration. There is no way in which his handling of paint, or his understanding of what painting is, pushes that medium forward, or even gives it a personal inflection. There is no way in which his paintings reveal interesting thinking about the relationships between man and nature; his environmentally themed paintings, for example, have all the sophistication of Reader's Digest illustrations. (Milroy, 2007, p. 2, para. 4)

I've seen Bateman's art, or his style of art, described as 'kitschy nature port'. As I've stated, Bateman himself would attest to his outsider status vis-à-vis the artworld. "Being rebuffed by one's peers in the art world is, of course, hurtful, but that has always happened and always will and it really doesn't matter. It is still fun to discuss and dismember...I do it myself, as you may have noticed" (Bateman, para. 14).

Whether you see Bateman's work as being excellent, or kitsch, is not at all important in the point I make here. Bateman is a working artist (well known is beside the point) with a large collection of work to his credit. Many thousands of people who admire his work own, display and are proud of the numbered electronically produced copies of his work that are marketed (one of the problems that some of his critics have with his work). In her review of his work, Milroy discusses hearing one patron at the exhibit. "At least this is a lot better than a lot of the stuff they put in galleries these days,' I heard one particularly crusty old gallery-goer griping to his companion, this exhibit and its didactic

materials having reaffirmed him comfortably in his perceptions that art after 1900 has been largely a sham. I wanted to push him down the stairs” (Milroy, 2007, para. 4).

And so there are multiple communities of response around the work of Robert Bateman. One community argues that his art doesn't have merit, and another community supports and applauds his work. As we've seen, these communities have their conversations, shift, and the debate changes over time. Perhaps one day Robert Bateman with his body of work will stand out as an important and iconic Canadian artist in the naturalist tradition. Or perhaps one will be able to buy several of his numbered prints for a few dollars, as a rule, at garage sales. We cannot know where the communities of response will take Bateman's legacy in twenty, fifty, or a hundred years.

But nobody gets the right to finish the conversation and move on today. That's not how communities of response operate. Bateman, of course, responds to the community that argues against the merit of his work. But he is likely much more involved with the community that supports him. It is this community, after all, that claims to understand his vision and that supports him both financially and spiritually. From Milland to Duchamp to Renoir each artist faces their detractors, but carries on the communities of response that arise in support. What, then, is there to support the artist in school who is faced with a single and powerful community of response in the form of 'teacher' whose all-powerful response condenses all discussion down to a single letter symbol that ends the conversation. Is it even acceptable, as noted above, to allow the mediated opinion of a small group of outside assessors to judge the work and finish the conversation with the same symbol? Writers who have struggled with ideas of how art is assessed in the field of art outside of education have debated how the use of portfolios fits with the generation of letter grades.

Howard Gardner attests to the difficulty in arriving at an approach to grading portfolios when he describes the process being undertaken at Arts Propel.

How, after all, does one reduce dozens or even hundreds of pages to a manageable but still representative sample and a succinct score or description? We are currently exploring a number of approaches which include self-descriptions and evaluation; scoring the number of different attacks which a student makes on a problem; the variety of ways in which a theme is revisited; the extent of interplay among productive, perceptual,

and reflective components; the evolution of ideas over a significant period of time; the ability to introduce personal elements in an effective manner, and the like. Some of these approaches can be quantitative, but many will need to rely on subjective impressions, interjudge reliability or 'holistic' scoring methods. (Gardner, 1991, pp. 282-283)

Gardner goes on to admit to the possibility or probability that reducing arts portfolios to mere letter grades will not be successful, but notes that "the effort will not necessarily be unworthwhile. In our view, the very practice of assembling a portfolio, in which the development of one's own artistic thinking can be captured, may constitute an extremely important and valuable educational exercise" (Gardner, 1991, p. 283). In another of his works, Gardner notes:

However useful they may be in traditional subject matter, I find little justification for the use of standardized, decontextualized instruments in the arts. Indeed, in many ways, such 'instruments' seem directly antithetical to the arts. What makes far more sense, from my perspective, is for assessment to occur 'in context, as part of the student's ongoing artistic activities. (Gardner, 1990, p. 47)

Examining the possible manners in which portfolios might be graded proposed by Gardner above raises problems and issues at every step. Subjective impressions, for example, are completely valid inside the community of response discussion that works around a work or body of art, as described above, but are so obviously inappropriate a base for a summative letter grade. Items such as scoring the number of different attempts or variety of ways in which a theme is revisited are certainly part of the artistic process, but are also quite problematic when raised to the level of being deterministic of the letter grade.

In the section on Creativity, Motivation and Arts Assessment I will be discussing at further length heuristic versus algorithmic tasks in the context of an education in creativity. Both the ideas of scoring the number of 'attacks' or attempts and the variety of ways in which a theme is revisited are akin to the process of 'brainstorming', developed by Alex Osborn in 1938. They are certainly skills that can be brought to bear when trying to develop pieces of art, a body of art or trying to tap into one's creative potential, but they are not core to the process or production of art. Amabile, for example, notes, "Brainstorming does generally result in a larger number of ideas than do

procedures that admit judgment during idea-generation. At the same time, however, the quality of ideas does not show noticeable improvement” (Amabile, 1996, p. 245). If our goal is to educate working artists and to develop creativity, we need to be careful to cut that artistic creativity off at the level of skill. Sharon Bailin states, about creativity, “This imaginative element is usually viewed as very distinct and separate from skills which are involved in producing a creative work, and, indeed, it is this element which makes possible the transcending skills and rules which characterize creativity” (Bailin, 1994, p. 109). It is in response to techniques such as brainstorming that Bailin says, “Creative achievement is not likely to result from attempting to foster certain personality traits such as fluency or flexibility nor from encouraging the resistance to judgment, rule-breaking, flights of fancy and irrationality” (Bailin, 1994, p. 130).

Gardner’s idea to examine the evolution of ideas over a significant period of time is intriguing, and certainly fits in with the kind of assessments that one can often see in authentic fine arts portfolios, where artists works are often categorized into certain periods of their artistic work. I think the term *significant*, though, is the critical term here, and it presents issues when it comes to the way in which courses and school years are scheduled. If a summative letter grade is to be created and issued, it is done within the schedule outlined by the school calendar. This is often, for example, a five-month term or less. Firstly, this doesn’t come close to representing a significant period of time for an artist to explore a set of ideas. It might actually be more authentic to state that no set period of time works – an artist will explore a set of ideas and move on when good and ready and not according to some externally imposed schedule. Secondly, the problems with creating an equitable grading scheme to cover this are evident.

Deborah Meier discusses her work towards eliminating letter grades in her Central Park East Schools, and much of her discussion moves around a sort of desire to allow the more powerful portfolios being developed to speak independently of the constraints created by letter grades. In Meier’s school, steps were taken to start moving away from traditional grades by changing the grading structure and creating rubrics and scoring grids using categories. But as Meier notes, “the more we worked at it the more complex our systems became and the less relevance the grade had to our parallel development of exhibitions, portfolios, and graduation committees. Now we simply have

both, and the contradictions between them are showing up and confusing issues” (Meier, 2002, p. 149).

Niguidula summarizes the use of portfolios in education (he is not just writing about fine arts portfolios, but about the use of portfolios in ‘21st Century Skills’ classrooms) stating, “In short, the process of collecting, selecting, and reflecting on the work in a portfolio is what makes it powerful. The portfolio is a representation of what students know and are able to do, and the opportunity to present that work to an audience of peers, parents, and teachers shows that the world can take the students’ work seriously” (Niguidula, 2010, pp. 166-167). All parts of this discussion are aspects of the authentic process of assessing and responding to works of art, and are part of the authentic process whereby artists self-assess and gather their own collections together. Nowhere is the process of a summative assessment, particularly in the form of a letter grade necessary, authentic or helpful.

The skills of the artist, in the wider artworld, is to create work and then present it, seeking to engage with the communities of response that develop, and to begin to engage with a supportive community in particular. The ideal of ‘authenticity’ in this context raises issues that go straight to the core of how we learn.

Combining recent research into the adolescent brain, how adolescents learn and how schools serve these needs poorly, Abbot and MacTaggart quote Libby Purvis in the Times where she notes of public schools in general:

If you are forever doing formal tests and waiting for someone else to give you marks, then you never learn the skills for assessing yourself and measuring your own knowledge and ability against genuine, outside challenges. The constant neurotic focus on grades stops teachers from encouraging connections and fostering creative flexibility. (Abbott & MacTaggart, 2010, p. 175)

Art, Culture and Education

In examining the history of arts education inside of the public school system, we see a tradition of educators using art for self-exploration and free play. Traditionally, in public education, teachers have eschewed or sought to subvert letter grades and other

forms of formal assessment or evaluation. In the process of exploring why this is the case, I will examine how arts education has developed and changed through time looking at arts education inside and outside of the public schools system. While I will be able to demonstrate how arts teachers over the past several decades have been concerned about grading in the arts, it would be highly inaccurate to suggest this has always been the case in arts education. There is a strong history of thorough and overwhelming summative assessment in fine arts education within certain cultures and historical contexts, and it will fall to me here to argue that such practices represent a vision of arts education, the arts, and our current cultural practices in particular that no longer holds validity.

I understand as I make this argument, that I am situating it inside a certain philosophical, historical and cultural construct from the start. There will be some brief discussion about modernist versus post-modernist ideals of art below. I think I need only briefly touch on this discussion, though touch I must. Having said that, there is no doubt that where I make the argument that what we call art, how we do art and how we perceive art have changed over the past century I am speaking from within some form of post-modernist view. It is sometimes pointed out that modernity/post-modernity is a false dichotomy in itself and that individuals rarely subscribe to a single point of view. Whether the art one tends to hold most dear might be classified as modern or post-modern, the vision, views and philosophies of the post-modernists have had influence on how we look at art and how we think about culture.

I look, now, at a history of arts education in Canada, moving towards a look at arts education in public schools. I look also at assessment in fine arts education. Lastly, I briefly examine the changes in art practices within the artworld and examine how we can reconnect arts education in public schools with today's artworld by refocusing on the ideals of authentic assessment.

Helping with my argument will be the very issues that arise in looking at a history of art education in Canada (and related back to the world). What is meant by 'art education' when examining it within a '1750's' context takes on subtly or greatly different context than when examining it from an '1850's' perspective or a '1950's' perspective. Shiner points out that "like the liberal arts, the fine arts were a variable group that tended

to centre around five or six arts even as the whole group remained open to expansion and to modest shifts in the number and identity of which arts were part of the core” (Shiner, 2009, p. 159). Part of this historical creation of the boundaries around what we call art involved the paring off of subsets that would come to be seen as ‘crafts’.

This is not a finished conversation, as the set of creative products we think of as art was arguably pared down and refined under modernist philosophies and ideals, and then has exploded back outward under post-modernism, with many ‘crafts’ being reintegrated into the artworld. An example of this would be traditionally feminine craft products such as quilts and needlepoint. Perhaps the easiest way to describe this conversation is to refer back to the previous chapter. Argument about ‘what art is’ occurs within a community of response, which flows through time, as does the response to individual works. I believe that there is a strong argument to be made that craft becomes art where the ‘making special’¹⁹ is presented as art and the community of response develops.

That is to say, it is not the object but the processes surrounding the making and presentation and response to the object that makes the art. This idea certainly supports my overall thesis here. When we letter grade a piece of student art, we deny the community of response or undermine it and the student art becomes inauthentic in practice, or a simulacra of sorts. Without the surrounding practice – the community of response to take on the role of assessment, the art cannot be much more than craft. That is to say, craft objects are a wider set. Objects from within this set that are nominated, so to speak, as art form a subset when the community of response develops. As further evidenced, in port-modern art, there is now a whole category of art objects that didn’t begin as craft, produced or ‘made special’ by humans. These are the ready-mades, such as Duchamp’s Fontaine discussed in the previous chapter. These are

¹⁹ Dissanayake uses the term ‘making special’ to refer to the art making that humans have been engaging in as long as there have been humans. (Dissanayake, 1992, p. 42) Dissanayake, E. (1992). *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why*. Toronto: The Free Press.

arguably art, though not made special, as they are 'nominated special', or advanced as works of art by artists and communities of response developed.

Though the processes of art making and ideals and philosophies involved in calling something art and assessing its value have changed over time, the artworld has been adept at integrating older works into the canon. For example, what of pieces that might have clearly been seen as representing 'fine art' from the early 1700's, and are still accepted as fine art by general convention today, such as an exemplar landscape painting? Such paintings were executed under quite different ideals of what art was about than those held today. Elkins notes that:

Renaissance and Baroque academicians conceived art as a subject that inhabits the middle shades of gray rather than the black or white extremes. The operative word here is decorum, indicating a kind of art that does not stray too far from the middle for the sake of effect. It seems to me that modernism and post-modernism are so bound up with dramatic effects and innovations that the Renaissance way of thinking is nearly inaccessible. (Elkins, 2001, p. 10)

Though the 18th Century way of thinking may be so remote as to be inaccessible to us, these items are still seen as art.²⁰ This is because the ongoing community of response continues. If a signed urinal can be art, there can be little argument to be made that those eighteenth century landscapes need to be dislodged.

Laurier Lacroix points out that, "Art education and the training of artists in Canada are directly related to the changing status of art in our society" (Lacroix, 1988, p. 126). This is a summative statement that fits in with my argument here. Early art education, mostly in the various 'crafts' (17th and 18th Centuries) in Canada was conducted largely through the traditional apprenticeship system. Lacroix notes that, "Apprenticeship is intrinsically a conservative system in which knowledge and methods in the arts and crafts were passed on relatively unchanged through several generations.

²⁰ Again, I need to state clearly that I am speaking from within a post-modern, Western world perspective. I make no claim to knowing whether or not an art establishment inside widely different cultures works similarly.

While these artists/craftsmen were rarely innovative, there was some response to new techniques, stylistic influences and competition, mostly from abroad” (Lacroix, 1988, p. 126). I should note here that this lack of innovation in the historical arts apprenticeship system in Canada and in western nations was likely more of a result of the traditional nature of pre postmodern art than the apprenticeship system itself. Abbott calls apprenticeship a sadly lost “appropriate response to the adolescent brain,” stating that it was “a mechanism by which adolescents could model themselves on socially approved adults, so providing a safe passage from childhood to adulthood in psychological, social and economic ways” (Abbott & MacTaggart, 2010, p. 210). Jumping ahead very briefly in this argument, the main thesis here of using ungraded arts portfolios to assess in the fine arts matches Abbot’s idea of ‘cognitive apprenticeship’ where authentic assessment and immersion in current arts practice “provides structures by which constructivist learning leads to deep understanding, sense-making and the potential for creativity and enterprise” (Abbott & MacTaggart, 2010, p. 211).

Taking things back to the historical setting, students working under an apprenticeship would have had no exposure to letter grades and formal assessment, having entered into an ages-old system rich with continuous informal formative assessment. “The traditional apprenticeship system for artists under connoisseurs or expert practitioners featuring observation, demonstration, and coaching in context (Schön, 1984) did not require a mathematical assessment. The mere raising of an eyebrow, the correction with the stroke of a brush can be evaluation enough” (Haynes, 1996, p. 36). Aside from the most popular apprenticeship system, some academies for the fine arts (drawing, painting and sculpture) were started up in Canada at the end of the 18th century.

Much fine arts training in the 19th century was also accomplished through private classes and tutorials. These classes were administered much as private drawing or piano classes are done today. Commenting on the type of instruction that was given, Lacroix notes that “Drawing was basic, and the students learned to copy various themes and fragments of artistic works. Imitation was considered a way to transmit artistic knowledge. Students learned to reproduce the pictorial conventions found in certain works and transmitted either by engravings or by examples provided by the art master” (Lacroix, 1988, p. 126). The practice of copying portions or whole from established

exemplars closely parallels the type of art instruction that was common in Europe. Elkins, in describing the French Academy, notes, “first, students were allowed only to draw from other drawings; then they drew from plaster casts and antique sculptures; and finally from live models (from six to eight in the morning, according to one schedule” (Elkins, 2001, p. 16).

In the second half of the 19th century, a move was made to bring art instruction into the public and normal schools, or to provide other forms of universal access to instruction in the arts. Art was seen as being a vitally important subject, and moves were made to create a standard set of materials and teaching methods. Where there had been a separation of what were seen as ‘crafts’ from the ‘fine arts’ implied above, there was some rejoining as the Industrial Revolution progressed. In Europe, such institutions as the Bauhaus heralded this. In Canada, such schools as the Conseil des Arts et Manufactures and the Institution Nationale did similar work. The 1884 Dominion Handbook refers to the Conseil and its work noting:

the free evening drawing classes conducted under the direction of the Council of Arts and Manufactures of the Province of Quebec, are worthy of note. These classes are entirely free and are intended chiefly for artisans and apprentices. Instruction is given in free-hand and object drawing and designing, and also in mechanical and architectural drawing and modeling. Lithography and wood-engraving are also taught. The classes are opened during the winter months, not only in Montreal, but in all the larger towns of the province. (Dawson, 1884, p. 220)

While offered as art classes, however, Lacroix notes that these courses “emphasized technical qualities (correct drawing, harmonious colours, balanced composition) rather than expression and formal research, and increased the gulf between applied art and fine art” (Lacroix, 1988, p. 126).

By the late 19th century, schools that were maintained by societies of artists had risen in influence. These schools taught in-line with the dominant European ‘academic’ models of art education at the time. “Their methods taught respect for tradition, the hierarchy of different media and genres and the supremacy of drawing” (Lacroix, 1988, p. 126). Travel to and study in Europe became a common critical step to building a career in the arts in Canada. The *Dominion Handbook* speaks of the annual exhibitions

of artwork held in various cities in Canada, stressing that, "Several young Canadians, now studying in Europe send pictures to these exhibitions" (Dawson, 1884, p. 51).

Elkins, speaking on this form of art instruction, notes that

Creativity in the modern sense, in which each student is helped to make something that is his or her own, was not important in these stages of academy instruction. It was as if students in life-drawing class were asked to conform to the teacher's way of drawing: there was little question of individual interpretation; the idea was to bring whatever was peculiar to the student's own manner under the control of the accepted style. (Elkins, 2001, p. 21)

Most interesting, in examining assessment of fine arts learning in education, is the highly competitive and judgmental forms of evaluation used in many arts academies and by the societies right up through the first third of the 20th century. Elkins discusses how all-encompassing examinations and competition for the two major prizes were in the French Academy:

There were monthly examinations, designed to weed out inferior students, but the major goal, from 1666 onward, was to win two all-important prizes: the Grand Prix (Grand Prize) and the Prix-de-Rome (Rome Prize) scholarship. The Grand Prize was not easy to attain. First, students had to pass an examination by executing a satisfactory drawing in the presence of an instructor. If they passed that test they could submit a sketch, and if that sketch was accepted, they were invited to make a picture or relief from a sketch while locked in a room (to make sure they weren't cheating by copying other drawings). All the pictures that had been made that way were put in a public exhibition, and eventually a panel chose a single Grand Prize Winner. (Elkins, 2001, p. 24)

This was not just a competition designed to choose a prime candidate from the overall graduating class. Winning this prize or placing highly in the competition was seen as the only really reliable path to being able to stake out a career in the fine arts.

Texts produced in the Baroque period that were designed to help train artists took a categorical approach to the production of art. Elkins discusses a book by Roland Freart that "evaluates all pictures according to their invention, proportion, color, expression and composition. The categories entailed rules, precepts positifs, which determined how best to treat each subject" (Elkins, 2001, p. 21). Note the similarity between these categories and the rules established for the skills-based approach to art

production and some of the suggestions for areas in which art within portfolios might be assessed given by Gardner in the previous chapter. Arising from such a rules-based approach to art production came a text by Roger de Piles in the same era in which he rated well-known painters on a scale from one to eighty. Within this scheme Raphael and Rubens were tied at sixty-five points, Rembrandt scored fifty points and Michelangelo thirty-seven.²¹

Lest you think I've wandered too far back in discussing hierarchies assigned to works of art and artists in the Baroque period, Lacroix examines how in the late 19th century the traditional methods being used to teach artists in Canada "taught respect for tradition, the hierarchy of different media and genres and the supremacy of drawing" (Lacroix, 1988, p. 126). Speaking of art education today, Elkins notes, "What I want to stress here is not how we are connected to the past but how strongly we are disconnected. For practical purposes current art instruction doesn't involve a fixed curriculum, a hierarchy of genres, a sequence of courses, a coherent body of knowledge, or a unified theory of practice" (Elkins, 2001, p. 38). When we come to speak of assessment practices in the arts, this disconnection that Elkins refers to is worth consideration. Artists, works of art, even media and genres of art have been traditionally graded and enumerated but this occurred inside 'academies' which had torn away from the traditional cultural 'apprenticeship' and replaced this with a regimented, skills-based approach. Those who are comfortable with scoring and letter-grading works of art might pause at giving Michelangelo a C-, as a score of 37/80 given by De Piles above might imply.

Perhaps the most essential change in the education of artists occurred in the mid-twentieth century when universities stepped up and started offering a far more wide-ranging and comprehensive education to students pursuing fine arts. Speaking of the Canadian scene, Lacroix notes, "Since the first Bachelor of Fine Arts was awarded in

²¹ If you'd like to see a complete breakdown of how Roger de Piles scores the artists in his text you can find it at the bottom of the Wikipedia article on de Piles at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_de_Piles

1939 to Mount Allison U in Sackville, NB, many institutions of higher learning across the country have established their own programs, offering a rich academic structure with social and aesthetic value as well” (Lacroix, 1988, p. 126). Noting the kind of break a comprehensive university education was from the long history of arts education, Elkins notes, “It is important to realize how much medieval artists missed out on by not going to universities. They were not in a position to formally learn about theology, music,²² law, medicine, astronomy, grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, logic, philosophy, physics, arithmetic, or geometry – in other words, they were cut off from the intellectual life of their time” (Elkins, 2001, p. 8). The establishment of arts programs in the universities heralded the decline of the academies. Where the academies narrowed training in the fine arts to skill sets and hierarchies, bringing art to the universities arguably reintroduced artistic training into a broader more integrated intellectual and cognitive activity. At the same time that higher levels of art education were transferring from the purview of the academies to the universities, art was being introduced as a field of study in public schools.

An examination of arts education in the public school system in Canada really begins somewhere about the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to 1900 public education systems feature a classical education, relatively unaltered from the type of curriculum one received privately for centuries. In Canada, this curriculum was essentially a version of “catechism, reading, writing, and arithmetic. The more gifted students learned the rudiments of Latin in preparation for studies at the secondary level” (Audet, 1970, p. 72). This style of schooling is best described, philosophically, as perennialism. Oliva notes that this philosophy is highly conservative and is only a fringe philosophy in today’s society as it catered only to “that small percentage of students who possess high verbal and academic aptitude” (Oliva, 1992, p. 196).

²² Note the inclusion of music in the academic subjects, learned in the university setting and completely separate from visual art. I did note in the introduction that my focus was on visual art as there are distinctions between the set of subjects we group together as ‘arts’, including this historical context.

There were signs of change by the mid-nineteenth century. For example, Egerton Ryerson, a Minister of Education in Ontario, “advocated a curriculum including history, geography, linear drawing, book-keeping, and music and emphasized the practical advantages of traditional subjects such as arithmetic” (Wilson, 1970, p. 218). Ryerson’s ideas would be experimented with more thoroughly in Western Canada in the very late 1800’s than in his own province. It was after 1900 when, across Canada, “agriculture, home economics, industrial arts, technical and commercial education, art, music and physical training appeared in the schools of the major cities” (Stamp, 1970, p. 323).

Saskatchewan and Alberta also led the first experiments in progressive curriculum arising from the historical ideas of Johann Pestalozzi as well as the contemporary work of educational philosophers such as John Dewey and were developing curricula that would “promote for the student an understanding of human relationships, and attitudes of inquiry, critical mindedness, tolerance, responsibility, creative self-expression, self-cultivation, and a willingness to cooperate²³” (Patterson, 1970, p. 376). Patterson notes that these experiments in a wider, more progressive model of education were swept away by World War One and World War Two in Canada, as pressure was placed on schools to offer a model that would focus on preparing students for productive employment. One of the last holdouts in the new curricular model was Alberta, where after World War Two “the terminology of progressive education was consciously purged from departmental literature” (Patterson, 1970, p. 382).²⁴

²³ Compare this set of educational ideas being argued for in Alberta in the 1930’s to our recent educational trend of ‘21st Century Skills’ which advocates for the development of skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurialism.

²⁴ World Wars, Cold Wars, Sputnik launches, depressions and recessions have all served to trigger demands for change in the education systems of western nations. Such demands have often resulted in a turn away from progressive ideas back to more conservative traditional methodologies.

And so, across Canada, the fine arts were largely introduced into the public school curriculum as models of progressive education came into favour early in the twentieth century, and then remained in the curriculum as this model fell out of favour. Of course, this post-war reduction in the prominence of progressive education models hasn't been a permanent matter. As noted in an earlier chapter, progressive and traditional modes of education continue to compete as educational ideals. It is within this context that one can begin to examine and appreciate the history of assessment in fine arts within the public school system, particularly in Canada.

I began this chapter by pointing out the historic split that occurred between 'arts' and 'crafts', and when speaking of the type of traditional education and sorts of assessment that were applied when the distinction between the two was first being worked out. What I want to specifically point out at this time, though, is that we've moved from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, arts education has had a number of venue shifts. Arts education was initially a matter of private tutoring or apprenticing. It might help to consider this community-based education. A second sort of venue arose, a more formal place of learning, as the academies came into the picture. The job of the academies has passed in the twentieth century onto the universities and colleges. Finally, arts education was adopted by public schools in the first portion of the twentieth century. Each of these places added to the last, so arts education occurs today in all three places – community, university/college and public school. Practices in all three venues, and corresponding methods of assessment, are quite distinct. Let's take a look at assessment as practiced in public or grade schools.

MacGregor et al. note that, "In North America, the nineteenth-century origins of education in the arts in the public school were caught up in that same tension between the need to demonstrate skill mastery and the desire to embrace autonomy and incomparability. The tension persists to this day" (MacGregor, Lemerise, Potts, & Roberts, 1993, p. 3). This tension, between envisioning art as a tool for self-exploration or as a more traditionally oriented subject requiring standards and the development of skills that can be evaluated, parallels the space given within the curriculum for progressive versus traditional educational philosophies.

Gruber and Hobbs examine the history of assessment in art within public schools. They note that, “Historically, the field of art education has not emphasized assessment” (Gruber & Hobbs, 2002, p. 13). They speak of some standardized art-assessment devices for art that were used over the years, but note that these took the form of intelligence or aptitude-style tests, and weren’t really used to assess students’ development or achievement in arts programs. These devices included the Goodenough Measurement of Intelligence by Drawing (1926), the McAdory Art Test (1929), and the Meier-Seashore Art Judgment Test (1930). They note that as progressive ideals of child-centered and self-expression in art continued to heavily influence art teachers in the public school systems, where assessment was called for systematically arts teachers tended to place less emphasis on “student art products and more on the artmaking process itself (e.g., the behaviours and interactions of students while drawing, painting, and sculpting)” (Gruber & Hobbs, 2002, p. 13).

Gruber and Hobbs are able to trace the ideals of how art should be evaluated in the classroom by examining student and teacher textbooks aimed at educating art teachers through the twentieth century. They demonstrate how discussions around assessment procedures are either not at all present, or crop up in various editions of texts only to disappear in subsequent editions. The overall trend is to disregard the idea of assessment in art, concentrating as they note above on the developmental aspects of arts education. This sort of philosophy is often noted in the literature to have best been summarized by Lowenfeld and Brittain, who argued that there should be one place in the school system where grades do not count. “The art room should be the sanctuary against school regulations, where each youngster is free to be himself and put down his feelings and emotions without censorship, where he can evaluate his own progress toward his own goals without the imposition of an arbitrary grading system” (Bensur, 2002, p. 18). Stating that the Discipline Based Art Education Movement (DBAE) advocated for by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts had influence on the discussions around how art should be taught and assessed, Gruber and Hobbs note that, “During this art education epiphany, however, the issue of evaluation was dealt with mostly on a theoretical level, if at all” (Gruber & Hobbs, 2002, p. 15).

MacGregor et al. surveyed 1500 teachers across Canada, 500 in each art area of drama, music and art. Their goal was to gather information about how teachers assess

in the fine arts, and what teacher attitudes were towards assessment in their subject areas. They were able to examine differences in attitudes between teachers in these three distinct areas as well. While they were able to note differences in philosophy, for example music teachers tend to stress skill development more than art teachers, they found that teachers in all three areas, “share a sense that the subject they teach is more than a body of content, and that student attitude has a critical effect on what may be taught and learned. They value individuality and independence, and are more inclined to look for evidence whether objectives have been met in practical work than in written response” (MacGregor, Lemerise, Potts, & Roberts, 1993, p. 37). As well, the researchers found that “there is no great inclination on the part of many teachers in the arts to move voluntarily in the direction of adopting the common format and descriptors that characterize system-wide or national assessment” (MacGregor, Lemerise, Potts, & Roberts, 1993, p. 39).

The picture since the mid-nineties might appear to be different in the United States than in Canada. Bensur reports that DBAE “became the foundation for National Standards in 1994. When the standards were adopted by the Consortium of National Arts Education Associations (NAEA), the content and expectations for student experiences and levels of student achievement were articulated” (Bensur, 2002, p. 18).

In 1996, a survey was conducted in which each state department of education interviewed teachers to determine current assessment practices in the fine arts. (Peeno, 1997) Responses revealed that only 14 states currently used or planned to use standardized tests, in keeping with some of the ideals of DBAE, to assess the fine arts. State representatives reported that they were contemplating using different types of assessment and that teachers had or will have input into construction of fine arts assessment instruments. (Defibaugh, 2000, p. 62)

Bensur surveyed 269 art teachers in Pennsylvania in the fall of 1999, and reports from the survey that “the majority of art teachers reported that they use assessment to grade student achievement, but, more importantly, they use assessment to set student goals and standard.” (Bensur, 2002, p. 19). She does go on to note that teachers surveyed report the same traditional concerns about assessment in the arts that are discussed

above, and that self-assessments, allowing the students to demonstrate learning in different ways and more open-ended rubrics, remain common.

The changes in standards, art programs and assessment regimes that flowed out of the DBAE proposal in public education in the United States did not emerge in response to some demand from the artworld, or from changes in the way art is practiced outside of the educational context. These changes were contemplated and brought about as a result of political pressure and various philosophical movements within education. The United States doesn't stand alone in having made such changes. Haynes reports that in 1984 the McGaw Report argued that art grades did not correlate well enough with the Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test, and thus moved to exclude art as a matriculation subject. Fearing a loss of status for arts, an art history component was added to the curriculum with a compulsory 2-hour examination. Once this change in art curriculum was accomplished, grades given in the art course now correlated more highly with the ASAT scores, and it was decided that art could remain as a matriculation subject.²⁵ Haynes, though, points out how drastically this changed the type of knowledge and learning being accomplished in art, with students from other disciplines able to excel "without the slightest aesthetic awareness" (Haynes, 1996, p. 33).

As the manner in which art programs were administered and assessed has changed through the past hundred years, what art is and how it is made and responded to in the wider cultural context has drastically changed. Consider, for example, the very core changes that have happened in what art means as modernism gave way to post-modernism. From a modernist ideal that "for any work of art there is and must be a single true interpretation" (Novitz, 2001, p. 158), the post-modernist belief that there are multiple interpretations emerged. Modernism held that art could be 'good' or 'beautiful' and that there were formal properties that could be identified in defining it as such. This

²⁵ A strange line of reasoning to me. Perhaps if all the academic areas could be thus manipulated to bring student grades in line so that they 'correlate' across the boards or with a single test, we could really get efficient and have only a single letter grade issued, e.g. School-C+.

ideal held that such properties were independent of cultural or temporal restraints. Those aspects that made something beautiful to the first century Saxon would conceivably hold for the twenty-first century Korean. To the postmodernist art philosopher, however, beauty or artistic merit exists “as a function of contingent historical and cultural circumstances,” and “what makes a work of art ‘good’ or ‘beautiful’ is not a set of intrinsic features of the work, but the historically-derived values and conventions that contingently characterize a particular period of a culture” (Novitz, 2001, pp. 158-159).

Charles Taylor describes how:

Twentieth-century art has gone more inward, has tended to explore, even to celebrate subjectivity; it has explored new recesses of feeling, entered the stream of consciousness, spawned schools of art rightly called ‘expressionist.’ But at the same time, at its greatest it has often involved a decentring of the subject: an art emphatically not conceived as self-expression, an art displacing the centre of interest onto language, or onto poetic transmutation itself, or even dissolving the self as usually conceived in favour of some new constellation. (Taylor, 1989, p. 456)

Taylor describes how art has evolved so that it begins with self-exploration and self-expression, but notes that ‘art at its greatest’ goes beyond this to what he names decentring, a dissolution of the self to something more. I have sought to explore the routines and traditions that have grown around this ‘something more’ in the previous chapter, calling the dialogue that works around art communities of response.

Taylor expresses, in his Massey Lecture, a concern that “the dark side of individualism is a centring of the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society” (Taylor, 1991, p. 4). While Taylor speaks of how “Self-discovery requires poiësis, making” (Taylor, 1991, p. 62), the thrust of his argument is that a modern view of art as simply self-exploratory or self expressive is neither an adequate description of what art has become, nor a desirable one. For Taylor, “No one acquires the languages needed for self-definition on their own. We are introduced to them through exchanges with others who matter to us – what George Herbert Mead called ‘significant others.’ The genesis of the human mind is

in this sense not ‘monological,’ not something each accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical” (Taylor, 1991, p. 33).

In this section, I have worked to weave together two ideas. In examining the history of art education within the public school system, we can see ways in which it paralleled traditional arts education, but ways in which it broke away from other traditions. Arts education in public schools was, from the outset, situated within progressive ideals in educational practice, and placed a premium upon self-exploration and self-discovery. Educational movements have arisen that have sought to move arts education towards a more traditional approach, or one that would reduce the self-discovery or self-exploratory nature and accentuate a more skills, knowledge and disciplinary approach making art education more resemble the paradigm we see in disciplines such as science or mathematics. In order to examine which direction might be most logically pursued in arts education, I’ve examined the ideals and practices followed within the arts discipline or field within the larger, authentic societal context (both in the previous chapter and this). I argue here that the practice of art is more than making. Art is a wider construct, one of making and presenting, explaining, listening and revising. The practice of art is, as Taylor describes dialogical. As this chapter started with an examination of traditional arts education within the community (before the very advent of public education), an examination of what arts education looks like in the community outside of public schools will serve nicely to wrap things up.

Place Des Arts is a vibrant and healthy fine arts education center in the Maillardville community of Coquitlam. Sitting in the main hall on any evening of the week is a remarkable experience. You’ll hear the sounds of the ballet studio down the hall, the thud of clay being thrown in the studios down the south side, and the sounds of violin, piano and guitar lessons echoing from the upstairs studios. Place Des Arts offers instruction in music, visual arts, dance, drama and movement to young and adult students alike. Art exhibitions fill one of the side studios and are always on display down the hallways and work, some of it for sale, covers the main hall walls. Over 63 000 visitors pass through this center each year, and over one million dollars is spent on tuition for courses each year.

It is possible for piano students to take Royal Conservatory or Conservatory Canada programs at Place Des Arts, and such forms of study come with a regimen of examinations and levels, but many students and parents choose not to go this route. The Executive Director of Place Des Arts seemed bemused by my inquiries regarding how the different courses and workshops are 'graded'. Most parents and students show their learning by bringing home or putting on show the objects they've made, playing their instruments in recitals, or performing for appreciative families or the community. This has always been the authentic way in the arts.

For visual arts, I can find no evidence of organizations in the public sphere that do grading, or levels, or examinations. Consider those organizations like the Conservatories listed above that do some form of grading, levelling and examining. In no manner do these organizations seek to set standards based on age, and then rank the students from this perspective. If I, as a forty-three year old individual, begin working on my Conservatory levels this year, I am in grade one. I can spend as much time working on the pieces that are set for this level as I like, and a determination of when I am ready to challenge the exam at the level will be made by me in consultation with my teacher. No outside force will determine what level of achievement I should be meeting on the piano based on the amount of time I've been taking lessons or my age. The Royal Conservatory provides movement from level to level in a manner that highly resembles a 'mastery learning' strategy discussed earlier in this paper.

There are eleven levels in the Royal Conservatory, from grade one to 'Associate of the Royal Conservatory of Music' (ARCT). At each level, candidates challenging the exam can fail to pass the level and continue at their current level of instruction, or make one of four levels, from pass to First Class Honours with Distinction. In the literature review on letter grades in this paper, one of the concerns raised about providing letter grades in the fine arts was the effect that doing so had on the teacher-student relationship. Of interest here is the fact that the student's teacher, in this testing scheme, does not examine or provide the level on the test given by the Royal Conservatory. Outside examiners maintain a schedule that takes them around the country to various testing centers, where exams are given to students and these outside agents determine the level of proficiency they achieve. (The Royal Conservatory of Music, 2010)

Dance works the same way. Many students attend dance classes, particularly in non-traditional types of dance like hip-hop or jazz, with no formal levels, examinations or assessments. More traditional forms of dance, however, such as ballet are served by several organizations that set levels. There are similarities in the methodologies used between these organizations and what I discussed with the Royal Conservatory of Music above.

One well known international school of dance, the Cecchetti Society, has a Canadian presence, the Cecchetti Society of Canada (CSC). Training in ballet, by Cecchetti method, is done via a “fixed regimen, with set of exercise for each day in the working week.” (Wikipedia, 2011, Training, para. 1) Training in classical ballet, under the Cecchetti method then, highly resembles the form of education that was found in the historical, traditional apprenticeship system in arts discussed earlier. The examinations done by the Cecchetti Society of Canada strongly resemble those done by the Royal Conservatory of Music. As is the case for the Conservatory, teachers of the CSC method consult with their students to prepare them for the exams, but touring outside examiners publish a calendar so that all know when the examiners are coming to their city, and it is this outside examiner who provides the exam and grades the student. (The Cecchetti Society of Canada, 2011, para. 1) The performance standards that can be given on the exam are ‘standard not yet attained’, ‘attained’, ‘pass’, ‘credit’, ‘commended’, ‘highly commended’, and ‘honours’.

Another dance Academy that provides support for various forms of dance but again centers itself on work in the formal discipline of ballet also provides several levels of classes and exams from pre-school levels through eight grade levels. This is the Royal Academy of Dance in Canada. As is the case with Cecchetti, candidates in the Royal Academy who seek promotion to the next grade level are examined by outside examiners, employed by the Royal Academy, who travel around on a pre-established schedule. Students who do not reach a required level of competence in the examination score ‘Standard Not Attained’. There are only three other levels given: ‘Pass’, ‘Merit’, or ‘Distinction’. (Private Correspondence, April 5, 2011)

A friend of mine has a fourteen-year-old daughter who has dedicated herself to dance, particularly ballet, and she is now attending the National School of Ballet in

Toronto. This is rather like a boarding school, and she receives performance-standard type grades in the academic subjects that she studies at the school (1-4). The central reason, though, for her travelling to Toronto to study is the ballet that she studies. She is not given letter or performance grades in ballet, but provided with anecdotal reports detailing what skills she is working on and how she is developing. My friend's daughter did do a Cecchetti exam at least once while studying ballet, and her local school had a complex assessment system. When she went to apply to the National School of Ballet they weren't interested in any of these grades. The application, her references and her audition were all that mattered. If she wishes to join a ballet company, when she is finished studying at the National School of Ballet, again only her audition or recordings of her dancing (a portfolio) will really matter.

It seems that the levels and exams that students in dance take help to focus the order and developmental points at which certain skills are introduced, which can vary from methodology to methodology. Also, levels of achievement and performance at different levels likely have a more critical impact on individuals seeking certification towards teaching in dance. As I've stated above, admission to the profession as 'dancer' whether when seeking to enter a school or join a company is based almost entirely on the live or taped audition. To be either certified to teach or to have a marketable set of credentials as a teacher, however, often requires an established level within one of the academies.

What I have attempted to establish here is that, in much arts education in the community there is little or no letter grading. In certain traditional arts education settings, such as music and ballet, there are available examinations and grading schemes. Many of them bear more resemblance to mastery grading schemes (see terms) than they do to letter grades as used in public school. All examination and grading schemes in such disciplines are based more on the readiness and preparation of the student with little or no respect to age. That is, students choose when to challenge these exams in consultation with their teachers based on current skills, and not based on their age, on a schedule that sets a preordained pace (e.g. on grade level per year), etc. As such, it would be facetious to compare these examinations schemes to the traditional type of grading that happens in public schools, where students are expected to meet certain learning outcomes by grade, at the same pace as their peers and based largely upon

age. I will explore such matters a little further in the chapter on Competing Curriculum Theories.

Creativity, Motivation and Arts Assessment

In *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*, Christensen, Horn and Johnson point out that a great deal of the entire organization and structure of public schooling was set in place in the late 1800's guided by a philosophy that valued the efficiencies being sought in industrial America and around the world.²⁶ Sir Ken Robinson goes further, noting that "Public schools were not only created in the interests of industrialism – they were created in the image of industrialism" (Robinson, 2009, p. 230). The same thinking processes that would lead to Ford's conveyor belt, lock-step assembly line processes by the very early twentieth century were central to the set of philosophies that drove the organization of school systems as school populations grew quickly and economic efficiencies were called for. For example, the authors point out, "By instituting grades and having a teacher focus on just one set of students of the same academic proficiency, the theory went, teachers could teach 'the same subjects, in the same way, and at the same pace' to all children in the classroom" (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008, p. 35).

It is this idea that all subjects can be taught in the same way that deserves careful consideration as we set about considering educational programs and assessment routines. The idea that there must be some standardization in educational programming is a powerful one that we often see played out in fine arts education. For example, the Getty Center for Education in the Arts proposal to make "art education more academic, with the thought that increased rigor and a broader curriculum encompassing aesthetics, art history, and art criticism as well as the development of the

²⁶ While I refer directly to this particular book here, it is an assertion made by many authors. The industrial or factory-like model that public schooling adheres to as an artifact of late nineteenth century beliefs is a relatively common assertion.

skills of production” (Fowler, 1996, p. 8), can be seen as following these ideas of standardization, particularly where the idea expressed is “that if we want art education to be a basic subject, we must make it look and act like one” (Fowler, 1996, p. 8).

In the case of education in the Fine Arts, however, there are powerful arguments to be made that because of the nature of the field,²⁷ using approaches to teaching and assessing that mirror those used in some of the other disciplines or fields may be particularly inept. This is especially the case if we suppose our arts education programs value creativity as an integral component of the educative experience. Since the last third of the twentieth century, “The cognitive perspective, with its emphasis on analysis of internal cognitive processes and direct study of complex phenomena, such as human problem solving and reasoning, displaced behaviorism” (Weisberg, 2006, p. 378). There have now been many studies both in investigative psychology and neurobiology that point to a negative correlation between stimulus-response or behaviourist approaches and the propagation of creativity.²⁸

It is not uncommon for critiques of letter grading to revolve around the way it can be easily described as a grand sort of stimulus-response system. It would be difficult to argue, in a convincing way, that it cannot be seen as such. Alfie Kohn describes how dependent almost every aspect of American education is on rewards when he notes, “To induce students to learn, we present stickers, stars, certificates, awards, trophies, membership in elite societies, and above all, grades. If the grades are good enough,

²⁷ This term is carefully used here as defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. His thoughts about creativity and the importance of ‘flow’, particularly within creative domains, have helped frame my thinking. Csikszentmihalyi defines a domain as a “set of symbols, rules and procedures.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 27) Mathematics is given as an example of a domain. “A field is the set of people who work within or act as ‘gatekeepers’ to the domain.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 28) “In the visual arts the field consists of art teachers, curators of museums, collectors of art, writers, and administrators of foundations and government agencies that deal with culture.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 28)

²⁸ Weisburg points out that there weren’t many studies into creativity during the period of time that behaviourism dominated psychology because “This assumption – that complex behavior was made up of simple building blocks – led many American psychologists away from the study of complex human activities, including problem solving.” (Weisburg, p. 308)

some parents then hand out bicycles or cars or cash, thereby offering what are, in effect, rewards for rewards” (Kohn, 1999, p. 11).

Daniel Pink speaks of the letter grade’s central status as a focused-on reward in the educational context, and its negative effect upon creativity.

Too many students walk through the schoolhouse door with one aim in mind: to get good grades. And all too often, the best way to reach this goal is to get with the program, avoid risks, and serve up the answers the teacher wants in the way the teacher wants them. Good grades become a reward for compliance – but don’t have much to do with learning. Meanwhile, students whose grades don’t measure up often see themselves as failures and give up trying to learn.²⁹ (Pink, 2009, p. 176)

Marcia Seeley reports that, “Teachers recognize that grades are taken seriously by students, parents, and school administrators, and that poor grades may have unintended consequences for students” (Seeley, 1994, p. 5). Consideration of unintended consequences, however, usually revolves around the damage done by letter grades to what are called ‘grey area’ or poor students. Good grades, though, may also have unintended consequences, and this may be an equally important discussion in the context of a creative education. Consider the ‘A’ student who achieves partially because of how she cares about her grades and is driven to continue bringing home top letter grades. Such a student has often learned, as Pink alludes to above, how to continue ensuring such grades by following the rules, being good at guessing what the teacher wants and sticking to safe strategies (such as avoiding being paired for project work with non-achieving students). What effect might such behaviour and thought processes have when risk-taking, creativity, and divergent problem solving are called for?

²⁹ One result of the industrial-organizational model discussed above is that children born on January 1st of a calendar year are placed in the same grade as children born on December 31st. This near-year gap in maturity and development is immense at the time that children enter school. Commenting on that, and the way that these children are then expected to master the same curriculum, learn at the same pace, etc., Malcolm Gladwell notes, “The small initial advantage that the child born in the early part of the year has over the child born at the end persists. It locks children into patterns of achievement and underachievement, encouragement and discouragement, that stretch on and on for years.” (Gladwell, 2008, p. 28)

Simon and Bellanca concur, asserting, “grades are subjective, generally unscientific, and seldom related to established educational objectives. More often than not, grades establish a meritocracy that rewards conformity and compulsive compliance, and discourages individuality and creativity” (Simon & Bellanca, 1976, p. 56).

In some cases, once past the primary years summative assessment in our public school system is limited to only a letter grade. Even where more in-depth information, analysis and assessment of learning is provided in addition to the letter grade, anyone working around assessment and reporting will admit readily that the single letter grade is the first thing the reader of a report sees, the thing of greatest concern to the students being reported on and the center of focus for any written report.

Alfie Kohn summarizes the three reasons for using letter grading in education as follows:

1. They make students perform better for fear of receiving a bad grade or in hope of getting a good one.
2. They sort students on the basis of their performance, which is useful for college admission and job placement.
3. They provide feedback to students about how good a job they are doing and where they need improvement. (Kohn, 1999, p. 201)

The sort of psychology surrounding the first reason is one completely familiar to teachers who must deal with letter grades in reporting or assessing student achievement, and clearly demonstrates the position that letter grades hold as positive and negative reinforcements. Reward and punish always go together in such schemes. It is time to speak now of the work being done by experts examining creativity, and what drives creativity, to contemplate the effect of behaviourist approaches upon an education program where the enhancement of creativity is a principle goal.

Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi sees the elements of “training, expectations, resources, recognition, hope, opportunity, and reward” as all being critical in the genesis of the creative individual (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 330). Specifically in regards to rewards, he sees both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as being a critical factor. Csikszentmihalyi points to the emergence of wealthy and influential patrons in Florence during the Renaissance, willing to pay highly for excellent and creative artworks, as having fuelled

the burst of creativity we can see happened. Speaking of Brunelleschi, an artist who came from a family that would not be expected to send a son into such a profession a generation earlier, Csikszentmihalyi notes, “But with the sudden infusion of money and prestige, it was possible for him as well as many other talented young men of good families to envision careers in architecture, painting, or sculpture” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 334)

Moderating his message somewhat, Csikszentmihalyi does note that, “Probably very few creative persons are motivated by money. On the other hand, very few can be indifferent to it entirely” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 335). He also goes on to state that, “Presumably creative individuals respond to financial incentives to a lesser extent than most people, but they do so nevertheless” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 335). It is not uncommon to hear letter grades, in the educational context, equated with pay cheques in the world context. When Csikszentmihalyi speaks of reward, then, as being an important factor to the creative individual, is he advocating the use of positive reinforcement regimes within the creative context?

Csikszentmihalyi’s argument appears to follow a rather simple line – that one needs to have a certain level of financial stability and some resources at ones disposal in order to turn one’s mind over to acts of creativity. The sorts of rewards that Csikszentmihalyi discusses don’t seem to function as a reward for the creative act at all. Kohn does not ignore the factor that Csikszentmihalyi is discussing in this thorough review of studies that point to the detrimental effects of reward and punishment on creativity. He notes, “I would propose to those responsible for setting policy: Pay people generously and equitably. Do your best to make sure they don’t feel exploited. Then *do everything in your power to help them put money out of their minds*” (Kohn, 1999, p. 182). Noting that there is a complexity to the discussion of compensation in occupations requiring creative work, Florida states, “My research has convinced me that many firms, scholars and business pundits still overrate money as a motivating factor, especially in the world of creative work” (Florida, 2002, p. 88). Echoing Kohn’s words, Florida

describes how creative people require enough money to live and should be compensated in line with the compensation given to others in their line of work so they feel respected.³⁰

Kohn sees rewards and punishments as falling into the same psychological approach (both being 'reinforcement', albeit positive and negative). He discusses reasons why such approaches don't serve well to change behaviours or improve learning. He notes that rewards serve as punishment, as the withholding of a reward within any organized reward schema is a punishment. Kohn points out the inimical relationship that reinforcement schemes have in the relationships between controlled (student) and controller (teacher). Kohn points out that stimulus-response schemes focus on input-output and entirely ignore critical reasons underlining student behaviour. For example, the focus where a student is not learning what the teacher wants her to learn becomes how to make it happen by developing the appropriate reward scheme rather than an investigation into why these learning problems are occurring.

Kohn notes that rewards discourage risk-taking. He points to the research showing that where students seek a reward, such as an 'A', for demonstrating certain learning, skills or behaviours they will tend to work towards that reward, doing "exactly what is necessary to get it and no more" (Kohn, 1999, p. 63). This concept, that letter grades encourage students to perform only to the level required to 'gain the A' and no further is examined by Eisner where he notes:

One of the first things a student learns – and the lesson is taught throughout his or her school career – is to provide the teacher with what the teacher wants or expects. The most important means of doing this is for the student to study the teacher, to learn just how much effort must be

³⁰ Malcolm Gladwell presents a more personalized choice. "If I offered you a choice between being an architect for \$75, 000 a year and working in a tollbooth every day for the rest of your life for \$100, 000 a year, which would you take? I'm guessing the former, because there is a complexity, autonomy, and a relationship between effort and reward in doing creative work, and that's worth more to most of us than money." (Gladwell, 2008, p. 150) As this section of the paper proceeds, look how closely Gladwell's description of the positive attributes of creative work match the set of ideas set out within cognitive evaluation theory!

expended for an A, a B, or a C grade. How long should the term paper be is a question heard not only in secondary school; it is heard in graduate school, as well.” (Eisner, 2002, p. 89)

Finally, Kohn devotes a whole chapter to his argument that “rewards, like punishments, actually undermine the intrinsic motivation that promotes optimal performance” (Kohn, 1999, p. 69).

Kohn’s two points, that reward schemes interfere with risk-taking and that they have a negative effect on optimal performance, particularly creative performance, are the two most interesting effects to examine where we seek to establish effective fine arts programs with a focus on enhancing creative performance. As Kohn states quite directly, “rewards killed creativity, and this was true regardless of the type of task, the type of reward, the timing of the reward, or the age of the people involved” (Kohn, 1999, pp. 44-45). I turn, then, to an examination of the research data upon which Kohn and others have based their conclusion that letter grades are particularly disruptive where creativity and originality are desired outcomes.

I won’t spend too much time focused on individual experimentation here, as there is a tremendous wealth of such work and as such, there are meta-studies of these experiments that I can turn to in order to examine the results coming out of the field. It will help, though, to look at some of the examples of experiments being done in order to better understand what the studies examine, and how they are accomplished.

Pittman, Emery and Boggiano (1982) describe a common type of experimental procedure for looking at intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In such studies, tasks for which people have relatively high initial interest are chosen. Subjects are then offered extrinsic reward. These rewards can be either task-contingent (subjects must perform the activity for a set time or a set number of repetitions) or task non-contingent (subjects have to put in their time, but the reward isn’t directly linked to performing the task or to some standard in the task). Subjects’ interest in the given activity, following reward, generally declines following the application of rewards in these studies. This is sometimes determined through questioning the subject, and sometimes determined by observing choices made by the subjects in ‘free activity times’ following the application of experimental procedure. This change in interest in activities that were initially high

interest is attributed to a decline in intrinsic motivation. Many experiments have demonstrated this effect. A common explanation for the phenomenon is that once reward is given for a task, the reward becomes the reason for engaging in the activity.

In the pair of experiments completed above in the paper by Pittman, Emery and Boggiano, extrinsic and intrinsic motivational orientations are examined. The authors contend that for individuals who adopt an intrinsic motivational orientation, “features such as novelty, complexity, challenge, and the opportunity for mastery experience are sought and preferred” (Pittman, Emery, & Boggiano, 1982, p. 790). A lack of such attributes inside of activities that are approached with an intrinsic motivational orientation leads to boredom. When people adopt an extrinsic motivational orientation towards an activity, however, “features such as predictability and simplicity are desirable” (Pittman, Emery, & Boggiano, 1982, p. 790). This occurs because once the goal is to reach a reward status, this becomes the motivational focus and where the complexity and challenge within the activity undermines the potential of reaching that goal, subjects experience tension and frustration. This schema, of differentiating intrinsic motivational orientation from extrinsic motivational orientation and the nature of the tasks that play to each orientation is discussed by Amabile, Hennessey and Grossman where they discuss McGraw’s proposition that “extrinsic motivation enhances performance on algorithmic tasks (simple, straight-forward tasks), but undermines performance on heuristic tasks (open-ended, complex tasks where some search is required)” (Amabile, Hennessey, & Grossman, 1986, p. 15).

In their study, Pittman, Emery and Boggiano demonstrated that subjects who were rewarded for engagement in activities for which there were different challenge levels of the activity available “showed a marked preference for simple versions of the target activities compared to no-reward baseline subjects” (Pittman, Emery, & Boggiano, 1982, p. 795). In the concluding remarks to the study, the authors go on to question whether repeated experiences in one type of motivational mindset might cause a person to start to approach new challenges, in general, from within this mindset. A related question, and one that many teachers have direct experience with, is whether repeated experience within the paradigm of an extrinsic motivational orientation inside of a particular field of knowledge might cause a student to continue to approach experiences within the field from the same mindset. What I mean in noting that teachers have direct

experience with this is that it is a common observation of teachers who attempt to move from algorithmic to heuristic tasks in the classroom that one inevitable hurdle comes with the frustration incurred by students used to a simple and predictable route to 'A' grades.

Teresa Amabile has been studying creativity since the late 1970's, and has published several books and over 150 papers. In her 1985 article in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Amabile, 1985) she shares the results of an experiment in which she examined creative poetry writing in 72 young adults. In lab sessions, these subjects were asked to write two poems. All involved in the study had identified themselves as being involved in creative writing. All wrote an initial poem under similar circumstances, with no front-end intervention. Between the first and second piece of writing, half of the subjects completed a questionnaire that focused on extrinsic reasons for writing. After writing the second poem, all poems were blindly rated by a panel of twelve poets, who rated the poems on a forty-point scale. Amabile points out that the techniques used in her study have proven to have a high level of reliability in previous studies. Weisberg notes that Amabile's consensual assessment technique, which "uses judges who are expert in the domain to rate the creativity of products that the participants create" has come to wide use in the field of creativity studies (Weisberg, 2006, p. 520).

Amabile's study showed that, "Clearly, concentrating on extrinsic reasons for creative writing did result in a temporary decrease in creativity, as predicted" (Amabile, 1985, p. 397). She goes on to note that "There is no strong evidence, however, that concentrating on intrinsic reasons for writing caused a temporary increase in creativity" (Amabile, 1985, p. 397). This is an important distinction. Amabile's study did not indicate that adopting an intrinsic motivational orientation increased creativity, but that adopting an extrinsic motivational orientation decreased creative performance. Amabile details four types of extrinsic motivation that she has found, in her work, inhibit creativity. These are direct tangible rewards such as money, the idea that work will be externally evaluated, the external direction of creative work (having others guide or force the work

along)³¹ and having the creative work be a means to extrinsic ends (do well and your career will advance, you'll get into the university you want). Amabile's experiment doesn't focus on letter grades in particular, but it is easy to see how letter grades fall easily into all four types of extrinsic reward as outlined in Amabile's schema above.³²

In a 1986 article, again in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Amabile along with Hennessey and Grossman reveals three studies designed to examine the effects of reward on children's and adults' creativity. In the studies, various combinations of reward for completing an activity versus not reward, labelling of an activity work versus not labelling, providing choice about whether to complete an activity versus not providing that choice were examined, and children were studied alongside adult women in the set of experiments. The study again demonstrated that working for reward "can lead to decrements in creativity" (Amabile, Hennessey, & Grossman, 1986, p. 20). The factor of having choice over whether or not to perform an activity versus not having that choice was not clearly influential in creative performance. The authors concluded that examining the results of their study in coordination with an earlier study conducted by Amabile and Gitmer, in 1984, revealed the possibility that having choice in the matter of how to complete an activity may have more positive impact on creative performance than simply having choice over whether or not to engage in the activity.

³¹ Bayles and Orland refer to this when they recount a story of the photographer Edward Weston. "More often, though, the same artists who diligently follow a self-imposed discipline (like writing in iambic pentameter, or composing for solo piano) prove singularly ill-equipped to handle constraints imposed by others. Edward Weston's well-meaning friends once convinced a coffee company to offer that artist a commission to make still-life photographs they could use in their magazine ads. About the only requirement was that the company's product appear somewhere in the arrangement; nonetheless Weston, whose facility with photographing small objects as art is legendary, was driven to complete distraction by the pressure of having to make one of those small objects a coffee can. (Bayles & Orland, 1993, p. 75)

³² In her article from the following year, Amabile, Hennessey and Grossman summarize the studied constraints on creativity as being "evaluation, surveillance, competition, restriction of choice, and directly induced extrinsic motivational orientation." (Amabile, Hennessey & Grossman, 1986, p.15)

Kohn points out that following the first publication of *Punished by Rewards*, University of Alberta doctoral student Judy Cameron published a meta-analysis of nearly 100 of the type of studies discussed above in which she concluded that “most kinds of rewards weren’t harmful” (Kohn, 1999, p. 260). He points to serious flaws in the methodology used in the Cameron study, and notes that Deci, Koestner and Ryan completed a follow up meta-analysis, examining even a larger pool of studies, aimed at correcting the errors found in Cameron’s work.

Deci, Ryan and Koestner begin their article by examining the theoretical framework into which their meta-analysis, and the experiments they are examining fit. An influential post-behaviourist framework used to explain the results being obtained from many of the experiments that they examine in their meta-analysis is cognitive evaluation theory (CET), a sub-theory of ‘Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Alfie Kohn is certainly framing his thinking with CET when he notes, “The loss of autonomy entailed by the use of rewards or punishments helps explain why they sap our motivation” (Kohn, 1999, p. 192). CET theory, in summation, states that “underlying intrinsic motivation are the psychological needs for autonomy and competence, so the effects of an event such as a reward depend on how it affects perceived self-determination and perceived competence” (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999, p. 628).

CET³³ complicates the discussion, or at least paints a much more complex picture of the effect of reward upon human behaviour than that offered up by the behaviourists. For the behaviourist, the critical thing is to find the stimulus that will encourage the desired response. Discussion of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation is a non-issue. All behaviours are extrinsically motivated. “If something looks intrinsic,” to the behaviourist, “it’s just because we haven’t figured out the real (extrinsic) causes” (Kohn, 1999, p. 290). In CET theory, however, rewards and punishments carry a functional significance. An individual receiving a punishment or reward either consciously or unconsciously determines whether that reward is an attempt to

³³ CET is sometimes called Self-Perception Theory. So there is at least one other, and unrelated ‘Self-Perception Theory’ in the field of psychology I will stick to CET.

manipulate their self-determination, or it affects their feelings of competence. How that internal conversation plays out affects the significance and result of the reward.

We all, as the theory goes, have certain psychological needs. We wish to feel competent, or able to meet the challenges and problems presented to us within the environment we find ourselves in. We all need to feel autonomous. This doesn't mean that we wish to be isolated or unattached to the others around us, just that we wish to be 'causal agents' with respect to our interactions within our environment. Finally, as expressed in SDT, we have a need to be connected to others around us. This need is called 'relatedness'.

Deci, Ryan and Koestner note that there have been four meta-analyses of the type of experiments they look at, and that only the Cameron study referred to by Kohn above indicated that rewards didn't have a negative influence on intrinsic motivation or creative outcomes. They examine and point out the problems they see in the study³⁴, and in their follow-up piece enlarge the set of studies examined and correct for procedures. Their meta-analysis, then, examines 128 studies from 94 published articles and 19 dissertations.

The Deci, Ryan and Koestner meta-analysis, in effect, overturns Cameron's results, and reaffirms that "the effect of all tangible rewards was to significantly undermine intrinsic motivation, assessed with both measures³⁵" (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999, p. 639). More important to this paper, the authors provide a more thorough analysis of age results than previously undertaken, and find that:

³⁴ According to Deci, Ryan and Koestner all previous studies did not include doctoral dissertations. This is a procedural error, they argue, as published articles are far more likely to highlight positive experimental outcomes as opposed to null outcomes. In addition, they note that Cameron made errors in the outcomes she ascribed to some of the studies examined. They also outline serious methodological problems identified in the previous studies – problems described more fully in many of the responses published to those studies by researchers from both sides of the debate.

³⁵ Both measures refers to the two basic types of experiment in the field – those that assess the effect of reward by having subjects self-report their interest in activities post-experiment and those that examine subjects' free-choice behaviours post-experiment.

tangible rewards are detrimental to the free-choice intrinsic motivation of both children and undergraduates but that they tend to be more detrimental to the intrinsic motivation of children than of college students. Furthermore, the analysis showed that verbal rewards did not enhance free-choice intrinsic motivation for children but did for college students. (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999, p. 646)

That last statement that indicates a newly discovered difference in the effects of rewards on children from older subjects deserves some extra consideration here. What is particularly interesting is that CET theory would not have predicted this result. CET categorizes rewards given into several categories. There are task non-contingent rewards. These are rewards given for simply engaging in a study, and are not dependent on controlling any other behaviour. You might think of this as 'clocking in'. CET predicts that task non-contingent rewards will have no effect on motivation as they are viewed by the subject or individual being observed as being non-manipulative. Task contingent rewards are usually seen as a single category, but Deci, Ryan and Koestner divided this category into task-completion contingent rewards, where the task need not be completed. There are also performance-contingent rewards. These rewards are given contingent upon the subject performing to a set standard. Letter grades quite obviously fall into this category of reward. CET predicts, and the studies as well as most of the meta-analyses have confirmed that these last two or three categories of reward will have a detrimental effect on intrinsic motivation.

The factor that complicates this effect as pointed out by Deci, Ryan and Koestner, however, is the extent to which a subject sees the information or feedback provided in the reward as providing an affirmation of competence. In short, we have these two needs for autonomy and competence. A reward can cause us to feel that our autonomy has been compromised, but if the form of the same reward provides us an affirmation of our competence, then some of the harmful effects of the reward are thus ameliorated. Because of this, factors built into a reward system such as "choice and non-controlling positive feedback" can lead to enhanced intrinsic motivation in that they limit damage to an individual's perception of autonomy whilst providing psychologically required feedback on competence (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999, p. 657).

For this reason, positive verbal feedback has been viewed as a performance-contingent reward, but one that because of the competence affirming information carried in it would carry more weight on the 'competence affirmation' end of things than the 'autonomy controlling' side. And Deci, Ryan and Koestner found above that this idea held for college level students, but not for younger children. One deduction might be that the psychological need for autonomy is more pronounced in younger children, so this balancing act has quite a different outcome. Deci, Ryan and Koestner are forced to conclude that, "the use of such rewards in schools could be very detrimental to intrinsic motivation, which has been shown to relate positively to both cognitive outcomes, well-being, and behavioural persistence" (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999, p. 657).

Another study deserves a note here, as it pertains so directly to the education of artists in particular. Daniel Pink describes a study of artists that set out to examine extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Artists at the School of Art Institute in Chicago were surveyed and grouped in a study into those whose primary motivation was extrinsic and those whose motivation was mostly intrinsic. This survey was done in the 1960s. In the 1980's the study subjects were investigated to see how their careers were doing. "The less evidence of extrinsic motivation during art school, the more success in professional art both several years after graduation and nearly twenty years later" (Pink, 2009, pp. 45-46). Pink supposes that artists who create for the love of the act itself are able to get through the inevitable lean times that an artist encounters. "For artists, scientists, inventors, school children, and the rest of us, intrinsic motivation – the drive to do something because it is interesting, challenging, and absorbing – is essential for high levels of creativity" (Pink, 2009, p. 46).

A summary of what has been discussed in this section, then, goes like this. Grades hold a central place in assessment systems and the reporting routines in schools today, and are often given in all subjects including the fine arts. 'A' grades are seen as rewards for learning accomplished, tasks completed or following the rules, and 'F' grades carry the opposite message. As such, letter grading as a system is a positive and negative reinforcement scheme. A compelling mass of research, much of it accomplished over the past fifty years, has shown that such behaviourist approaches have a negative impact on the performance of tasks that can be described as heuristic. In specific, the use of rewards damages intrinsic motivation. Receiving rewards for

engaging in tasks causes individuals to change their approach to activities, tasks or learning from an intrinsic motivational orientation towards an extrinsic motivational orientation. People approaching tasks from an extrinsic motivational orientation adopt a mindset and approach better suited to algorithmic tasks. They perform only to the level required to gain the reward. Reward schemes are thus shown to be antithetical to the development of creativity.

Defibaugh reports on another aspect of creativity research that needs mention here. She details a study conducted in 1987 by Hennessey and Amabile. “In the study, two groups of girls, ages 7 to 11, were asked to create collages at two separate art parties. One of the groups (experimental) was told that the adults present would decide who had produced the best designs; the winners would be awarded prizes” (Defibaugh, 2000, p. 23). Artist judges, who were trained to rate the works of art, judged the non-competitive or control group collages to be significantly more creative than the competitive or experimental group. This study raises the further issue of anxiety, and the effect it may have upon creativity³⁶. In a meta-analysis designed to examine 25 years of mood-creativity research, Baas, De Dreu and Nijstad look at 66 reports including 12 unpublished papers or dissertations. In their conclusion, they find that “Increasing feelings of happiness and joy are unlikely to produce creativity when the task is framed as ‘serious business on which your annual bonus (or your letter grade, or your pocket money) substantially depends” (Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008, p. 799). The matter is again brought back to the importance of intrinsic motivational orientation when

³⁶ It is this negative effect of anxiety upon creative performance that Bayles and Orland are discussing when they present this compelling but probably fictional scenario: “The ceramics teacher announced on opening day that he was dividing the class into two groups. All those on the left side of the studio, he said, would be graded solely on the quantity of work they produced, all those on the right solely on its quality. His procedure was simple: on the final day of class he would bring in his bathroom scales and weigh the work of the ‘quantity’ group: fifty pounds of pots rated an ‘A’, forty pounds a ‘B’, and so on. Those being graded on ‘quality’, however, needed to produce only one pot – albeit a perfect one – to get an ‘A’. Well, come grading time and a curious fact emerged: the works of the highest quality were all produced by the group being graded for quantity. It seems that while the ‘quantity’ group was busily churning out piles of work – and learning from their mistakes – the ‘quality’ group had sat theorizing about perfection, and in the end had little more to show for their efforts than grandiose theories and a pile of dead clay. (Bales & Orland, 1993, p. 29)

the authors further conclude, “It would be much better to match such induced feelings of happiness and joy to framing the task as ‘enjoyable and interesting to do’” (Baas, DeDreu, & Nijstad, 2008, p. 799).

Further, however, these authors report a conclusion that might seem to conflict with the studies discussed thus far. They note, “However, when employees are feeling grumpy, when pupils are having a bad hair day, or when children are struck by winter depression, framing the task as serious and consequential to extrinsic rewards may actually help elevate their level of creativity” (Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008, p. 799). There are two possible reasons, in keeping with the research that has been covered here, why the authors may have come to such a conclusion.

In their study, Bass, De Dreu and Nijstad examine three facets of mood that have been traditionally examined in respect to creative performance. ‘Hedonic tone’ refers to positive and negative moods, and psychologists classify moods into these two categories. ‘Activation level’ describes the level of arousal that is associated with a mood. Now we have a four-quadrant classification. Depression would be a negative mood with a low level of arousal. Anger would be a negative mood with a high level of arousal. The relaxed, happy mood that one might incur lying in a hot bubble bath would be a positive hedonic tone with low level of arousal, and the excitement one experiences riding a roller coaster (provided one enjoys roller coasters) would be a positive hedonic tone with high level of arousal. Finally, the authors looked at regulatory focus. A promotion regulatory focus involves working towards a goal (not necessarily reward) and a prevention focus involves avoiding some end. Taken together, then, these three binary classification create a grid of 8 possible mood sets that are examined, in the literature, in respect to their effect on creativity.

Where Baas, De Dreu and Nijstad state that there may be situations where it is conducive to frame a task as consequential or even leading to exterior reward, they appear to be referring specifically to subjects whose mood or arousal level, in the classification system just discussed, is negative in hedonic tone and low in state of arousal. Firstly, such a state of mind (depressed, grumpy) is inimical to getting any task completed be it creative work or not. Under such circumstances, some form of inducement might indeed be the only way of procuring any sort of progress, creative or

not. The authors' statement doesn't, upon further inspection, seem to clash with the psychological experiments into creativity detailed earlier. Recall that the experiments all centered on performance and creative performance in activities that had a 'high level of initial interest'. Rewards are not considered inimical to performance or motivation in activities that do not carry this high initial interest.

Further, in the results that Baas, De Dreu and Nijstad obtain they examine a number of studies that use various 'creativity indicators'. One of these indicators is 'fluency'. The authors note that fluency "refers to the number of unique, nonredundant ideas or problem solutions that are generated" (Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008, p. 781). Weisberg discusses the design of this subset of creativity experiments where he notes that, for these experiments, "people are given reinforcement for some aspect of creative production on divergent-thinking tasks: for example, fluency (number of responses), flexibility (number of different categories of responses produced), or originality (rarity of responses)" (Weisberg, 2006, p. 529). Amabile's response to data coming from studies incorporating this design is that they are flawed, as these "tasks are highly structured and the participant essentially knows how to do well on the task" (Weisberg, 2006, p. 529). Baas, De Dreu and Nijstad may then be concluding that reward might foster creative production in individuals in negative hedonic and low arousal moods based on a set of experiments that examine algorithmic rather than heuristic tasks, and thus are seriously flawed as 'creativity' experiments.

Given all this research into creativity and reward why is there not a more widespread discussion over the use of letter grades in the fine arts going on? I believe the answer is to be found in pondering some of the matters I outlined in the introduction to this chapter. Discussions about how to assess and report out in the public school system usually occur on a meta-level. That is, the question raised is 'what should our report card look like', and not 'what should our fine arts report look like'. 'What kinds of assessments should we be doing in the classroom' is a different concern from 'what kinds of assessments should we be doing in the fine arts classroom'. However, there is that push for standardization, inside a system that was designed to enhance an industrial approach as discussed at the start of this section.

Letter grades, or the use of rewards in learning are probably not a problem, and may even be beneficial, in certain learning situations within the wider educational context. Remember that the research only found rewards had a negative effect on intrinsic motivation where subjects were engaged in tasks with a high level of initial interest. Some of the research just discussed even indicated that reward could be beneficial when paired with more algorithmic tasks, or applied with individuals in certain moods or states of arousal.

Within the educational project not all learning is heuristic, and not all learning is algorithmic. As students need to develop the ability to imagine, envision and develop their creativity in various fields, they also need to develop a wide range of algorithmic skills, learning how to apply set solutions to commonly encountered problems. If the goal is to teach students how to add two four-digit numbers using a set algorithm, or to have students memorize times tables, then routines that reward them for performance in the task may be beneficial, or at least not harmful. It is easy to speculate that in any given field or discipline of study there will be a different sort of mix of heuristic and algorithmic learning tasks, and the conversation about the efficacy of rewards or letter grades will run in different directions.

Amabile admits that much of her research runs to the negative side of creativity research in that she is examining factors that have a negative impact on creativity. “Most of my research has uncovered methods for destroying creativity: making external evaluation salient, offering task-contingent rewards, imposing surveillance, making extrinsic motive salient” (Amabile, 1996, p. 243). One experiment, though, set out to examine whether the negative effect of reward on creativity, letter-grading in particular, could be ameliorated through the use of a specific approach. Sometimes referred to as the ‘inoculation’ experiment, Amabile posits that “If the extrinsic constraint or contracted-for reward can be considered a kind of germ or virus, might it be possible, we wondered, to immunize people against its negative effects on intrinsic motivation and creativity?” (Amabile, 1996, p. 173).

In this experiment, conducted with school-age children, an experimental group of children were exposed to a video in which students discussed school work and learning from an intrinsically motivated perspective. “For example, when asked whether they

ever think about the grades they're going to receive for their schoolwork, they replied that although they know that getting a good report card is important, and although they try to get good grades, grades are never the most important thing to them while they were working" (Amabile, 1996, p. 173). The idea was to provide students within a system where external constraints and salient rewards were to be utilized despite their negative consequences with what Amabile refers to as the *cognitive distancing techniques* to compensate and maintain their ability to develop creativity.

In this study, Amabile concluded that, "The intrinsic motivation training children tend to report higher levels of intrinsic motivation towards learning on the paper-and-pencil test. And in general, the control group of children exhibit a lower level of creativity under reward" (Amabile, 1996, p. 174). Amabile, in fact, indicates that rewards can be turned to having a positive effect on creativity under the proper circumstances and used carefully with cognitive distancing techniques. "These positive effects appear when intrinsic motivation is kept salient, when extrinsic motivation becomes less salient (or cognitively diminished), and when rewards signify competence or enable performance of interesting new activities – rather than signifying external control of behavior" (Amabile, 1996, p. 177). Amabile names this positive combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational strategies *motivational synergy*.

There is a possible limitation to this particular device suggested in Amabile's description.

This conceptualization proposes that certain types of extrinsic motivation – those we call 'synergistic extrinsic motivators' – can combine positively with intrinsic motivation, particularly when initial levels of intrinsic motivation are high. Rewards that confirm competence without connoting control, or rewards that enable the individual to do exciting work can serve as synergistic extrinsic motivators. (Amabile, 1996, p. 118)

The initial requirement, in this system, of requiring high levels of intrinsic motivation delineates the delicate nature of the balance created. Any act of reward, which doesn't steadfastly fit the synergistic model, will serve to decrease intrinsic motivation. Further to this, any decrease in intrinsic motivation will fetter the ability of a system to harvest reward from motivational synergy.

This demonstrates another reason why the conversation around letter-grading in the fine arts in particular has not been more vociferously waged. In a testament to the 'art' of education, talented teachers have been able to utilize motivational synergy and harvest creative growth in spite of the constraints imposed by the system of letter grading. My advisor, Dr. Carolyn Mamchur, once related to me how she would call students up and have them write down the letter grade they were going to work towards on a piece of paper, place the paper in her desk drawer and then advise the students to forget about the whole matter of letter grades until the report came along. I have used criteria and mastery letter-grade schemes in fine arts over the years to try and devalue the letter-grade. Weisberg advises that "Teachers, for example, should talk less about grades in the classroom, and when they talk about grades they should emphasize their informational aspect: that grades provide information that can lead to higher levels of skills" (Weisberg, 2006, p. 531). Ironically, the whole issue of the fine arts grade carrying less value than the 'academic subjects' in the view of many parents may also serve to drive a certain motivational synergy in fine arts assessment.

I believe that it would be foolish, however, to consider such factors enough to overcome the negative effects of letter grading on creativity. Where creativity has been enhanced under letter-grading systems, by talented educators able to build with most students the positive synergy, required it is by no means an adequate system. Too many players must be on the same page for this system to stand up. De-emphasis of the importance of the letter grade must be internally accepted by the student and emphasized by both teacher and parent, for example. And the letter grade just isn't important enough of an assessment tool in fine arts to make this effort worthwhile.

Much of Amabile's research is geared towards examining how creativity can be fostered in workplaces and industrial settings. This is why she makes statements such as "if payment is a routine, nonsalient aspect of the work environment, and if the professional climate is one that alleviates monetary concerns and fosters an intrinsic motivational orientation, then creativity should be enhanced" (Amabile, 1996, p. 254). Of course employers need to deal with the issue of salaries and compensation within their workforces, and work beyond such matters to foster creativity in employees.

In speaking of what he names the autotelic experience, a concept that can closely be linked to the intrinsic motivational orientation discussed earlier, Csikszentmihalyi notes, “The key element of an optimal experience is that it is an end in itself. Even if initially undertaken for other reasons, the activity that consumes us becomes intrinsically rewarding” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 67). In business, above, professionals are now grappling with understanding how they can move employees who initially enter the workplace in need of a paycheque away from focusing on this so that an intrinsic motivational orientation can be fostered. In education, we bring students in and develop this intrinsic motivational orientation through the primary years, and then introduce the letter grade at the intermediate level and so move them towards the extrinsic motivational orientation.

Only by finding an alternative to the letter grade in fine arts can teachers work to maintain all students’ intrinsic motivational orientation. As Amabile prescribes:

In the formal educational process, highlight learning achievements rather than the external indicators such as grades and competitive awards. Emphasize the intrinsic joy of learning and focus children on their own development of competence and knowledge. Emphasize the value of taking the risk to challenge oneself beyond current skill levels; highlight the informational value of mistakes. Give precedence to intangible over tangible rewards and present rewards as bonuses rather than bribes.” (Amabile, *Creativity in Context*, 1996, p. 261)

Competing Curriculum Theories and Arts Education

Learning is an immensely complex business, so, to put faith in highly directive, prescriptive curriculum, is to so ‘go against the grain of the brain’ that it will inhibit creativity and enterprise...the very skills needed in the complex, diverse community for which we need to prepare our children. (Abbott & MacTaggart, 2010, p. 211)

Nothing teachers do can be counted upon to institute awareness of or experience with a work in a particular individual; there can never be assurance or guarantee. Tacit awarenesses are involved: there is always a surpassing of what the instructor says, even of what the instructor knows. Partly for this reason, teaching in the field of art can never be reduced to a set of predetermined competencies. Nor can the encounters or experiences we hope to make possible be finally defined in terms of specified behaviors. (Greene, 1978, p. 200)

Our teaching modes and methods as well as curriculum models help to determine the assessment routines and methods we employ. There is a feedback loop here. Committing to our assessment routines and methods helps to influence our teaching and curriculum. Speaking of how authentic portfolio assessment in particular can change curriculum itself, Herman and Winters confirm this interaction when they report that, “The majority of principals interviewed affirmed that Vermont’s portfolio assessment program had beneficial effects on curriculum and instruction, citing as examples specific changes in curriculum content and instructional strategies” (Herman & Winters, 1994, p. 53).³⁷ They go on to note that, “Similarly, Aschbacher’s action research (1993) suggests that involvement in the development and implementation of alternative assessments influences teachers’ instructional practices and their attitudes towards students” (Herman & Winters, 1994, p. 53). The Aschbacher study also noted that using portfolios had influenced teachers’ expectations of their students. “Over half the respondents said working on alternative assessment had changed their attitude toward students in general and their expectations for student learning and performance” (Aschbacher, 1993, p. 20).

While my focus is on assessment in the fine arts, I cannot completely ignore the implications the model I explore has upon curriculum and instruction itself. Several competing philosophical visions of what education should look like have been discussed and woven their way in and out of this paper. These different visions lead to very different types of curriculum design. What I seek to demonstrate here is that these different curriculum designs call for modes of assessment that work or fit logically. In

³⁷ It should be noted that this study examines the use of writing portfolios. The authors of this study examine several portfolio projects where multiple assessors score the portfolios. They struggle with issues such as the reliability and validity of the scores given. For example, they examine the correlation of scores given portfolios by multiple assessors to see if there is a high enough level of agreement in scoring. One of the studies cited, interestingly enough, is a Pittsburgh portfolio project that grew out of an ARTS PROPEL project examining visual arts, music and imaginative writing. The authors of the paper admit that there are challenges in creating technical quality and inter-rater reliability in portfolio assessment, that these challenges can be overcome by highly standardized portfolio content and tasks, but admit that this might have an impact on the sort of goals that one ties to portfolio assessment, such as creativity.

other words, we are moving away from behavioural objectives in some disciplines and areas of learning towards what I will describe as outcomes in the next few paragraphs. It is important to change the assessment routines that we employ. The assessments that work with behavioural objectives don't make sense for outcomes.

In regards to the education system, Abbot and MacTaggart state, "Our present community and school structures are finely tuned to outdated assumptions about how humans learn" (Abbott & MacTaggart, 2010, p. 262). Elucidating on one of the critical issues they discuss in their book, they note, "Here is the absolute conflict with behaviourism, which asserts that learning has always to be under the control of the teacher, as has the learning environment. We have to rid ourselves of such thinking once and for all" (Abbott & MacTaggart, 2010, p. 207).

The word curriculum, as it happens, is about as descriptive as the word insect.³⁸ There are, it seems, many species. I've seen curriculum theory itself classified according to the psychological and learning theories that underlie its subdivisions, the type of learning environments that are advocated for (child-centered, skills-based, knowledge-centered, etc.) and the philosophical orientations (idealism, realism, constructivism, perennialism). Mark Smith examines how curriculum can be seen as a body of knowledge to be transmitted, a process whereby certain ends in student learning are met (product), a process or a praxis (Smith M. K., 2000). Elliot Eisner defines curriculum as "a series of planned events that are intended to have educational consequences for one or more students" (Eisner, 2002, p. 31).

Oliva categorizes definitions of curriculum into the following schema:

1. Curriculum is what is taught in school.
2. Curriculum is a set of subjects.
3. Curriculum is content.

³⁸ The word curriculum comes from the Latin, originally referring to the racetrack on which chariots competed. It is quite fascinating to me that both our educational terms, 'curriculum' and 'course', come from this source.

4. Curriculum is a program of studies.
5. Curriculum is a set of materials.
6. Curriculum is a sequence of courses.
7. Curriculum is a set of performance objectives.
8. Curriculum is a course of study.
9. Curriculum is everything that goes on within the school, including extra-curricular activities, guidance, and interpersonal relationships.
10. Curriculum is that which is taught both inside and outside of school directed by the school.
11. Curriculum is everything that is planned by school personnel.
12. Curriculum is a series of experiences undergone by learners in a school.
13. Curriculum is that which an individual learner experiences as a result of schooling. (Oliva, 1992, pp. 5-6)

Eisner discusses how curriculum has been “defined as ‘all the experiences the child has under the aegis of the school,’” (essentially the same as number 9 above) and notes how “this conception of curriculum was created by progressive educators during the 1920s to emphasize several beliefs that they considered central to any adequate conception of education” (Eisner, 2002, p. 26).

Oliva points out that the list of thirteen categories of curriculum definition above is not exhaustive of the literature in place, but an examination of the thirteen categories he provides above reveals a certain division in several types of category. Most of the definitions are primarily concerned with the endpoint at which the student will arrive. For example, if curriculum is ‘a set of performance standards or behavioural objectives’, then the prime thing to be examined is what we will set as the standards. The standard, or skill that the student should gain from instruction becomes the focal point of the exercise in this paradigm. From this, we move to making decisions about how students will be taught these skills or pieces of knowledge. As this is a second step in the process, this step becomes an instructional decision as opposed to a curricular decision. This, of course, leads to decisions around how we might measure whether or not we have been successful.

Eisner describes the routine steps taken in developing curriculum where behavioural objectives are used.

In the standard curriculum literature, goals are supposed to be deduced from aims. Having deduced goals, one then deduces objectives. Having deduced objectives, one then proceeds to formulate curriculum activities. The planning process is supposed to be a step-by-step process from the general to the specific, from ends to means. (Eisner, 2002, p. 135)

He goes on to note that “The problem with this view, as I have indicated earlier, is that it assumes that curriculum activities that are educationally significant always have explicit goals or objectives, which they do not, and that the formulation of goals must always precede activities, which is not always true” (Eisner, 2002, p. 135).

Some of the concepts of curriculum outlined by Oliva above can be used to lead into a discussion of how curriculum can be based around a philosophy that moves away from behavioural objectives, as considered by Eisner. The definitions of curricula given in numbers 9, 12 and 13 above, for example, imply a different sort of approach. Where the others are primarily concerned with what I have called the ‘endpoint’, these three categories are focused instead upon the experience. In these definitions, either the entire focus is upon the educational experience itself, or the set of experiences is so wide and varied as to be uncontrollable in its entirety outside of some dystopian science fiction novel. A control over and responsibility for learning shifts from one set of definitions to the next.

In one group, responsibility for curriculum lies with the teachers, administrators or curriculum designers. Where we employ behavioural objectives, and have a set and measurable endpoint, we develop and utilize assessment routines that focus entirely on the piece of knowledge or skill that we require the student to demonstrate before moving on. In the case of formative assessment, we are measuring our curricular success and making decisions about the next step in teaching and learning in relation to the very specific endpoint. If the student isn’t there yet we teach again, change approaches, provide more practice or the like. If the student has demonstrated, in a measurable way, their learning then we are ready to move on.

With the other type of curricular goal, what the students take from or learn from the set of experiences can be personalized, and responsibility or control over the curriculum begins to transfer to the learner. The experience is provided, but not

necessarily with a specific or measurable end goal in mind. Leading into the assessment, within such activities, multiple end goals are possible or even desirable.

Another way of thinking about it is that in many of the categories of curriculum given above, the focus is on the 'ends', which are always predefined. When you approach the concept of curriculum seeking an 'end', it is the next logical step to seek to determine whether that end has been met in order to judge success, and measuring this probably makes sense (if it can be measured). What is more, it doesn't matter whether the student has learned things in addition to or instead of the learning objective. All that matters where behavioural objectives are utilized is whether or not the student has learned the objective that was aimed for. If the goal was that the student should be able to write a Haiku poem, and what was turned in was an impressive and incredibly original 800 page novel, the goal has been missed.

The other set of definitions, however, focus on the means. Curriculum becomes the experience provided. Such a definition opens up different vistas. When the experience, or the means is key, different outcomes are possible. It matters less whether or not the outcomes can be measured. In addition, all learning becomes relevant.

Earlier in this paper, I have discussed the philosophical division that exists between progressive and traditional or essential philosophies and modes of education. In the present discussion, we see these two philosophies being fleshed out within the sorts of curriculum constructs that are being chosen for use. We can envision curriculum in one manner, and in seeking to implement that curriculum we are drawn into a traditional mode of curriculum delivery or instruction. We can envision curriculum in another way, and be drawn into progressive forms of instructional interaction.

Oliva speaks about how these various philosophies play into curriculum design, and further, she makes the link between the behaviourist paradigm and the types of curricula that play towards an essentialist or traditional form of instruction.

Behaviorism casts the learner in a passive role as the recipient of the many stimuli to which he or she must respond. Known in its variants as connectionism, association, S-R (Stimulus-Response) bond, and conditioning, behaviorism brought into the classroom drill, programmed

instruction, teaching machines, standardized testing, and, of course, behavioral objectives. The whole current competencies movement in both general and teacher education owes a debt to behaviorists. (Oliva, 1992, p. 198)

Speaking of the types of instruction that this type of curriculum fosters, Oliva says, "Teachers of the behaviorist-essentialist school fragment content into logical, sequential pieces and prescribe the pieces the learner will study. Typically, they begin instruction by giving the learners a rule, concept, or model (for example, the formula for finding the area of a rectangle) and then provide many opportunities to practice (drill) using this guide" (Oliva, 1992, p. 198).

Eisner also notes this behaviorism - essentialism connection when he points out Edward L. Thorndike's influence on what I've called 'ends' definitions of curriculum. He notes that Thorndike "believed that it would be possible to ensure that learning would occur if the responses made to a stimulus were reinforced by rewards" (Eisner, 2002, p. 8). In this type of curricular design, curricular goals inevitably move towards curricular objectives. In a sense, the distinction between goals and objectives disappears. "According to the proponents of behavioural objectives, a compilation of all the behavioural objectives of all the programs and activities of the school would constitute the curriculum. The curriculum would be the sum total of all instructional objectives" (Oliva, 1992, p. 9). Also tying this type of curriculum development to behaviourism, Eisner notes that it is "more closely aligned with the ideas of Thorndike than those of Dewey" (Eisner, 2002, p. 14).

It is certainly the case that in the name of accountability there was a very strong movement to write all curricula in the form of behavioural objectives. The argument is that one needs to set learning goals, and be able to measure the outcomes, in order to demonstrate to the educational consumer that schools are effective. Eisner says, in advocating a break away from this form of curricula, that "The point here is not an effort to inject the mystical into educational planning but rather to avoid reductionistic thinking that impoverishes our view of what is possible. To expect all of our educational aspirations to be either verbally describable or measurable is to expect too little" (Eisner, 2002, p. 114). He goes on to advocate for a more divergent form of curriculum design stating:

I believe that it is perfectly appropriate for teachers and others involved in curriculum development to plan activities that have no explicit or precise objectives. In an age of accountability, this sounds like heresy. Yet surely there must be room in school for activities that promise to be fruitful, even though the teacher might not be able to say what specifically the students will learn or experience. (Eisner, 2002, p. 119)

There is a story told of a man who is driving through the countryside and he sees a barn. On this barn there are a series of targets painted, and there is an arrow imbedded in the center of each bull's-eye. The man is a coach for the country's archery team, and thinking he has happened upon the type of talent he is always looking for he calls on the farmer's house. He asks the farmer how he could possibly have learned to shoot so well on his own, and the farmer answers that it's really quite easy – he shoots the arrow first, and then paints the target. This is the type of amusing analogy that I have heard used to discount the idea that there might be a space in our curricula for outcomes that don't focus on specific, measurable endpoints. My response to this objection is to demonstrate that there is a way to assess learning, where more divergent outcomes are expected or desirable, that accountability can still be expected, but that it just looks different.

Elliot Eisner refers to this when he states, "When one seeks not uniformity of outcome, but productive diversity, the need to create forms of evaluation that can handle uniqueness of outcome becomes increasingly apparent: the multiple-choice test will no longer do" (Eisner, 1998, p. 68) Eisner's overview of the learning to be gleaned from the fine arts deserves a full recounting here:

I have learned that knowledge cannot be reduced to what can be said. I have learned that the process of working on a problem yields its own intrinsically valuable rewards and that these rewards are as important as the outcomes. I have learned that goals are not stable targets at which you aim, but directions toward which you travel. I have learned that no part of a composition, whether in painting or in a school, is independent of the whole in which it participates. I have learned that scientific modes of knowledge are not the only ones that inform and develop human cognition. I have learned that, as constructive activity, science as well as the fine arts are artistically created structures. I have these lessons and more. (Eisner, 1998, pp. 68-69)

There may be some forms of learning or some fields of study in which the insistence on moving from curricular goals to objectives which can be measured is not particularly damaging to the educative experience, but my argument here is that it won't serve in fine arts education. Several quick definitions are in order at this point. Oliva notes that curriculum goals are "general programmatic expectations without criteria of achievement or mastery" (Oliva, 1992, p. 182). Oliva goes on to note that curriculum objectives "are specific, programmatic targets with criteria of achievement and, therefore, are measurable" (Oliva, 1992, p. 182). For many, as has been noted here, the objective is indispensable. But there are forms of curriculum design that work differently.

The spiderweb model is one in which the curriculum designer provides the teacher with a set of heuristic projects, materials, and activities whose use will lead to diverse outcomes among the group of students. The assumption used in this model of curriculum organization is that what is needed are projects and activities that invite engagement rather than control." (Eisner, 2002, p. 142)

Not all curriculum goals need lead to endpoint objectives. Eisner notes that educational 'outcomes' might be a more open concept that would have value in curricular models where divergent outcomes or unpredictable outcomes are the natural result of the kinds of educational situations students engage with.

In identifying what I believe to be an oversimplified view of the character of educational aims, I am not taking the position that there is no place for clearly defined behavioural objectives in a school curriculum. When specific skills or competencies are appropriate, such objectives can be formulated, but one should not feel compelled to abandon educational aims that cannot be reduced to measurable forms of predictable performance. (Eisner, 2002, p. 113)

What Eisner calls 'outcome' then encompasses the same concept as 'goal'. Both are open, flexible and probably experientially-based educational endpoints that don't lead to specific measurable behavioural objectives at the end.

I believe that I'm not actually suggesting much in the way of change to the curriculum here in B.C., but merely naming or labelling changes that have occurred. I can point to examples of curriculum design that look like the 'objectives' discussed above, and other examples that look far more like 'outcomes'. What hasn't occurred is

the explicit direction, within regulations provided to guide assessment, to match assessment and evaluation procedures accordingly – one routine suggested for objectives and another for outcomes. Currently, in most schools, letter grades are given in all subjects. But letter grades are a form of evaluation that matches far more successfully with behavioural objectives. They do not match well with outcomes.

Consider several statements from curricular documents. Here is a goal statement from the grade 7 Language Arts curriculum in B.C.: “It is expected that students will read and reread just-right texts for at least 30 minutes daily for enjoyment and to increase fluency and comprehension” (B.C. Ministry of, English Language Arts Kindergarten to Grade 7, 2006, p. 57). This could accurately be called an objective. There are, in fact, several set endpoints implied in the objective, all of which are conceivably measurable. First, it is easy enough to measure that the student is spending the time set out in the objective engaged in reading. One could use survey or interview strategies to assess the enjoyment of reading. Further, reading fluency and comprehension are both aspects of learning for which there are a number of arguably accurate test devices available.

Now consider the following statement from the grade 7 visual arts curriculum in B.C. “It is expected that students will create 2-D and 3-D images that convey personal or social beliefs and values” (B.C. Ministry of, Arts Education Visual Arts K-7, 2010, p. 41). Here we have a more open sort of educational outcome because we have a much more complex activity. I suppose it is easy enough to determine on the most basic level whether or not a student has created a 2-D or 3-D image. How does one measure, though, whether or not the student has *attempted* to convey a personal or social belief or value with said object? Better yet, how does one measure whether the social belief or value has been successfully conveyed. We have found ourselves back, with this question, at the idea of ‘Communities of Response’.³⁹ Whether the artist has conveyed any of these matters with the work is not a matter decided on a rubric’s checklist, or by

³⁹ That is, if we didn’t already find ourselves back there as soon as we attempted to decide if the image the student made was ‘art’.

some expert examiner or even a single teacher making an assessment. If we view this curricular statement as 'objective' we are left with the impossible task of trying to authentically and fairly measure the achievement obtained by the student in the making of the object in opposition to the well-established authentic practices at work in the artworld. If we see the statement as being 'outcome' or 'goal', we are at liberty to set up the experience, coach an authentic approach to the endeavour and so develop a discipline or field-relevant educative experience.

Assessing and Evaluating Students with Ungraded Fine Arts Portfolios

Eric Jensen in *Teaching with the Brain in Mind* calls portfolio assessment “a much better way to measure student progress, because it measures a variety of skills over time. We have also come to understand the benefit of providing more choice in the assessment process, and we recognize the legitimacy of allowing students to show what they know in a variety of ways” (Jensen, 2005, p. 153).

Portfolios are an attractive part of an assessment and grading regime in the fine arts because they are an authentic approach to assessment in the fine arts. McMillan notes, “Portfolios have constituted the primary method of evaluation in fields such as art, architecture, modeling, photography, and journalism. These professions have realized the value of documenting proficiency, skill, style, and talent with examples of actual work” (McMillan, 2004, p. 235).

First, I’d like to discuss here what type of work should be included in a fine arts portfolio. In this thesis, I have reviewed research and literature that looks at portfolio assessment. I’ve also argued, at length along some key lines of reasoning, that fine arts portfolios should be ungraded. In this section, using the evidence gathered to this point, I will posit some key ideas of what can and should be included in the fine arts portfolio.

In addition, it is a regrettable fact that in many jurisdictions including British Columbia, fine arts teachers are faced with the expectation that they will provide letter grades to students whether they think this is beneficial or harmful to the students’ learning. The response of some teachers to this set of circumstances is to simply make this grade ‘easy’ – everybody gets an A or B. I believe that such an approach is not well considered, and serves to devalue fine arts education in itself as seen by those working in fine arts or as seen from outside the discipline. There is a structure of assessment that one can use to approach fine arts portfolios that can be utilized to arrive at a letter

grade where required that minimizes the impact that grading has as outlined in this paper. It is my hope that in the best of programs and bureaucracies, this grade could be eliminated, but I will outline a possible system here.

Before I begin the outline, I should admit that much of my discussion revolves around the use of digital media to create portfolios. As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, one traditional problem that has inhibited the use of portfolios to gather together student work, particularly from year-to-year, was the type of space requirement that accompanied the traditional, physical portfolio. In addition, the type of artwork that could be included in this portfolio was very limited. Such a portfolio, for example, had tremendous value where students were creating 2-D visual art, but was of very limited use to a sculptor the dancer or the musician. This, then, leads to the first of the suggestions that I have to give for assessing and evaluating students with ungraded fine arts portfolios.

1. Go Digital

In *Curriculum 21*, David Niguidula states:

Digital portfolios represent a powerful way to collect student work. When done well, a digital portfolio outlines a student's learning journey in much the same way that a curriculum map describes a teacher's teaching journey. The collection of work in a portfolio can do two things: it can show that a student has met standards and show who the student is as an individual learner." (Niguidula, 2010, p. 154)

Niguidula writes about maintaining portfolios in all subject areas – for example scanning students' solutions to word problems into the digital portfolio as well as including digital video of the students describing their work and thinking.

It is worth noting that the use of digital media to create and maintain portfolios fits very well with the types of skills and communication routines being brought to the table by students, almost universally today. This generation is adept at communicating using what has come to be called 'Web 2.0' tools. These are online, social, communication programs that include Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and various sites where one can

create wikis, blogs and other communicatory products. Use of digital tools, video, photographs and online resources fit particularly well with the way young people learn. Clark, Logan, Luckin, Mee and Oliver note that “Research suggests that many young people are engaged in the participatory Web as authors and consumers of digital content (Boyd 2007; Lenhart & Madden 2007), in activities ranging from file sharing to online gaming and writing blogs” (Clark, Logan, Luckin, Mee, & Oliver, 2009, p. 56). Boughton notes that “Students are excited about viewing their work on screen, are more willing to record reflective comments (so useful for understanding their thinking and value judgments), are interested in working further with their images once digitized, and can more readily see their own progress” (Boughton, 2004, pp. 268-269).

There is evidence that young people today are developing as a result of their exposure to these communication routines and technologies, brains that are wired differently from those of older people (by and large, their teachers). Speaking of how digital media, electronic devices and social networking hold a place of such prominence in their lives, Mark Prensky says, “It is now clear that as a result of this ubiquitous environment and the sheer volume of their interaction with it, today’s students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors” (Prensky, 2001, p. 1). Prensky has coined the term ‘digital natives’ to describe the young people of today who have grown up in this environment, and calls the previous generations who have had to learn and adapt to the environment ‘digital immigrants’.

This digital, interactive Web 2.0 technology is all very multi-sensory (video, picture, music, sound effect). Boughton notes, of popular visual culture in discussing students working with these technologies that “It is seductive in large part because it is highly complex” (Boughton, 2004, p. 265). Berson notes that:

modern technologies captivate youth because they draw on one of the most powerful genetic biases of the human brain – a preference for visually presented information. A visually oriented digital environment attracts and maintains the attention of young people. Youth are further enticed by interactions via digital modalities which allow them to

'manipulate' the environment and appeal to the brain's evolutionary tendency to engage in social exchanges.⁴⁰" (Berson, 2003, p. 3)

Use of digital portfolios, then, offers a complex, visually rich media environment already understood and being utilized by the students. Teachers who are concerned about keeping up with the technology or worried that some students may be less adept than others need not worry. My experience in teaching a laptop program with 11-13 year olds provides me daily examples to demonstrate that when a student doesn't understand how to use a particular piece of technology or software, there are always other students in class who do know, and students love to share their understanding with peers. As I've stated earlier, the kinds of teaching and teaching environment that comes about as a result of ungraded portfolios changes the role of the teacher in the classroom and within assessment routines – the teacher's role is no longer that of 'expert on everything'.

In her study "An Examination of the Evaluation Practices of Elementary Visual Arts Teachers" from 2000, Defibaugh states that "No examples were found in the literature that audio, video, or photographic documentation is being used as an assessment tool in visual arts education programs at the elementary level" (Defibaugh, 2000, p. 61). It is over the last ten years, though, that the online Web 2.0 environment has exploded. Fifteen years ago journal articles and theses dealing with digital portfolios featured discussions of how to manage the media used to save copies of the work and included discussion of printouts, zip disks, 3.5 inch floppies, CD-R/W and digital videotapes. It is now not at all difficult to pull up examples of all the above media being used in online, digital portfolios. Donnelly, in *Digital Portfolios and Learning: The Students' Voices* discusses "a Southern California high school that has created a technology rich culture, where, for the past ten years, all students in grades 9-12, and all

⁴⁰ Note how Berson's discussion of you people's desire to 'manipulate' or be in control of their environment and their tendency to engage in social exchanges mirror the ideas put forth by Cognitive Evaluation Theory earlier in this paper.

teachers are required to create and maintain an internet based digital portfolio” (Donnelly, 2010, p. iv).

I have used several types of electronic portfolios in the classroom. The past year, working with another teacher and two grade 6/7 classes in a laptop program, we had students use Powerpoint (A Slide Presentation Software program (SPS)⁴¹ to maintain fine arts portfolios. Students were asked to take a digital photograph of each piece of art as soon as the work was completed. Digital cameras have become relatively common and inexpensive, and these can be used, but my student’s laptops had built in cameras making this chore easy. This photo was simply mounted as a slide using the SPS. On the following slide, each student was asked to complete a piece of writing or reflection (see below) on the work. The SPS portfolios, then, were comprised of a title page slide (e.g. Mike’s Art Portfolio 2010/2011) and then a series of paired slides – art piece then reflection.

I have also had students maintain writing portfolios using journals or uploading and resubmitting as updated a simple assignment within an online Course Tool⁴² (CT) maintained by my school district. Course tools and other forms of online classroom environments are now common in school districts and universities. Finally, the computer teacher in my school has the students create and maintain websites on the school

⁴¹ Powerpoint is a piece of software sometimes referred to as ‘presentation software’. I’ve also seen this type of software called hypermedia, though hypermedia ‘looks’ more like a webpage where you can move around in a non-linear manner, and a Powerpoint presentation though being able to imbed everything from sound to video does tend to draw one forward in the presentation in a linear way. As I’ll refer back to these portfolios, and there are other software programs on the market that produce the same type of multimedia presentation as Powerpoint, I’ll refer to these tools as Slide Presentation Software (SPS) from here on.

⁴² In my district I work with an online course tool called ‘Moodle’. There are many different forms of online, virtual learning environments however, with many more being developed all the time.

server. Creating web pages or 'wikis'⁴³ is another excellent way to maintain an electronic portfolio.

As noted in the introduction, digital portfolios help to solve the storage problems that were experienced by teachers attempting to maintain physical portfolios in the classroom. Accessibility is also enhanced by having the portfolios online. Students could maintain their portfolios on their own computer, but were also able to log on to the course tool from home to access a copy of their portfolio and update it. Internet locations that offer free or inexpensive sites to save files and documents are becoming common. I am using one called 'Drop Box' as I work on this thesis. All my files of journal articles, my reading logs and different versions of this paper are stored in an online folder and I have been able to work on writing, as I like, from various computers over the past few years. Part of my reason for storing the work like this is the way in which it enhances the access I have to the work, and another reason is security. I'd heard stories of students well-advanced in their university work who had not backed their work up to a second device and had their computer stolen, which was devastating. My work on this thesis is automatically backed up on every computer that I work on (my desktop, my laptop, my school computer) because of the software I use. Digital portfolios set up correctly can afford this level of accessibility and backup.

They also help to solve the problems created where teachers wish to look at a student's development and work going back through the years, providing a longer vision of a student's academic development. In B.C., students have what is called a 'G4 File'. This file travels with the student from Kindergarten through to grade 12. When a student transfers schools, the new school requests a transfer of the G4 file from the old school. This file mostly contains report cards and testing results (for example, if a learning assistance teacher runs a Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R) or

⁴³ The easiest way to describe a wiki is to say that it is a web page, but can be collaboratively produced. A standard web page is usually created using a software suite by an individual or group working around a single computer. A wiki is a web page that can be altered online by anyone, or a set group of people. As such, a wiki is an example of a 'Web 2.0' program because of the potential for interaction and collaboration inherent in the media.

a Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement-2nd Edition (KTEA-II) the results are filed in the G4). Occasionally one will find examples of writing or work in the G4, particularly bits of work from the younger primary years. These pieces are not to be found, however, in all G4's, and there are rarely more than several pieces of actual student work in the file. The G4 file would simply be too large and unwieldy if teachers from each grade level filed examples of the student's work.

Electronic systems of record keeping for students, however, are being developed at a regular pace around the world and in B.C. Technical issues surrounding such developments have been numerous, but many teachers in B.C. now write reports on a system called BCeSIS (The British Columbia Enterprise Student Information System). Student attendance and personal information is now stored on this system across the province, and I don't believe that day is far off when information that is currently filed in G4 files such as grade information and test scores will be entered electronically into BCeSIS or another, similar, online records system. There has been discussion recently of how BCeSIS will be replaced, but the discussions center around replacing this electronic data system with one that works better. There is little possibility that we will see a wholesale return to standard paper and file systems of record keeping.

Given this, the opportunity arises to expand the types of data stored in student files. Where only a few pieces of student work might be included in the G4 files, digital systems offer the chance to store many more samples of work that can travel with the student from Kindergarten through to graduation. It might even be possible, if online electronic arts portfolios are developed (or portfolios in other disciplines such as writing are created) to link those portfolios to student's records allowing teachers and students to access work that demonstrates student growth over more significant periods of time than the September to June academic year. Craig and McCormick note that one benefit of portfolio use in the classroom is that "the art teacher can focus on long-term projects and progress as well as short-term mini portfolios" (Craig & McCormick, 2002, p. 36). Summative assessment, particularly letter grading, carries with it the demand that projects be finished within a pre-defined time period (e.g. September to June). With Fine Arts Portfolios that travel with a student long-term multi-year projects become possible and meaningful.

Portfolios are helpful in working with students at multiple levels that may be working towards different long-term goals or curricular objectives. Linn and Miller state, “Portfolios of work may span more than a single school year and provide information to teachers about student achievement as students move from one grade to the next” (Linn & Miller, 2005, p. 288). Perhaps it will be more than just the Fine Arts schools hosting portfolio fairs to interview prospective students into the future. Post secondary institutions having access to portfolios of work that span a student's years of education, maybe from K-12 but certainly through the last years of high school, would be looking at the growth and learning done by a student that could never be matched with a mere set of grades from grade 12, and a set of information that would be far more difficult to falsify, cheat on, or be made irrelevant or sketchy by the local circumstances of the high school from which the student graduated.

2. Include All Types, Stages and Levels of Work

Herbert ponders the reasons why, for many teachers, placing just ‘best’ work in a portfolio seems to be the only path that makes sense.

It makes sense because many teachers naturally feel compelled to structure and standardize a child's portfolio to conform to the concept of evaluation we were raised on, that is, a single correct response. The notion of ‘one right answer’ reinforces accustomed images of school and of the expected roles of teacher and student. This is how we experienced school as children. Teacher as knower, child as learner; teacher as in control, child as in compliance; teacher as posing questions, child as responding – these are some of the familiar dichotomies rooted in our educational experience. (Hebert, 2001, p. xi)

Portfolios provide the opportunity to place control over learning and decisions over what pieces of work deserve to be highlighted and responded to into the students' hands.

An eclectic selection of work can be featured, a mix of early stage or draft pieces mixed in with published or finished work. The alternative is showcase-type portfolios where the student gathers and displays what they consider to be their best work. There are problems with the best work portfolio, however, inside an educational context. Pieces of ‘best work’ laid one after the other in a portfolio might show what the artist is capable of but they don't demonstrate growth, show development or provide clues about

what goals might be set – what might come next. As Eisner states, when speaking about new assessment ideals in education, “The tasks used to assess students should reveal how students go about solving a problem, not only the solutions they formulated” (Eisner, 2002, p. 204). Students demonstrate, by placing various phases of their work in their portfolios, how they create their works.

Not all pieces of art are taken through to conclusion or publication, as not all of an author’s writing is finished, proofread, edited and published. Abandoned pieces of work, drafts, and sketches provide compelling examples of what kinds of work interest the student and what kinds don’t. These provide fodder for conversations about what sorts of ideas the student is playing with (see the Metacognitive Piece below) and generate ideas around which direction the student might choose to go in next (see the Setting of Goals below).

The portfolio can also contain pictures, pieces of work or pieces of writing that the student sees as touching on their thinking or art work. Perhaps a favourite poem by another is included in the portfolio, and associated with a painting the student did in response or inspired by the piece. Photographs that the student wishes to or has worked from are also relevant in the portfolio, providing insight into the student’s thinking and problem-solving and providing a background for conversations and elucidations.

Providing this space to make the students’ thinking visible to the teacher in a place devoid of letter grade assessment makes possible the sort of evidence through documentation that Falk and Darling Hammond refer to when they note, “Being able to truly see students requires that teachers learn to look and listen carefully and nonjudgmentally in order to understand who students really are, what they think, and how they make decisions” (Falk and Darling Hammond, 2010, p. 73). Encouraging students to include much more than finished pieces of work in their portfolios will allow for these wider conversations that will help the teacher to truly explore the individual voices and stories in the classroom.

Wolf and Pistone discuss portfolios kept by dance and music students. “As members of the chorus, each of Ross-Broadus’s students keeps a portfolio of his or her work. It includes sheet music marked with notes for performance, audiotapes made of

their successive rehearsals of the pieces they will perform, critiques of those rehearsals, and personal journals” (Wolf & Pistone, 1991, p. 28). Drama students can include video recordings, marked up scripts, bits of costume or reviews that were posted or printed. In short, I cannot envision a form of art that cannot be well represented in one or a combination of media available in modern digital portfolio, and all aspects and moments of the artistic process should be included where the portfolio is geared towards learning.

For many students who wish to apply for a job or a post-secondary institution, an exemplar style or best works portfolio may eventually be required. Given the ease of editing and changing provided within the digital formats used, moving from the complete to exemplar portfolio will be easy to do. In the SPS portfolios I discussed above, a student would only have to remove the pairs of slides they didn't want in their 'best works' portfolio, and save the remade portfolio under a new name. Such an operation would take a matter of minutes.

3. Engage in Collaborative Planning

In the chapter “Establishing Terms”, I noted that the process of engaging in art is essentially collaborative. At its most basic level, the work between artist and audience is dialogic, a sort of collaboration, with the artist attempting to communicate on an extra-linguistic level and the viewer, listener or observer attempting to decode or make sense of the meaning imbedded in the art and how it is presented. It is not uncommon for an artist to be playing with the ideas of what she is trying to communicate, for the viewer to continue the discussion, and for collaboration between the two voices to lead to resolution on what that might be. There are also forms of collaboration present in the communities of response that arise to discuss the art.

Sometimes in arts education programs, such as Discipline-Based Arts Education, a distinction is made between the piece of the educational program that is built around teaching 'artist', and the piece that is built around teaching 'consumer' or 'connoisseur'. I think these distinctions are mistaken. As I've discussed in “The Community of Response,” whether as artist or audience, one engages in the artworld and enters into conversations and collaborations with others in this process. As I've also stated,

allowing a single voice to establish a final judgment or individually determine the agenda is a denial of this process. The routines involved in creating a portfolio must remain respectful to these ideas.

Portfolios, as personal accounts of learning and understanding, need to be developed in a collaborative process between teacher and student. Studies have shown that students learn better when they have control or significant input into their educational programs and assessment routines. Zimmerman et al., for example, in a study examining student self-motivation and academic attainment found that students who perceived themselves capable of regulating their own activities strategically are more confident about mastering academic subjects and attain higher academic performance (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992, p. 674).

Advocating a systematic process, Linn and Miller advocate planning the portfolio with the student, deciding what work will be included and how it will be formatted (for example, in some art classes given the media used students may need to take digital photos of work for inclusion), work needs to be collected and interpreted (students will complete reflections on the work, or can even complete rubrics with detailed criteria) and there needs to be a method or timeline for the portfolios to be shared with parents. As noted, all of these pieces of organizational framework offer up some external structure, but allow for individual differences. In planning out the portfolio with the student the teacher becomes negotiator not commander.

Giving the student a voice in the process, and an opportunity to make choices about what will be included in the portfolio and how it will be structured provides an opportunity for the student to demonstrate what is unique about their work, their vision, and their learning. Eisner notes, "Assessment tasks should permit the student to select a form of representation he or she chooses to use to display what has been learned" (Eisner, 2002, p. 209). As Eisner states in another book:

Each student's work will need to be appraised on its own terms. A common cookie-cutter criterion will no longer be appropriate. Despite these difficulties, such a practice, at least as a part of the new assessment, will symbolize to students that personal proclivities matter, that productive idiosyncrasies count, and that individual interpretation and creativity are values the school cares about. (Eisner, 1998, pp. 147-148)

In the example of the SPS portfolios I've discussed above, the goal was to provide only an outside structure for the students to operate within. We provided regular assignments or project ideas in the classroom for the students to complete. We set very loose deadlines on the pieces themselves. We wished to respect the fact that one student completing the portrait assignment given might become intrigued and intimately involved with the project, and thus take a much longer time with the piece than the student for whom this assignment was not as interesting. This other student might complete the portrait assignment rather quickly, but become more involved with the single-point perspective drawing.

As such, students in the classroom were often working on a number of different assignments. Some might even be completing drawings, assignments or pieces that we hadn't assigned, though we asked them to consult with us on these projects so we knew what they were working on. What we did do was set goals and criteria for the number of pieces that needed to be pictured and responded to in the portfolio each term.

At the end of the term, the expectation as I've stated above was that students had a set number of pieces in the portfolio. There was no expectation that every student would have every assignment given through the term included. In some cases, students who had become particularly intrigued with a certain assignment completed it a second time, and commented in their portfolio about what decisions they had made or changes they had sought in the second work. They thus had two portfolio pieces in place for one of the assignments.

Decisions about what was in the portfolios, then, were made collaboratively. The teachers created a loose structure. In the introduction to this thesis I discussed the College Board's AP portfolio, and how the structure given was seen as 'an enabling constraint'. That was our goal here. We suggested that a student could have a single portfolio entry for each assignment given through the term and come up with enough entries to meet the criteria. From there, students were free to choose the assignments they liked best for portfolio inclusion. They were also free to negotiate the structure of the writing, which I will discuss further in "The Metacognitive Piece" below.

Questions were suggested rather than set down as criteria. Again, students were free to move beyond these suggestions and write about their art in whatever way they chose. It stands as a testament to this process that we didn't begin the term with the entire set of questions given below. Some of these questions were added later after the teachers read particularly intriguing portfolio entries where students worked through these ideas. We started, in fact, without a question about how the pieces of art 'expressed' a student's individuality, and it was a compelling portfolio piece written by a student around the topic that caused us to add the idea to the set of questions.

In the introduction to this paper I noted that one of the weaknesses of the College Board's AP portfolio was that, as the portfolio was to be graded and the grade given to the individual student, no pieces of art that are executed in collaboration with others can be included. Having discarded the notion of providing letter grades for the portfolio, we are thus free to disassociate ourselves from this constraint also. As Eisner notes, "Assessment tasks need not be limited to solo performance. Many of the most important tasks we undertake require group efforts" (Eisner, 2002, p. 205).

Allowing for group projects and collaborative artworks also has a positive influence on student motivation. Meece points out that, "Motivation research suggests that cooperative learning activities can also have a positive influence on students' ability perceptions and mastery goal orientations (Ames, 1984; Nicholls, 1989)" (Meece, 1994, p. 40). "By contrast," Meece states, "learning structures that encourage competition among students can lower ability perceptions, increase social comparisons between students, and elicit self-derogatory thought processes that impede learning (Ames, 1984; Stipek & Daniels, 1988)" (Meece, 1994, p. 40). For our portfolios, one of the assignments the students completed involved doing a multiple-part mural landscape scene, as if looking through a window with multiple panes. The students worked together in groups of four or six to come up with a concept and draft sketch, and then each completed their 'pane'. Portfolio entries could be a picture of their own contribution as well as a shot of the larger piece of work put together. For such a piece, it might work to allow the group of students who have created the piece of art to develop the piece of writing that will be included in the portfolio together, with each student posting essentially the same portfolio entry. It would also work to ask that students create their own

accompanying response for the portfolio, but any decisions on the matter, of course, require negotiation and conversation with the student.

The levels of collaboration that can be developed through the use of fine arts portfolios for assessment, of course, go beyond the classroom level. Teachers in a department (for example intermediate team in an elementary school) or school can collaborate in outlining the ideas and form portfolios are to take. Where portfolios will travel with students from elementary to middle to secondary schools, there is again potential for collaborative work throughout the system. Care needs to be taken, though, to maintain the viability of the collaborative decision-making that can occur at the classroom level between student and teacher. That is to say, it would be counterproductive to create firm or rigid criteria for the portfolios at these higher levels of management, thus reducing the opportunities provided at the more personal levels for flexibility and creativity.

4. Emphasize the Metacognitive Piece

Divorcing portfolios from teacher-assigned letter grades does not inhibit self-assessments and reflections from forming a valuable part of the process. Linn and Miller note, "Portfolios also foster student skills in evaluating their own work. Self-evaluation is a critical skill in developing independent learning ability and one that is often emphasized and reinforced by asking students to include some form of self-evaluation and thoughtful reflection on each entry in their portfolios" (Linn & Miller, 2005).

One important aspect of the systematic process recommended by many in the portfolio is the inclusion of 'reflections'. Having students reflect on their own work, in the

fine arts portfolio, is often linked with the idea of metacognition.⁴⁴ Put simply, metacognition is the process of thinking about one's own thinking. Falk and Darling-Hammond note that, "Through the representations of their thinking and learning that are provided in documentation, learners can contemplate the meaning of what they have learned, which, in turn, can help them become more curious, interested, and confident as learners (Malaguzzi, 1998)" (Falk and Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 77). Fisher, in writing about how important the skill of metacognition is in critical thinking, notes:

Sometimes you just work out the solution to some problem without thinking about how you are doing it or how you should do it; then you are just thinking, without engaging in metacognition. If you are not very skilled at, say, decision making, many believe that the way to improve it is through thinking about how you usually do it and then trying to correct the weaknesses by thinking self-consciously about how you make the next decision." (Fisher, 2001, p. 241)

One of the arguments that I provided for not grading fine arts portfolios was based upon ideals of authenticity within the domain of arts. Fisher links metacognition to the idea of domains when he notes that one goal of metacognition is to improve one's thinking and problem solving "by reference to some model of good thinking in that domain" (Fisher, 2001, p. 5). Rule links both metacognitive instruction and cooperative work to authentic modes of learning, noting that, "Research shows students who were exposed to metacognitive instruction with cooperative learning outperformed counterparts who had no metacognitive instruction (Dramarski, Mevarech, & Arami, 2002)" (Rule, 2006, p. 4).

Abbott calls on the education system to better utilize the most recent brain research to help formulate what schooling should look like. He sets out fifteen principles that could be used to outline such planning, and his thirteenth principle calls for the

⁴⁴ Engaging in this process is also authentic. In putting my mother-in-law's artist web page together I had cause to not only integrate her statements about her work and thinking processes into the writing on the page, but to review numerous other artists' pages. Artists reflecting on their own work in the artworld and sharing their reflections on their web pages is incredibly common.

utilization of 'Cognitive Apprenticeship'. Collins, Brown and Holum outline the idea of cognitive apprenticeship. They note that traditional apprenticeship was the method where knowledge and skills were passed on to the next generation, with the expert providing knowledge and showing the apprentice how to perform tasks, gradually passing more and more of the skill set over. "Cognitive apprenticeship," they state, "is a model of instruction that works to make thinking visible" (Collins, Brown, & Holum, 1991, p. 453). The authors advocate a metacognitive approach to learning, then, where the teacher models and discusses thinking strategies with students, and students make their thinking visible to the teacher. This process parallels the type of learning situation brought into play with the ungraded fine arts portfolio. The teacher models the type of writing that can be done in the reflection, and in doing so demonstrates the types of cognitive processes utilized inside the domain. The student is then able to share their thinking processes back and in so doing more thoroughly demonstrate their own understanding.

In the case of the SPS portfolios discussed in this section, students were asked to write a reflective/exploratory statement to accompany each piece of work in the portfolio. Students were also provided a set of guiding questions that they could use to comment on pieces in their portfolio. They were asked to write a paragraph or two on their piece of work, not to respond to the set of outline questions provided in a question-answer format. We believed that if students simply numbered the questions and responded to each one after the other, the exercise would feel like a worksheet and students would not really stretch their thinking in responses. It was stressed that not all of the guiding questions could be used for each piece. For example, responding to colour choices in a black and white portrait piece would be meaningless. Questions used to guide their writing included:

- ***Your medium choice.***
What did you make the piece with?
Why and how do find using this medium?
- ***Your use of colour on the piece.***
Why did you choose the colours you chose?
- ***Your basic work on the picture, line, shape and design.***
What do you think is good about the work?
What would you like to work on if you had a do-over?

- ***Your word designs if you used lettering.***
Do you always letter like this? Did you plan your space? If so, how?
- ***Your use of a draft – good copy process.***
Did you use one? How do you find it works?
Do you generally use a process?
- ***What the piece of art says about you.***
How does it express you?

5. Engage in Goal Setting and Self Assessment

Goal setting and self-assessment are really two sides of the same puzzle piece. Both are often related, in the literature, to metacognitive skills discussed previously, but this aspect of portfolio work merits individualized treatment here. Where letter grades have been eliminated, an assumed externally imposed regimen of goal setting has likewise been removed. The standard ‘you perform to this level and meet the performance criteria set by the teacher’ has been removed. This condition does not imply, however, that no goals or objectives need be or are established. The common curriculum cycle, as discussed in the section on curriculum, features a teacher or system-established objective (province, school district, school, etc.). From this objective comes a plan usually featuring instruction, some established method for the student to demonstrate learning and then some form of assessment based upon the original objective. In this alternative model, student-developed learning goals can be substituted for the systematically established learning objective. As noted in the collaboration section above, the teacher can have collaborative input into these goals, but ultimate control over the development of these goals needs to rest with the student.

Research done in this area over the past twenty years seeks to examine behaviour in students called ‘self-regulation’. “Self-regulation refers to students’ self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions which are systematically oriented toward attainment of their goals” (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994, p. ix). “The construct of self-regulation refers to the degree that individuals are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviourally active participants in their own learning process (Zimmerman, 1986)” (Zimmerman, 1994, p. 3). Research done by Zimmerman and others indicates that self-regulation is a strong indicator of student performance. Low achieving students don’t demonstrate self-regulating behaviours and high achieving students demonstrate these

behaviours consistently. Schunk notes that, “Effective self-regulation requires that students have goals and the motivation to attain them. (Bandura 1986; Zimmerman, 1989)” (Schunk, 1994, p. 75). Further, “This view of self-regulation fits well with the notion that, rather than being passive recipients of information, students are mentally active during learning and exert a large degree of control over attainment of their goals (Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992)” (Schunk, 1994, p. 75).

Thorkildsen notes that self-efficacy is “enhanced when children are able to participate in setting goals, to evaluate their own progress, or to follow learning-focused rather than performance-focused guidelines” (Thorkildsen, 2002, p. 90). Stipek states, “Personal goal-setting engages students’ involvement and interest, makes them feel more responsible for their own behavior, and helps them learn to set realistic goals” (Stipek, 1988, p. 33). Both authors discuss the optimal sort of goal or learning objective as being in the moderately difficult range. Students with the most effective motivational orientation tend to choose learning goals that are moderately difficult. Easy learning objectives minimize learning and maximize grades where these are at issue, and learning goals that are too difficult allow a sort of psychological cushion, where students can “attribute the failure to the extreme difficulty of the task rather than their own incompetence” (Stipek, 1988, p. 99).

In the chapter on motivation, I described the research that highlights the importance of students’ motivational orientation. Meece describes how students who pursue:

Performance-oriented (Dweck & Elliot, 1983) or ego-oriented (Nicholls, 1984) goals seek to demonstrate high ability or to gain favourable judgments of their abilities in relation to the efforts and performances of others. These individuals generally use norm-referenced standards to judge the adequacy of their performance. A sense of accomplishment is derived from doing well with little effort, doing better than others, or meeting some other normatively defined standards of success.” (Meece, 1994, p. 26)

The other type of achievement goal, however, is often called learning-oriented or task-oriented. This type of goal features the attribute that “Learning is valued as an end in itself. Subjective feelings of pride, success, and accomplishment are derived from

achieving a sense of mastery or developing one's competence based on self-referenced standards" (Meece, 1994, p. 26). It should be the obvious goal of educators to move their students towards learning-oriented motivation and away from performance-oriented. The proper motivational orientation, when well played by the teacher in the classroom, leads to students setting goals for themselves that dramatically increase the learning. Meece notes how Dweck's 1988 study indicated that children who maintained a learning-oriented motivational outlook were "more likely to choose challenging tasks that would allow them to learn new skills, whereas performance-oriented children were more likely to choose tasks that would allow them to demonstrate competence, even though they might not learn anything new" (Meece, 1994, pp. 28-29).

Collaborating with students to set their own learning goals and responding to their work using the goals they've set as a basis for commentary is a powerful way to motivate all learners, but this cycle may be particularly helpful for struggling students. "Experimental studies have shown that teaching low-achieving students to set proximal goals for themselves enhances their sense of cognitive efficacy, their academic achievement, and their intrinsic interest in the subject matter (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Schunk, 1983)" (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992, p. 664). Proximal goals are short-term achievable objectives. This does not mean that they are easy, for as noted above a moderately difficult goal is usually the best sort. The opposite of the proximal goal is the distal goal. A distal goal in fine arts might be an umbrella sort of objective as 'to become a better artist' or 'to improve my drawing'. Teachers who have worked with students on goal setting will recognize that students new to the idea of setting their own goals will often naturally formulate distal goals. One of the tasks to be covered in working with students in developing self-regulatory skills is to help them to understand the importance of and help them to develop more relevant and powerful proximal goals as they work.

The number of distal goals should be limited, and should probably only receive occasional attention in assessments. Proximal goals, such as 'to improve my use of technique to establish a three-dimensional effect in drawing' can be more effectively tied to assignment and project work, more effectively commented on in assessments and provide more immediate motivational support. The structure of the SPS portfolios discussed above certainly helped hone the students' skills in the formation of proximal

goals. Students comments in these portfolios were aimed directly at what kinds of things they'd learned from the specific project completed, what kinds of specific problems they'd encountered and solved and most relevantly what kinds of goals they'd set specific to the type of project were they to make another attempt at the same kind of project. Further, the structure of the work in the course allowed them to do just that should they wish. Having finished a project on drawing using a single point perspective they were perfectly free to do another if this moved them and perhaps skip another project that was less interesting to them.

Marzano reports, "Although the most underused form of classroom assessment, student self-assessment has the most flexibility and power as a combined assessment and learning tool" (Marzano, 2000, p. 102). In the section above on metacognition, I related a series of questions that I've used with another teacher to illicit student responses to their art works in art portfolios. An additional strategy, in order to enhance student goal-setting and self assessment is to have students develop a proximal goal before beginning an art project, and begin the piece of writing they will use for their portfolio by telling about this goal. Then, when the project is completed, students can comment on or assess their progress towards this goal. Wormeli suggests further prompts in order to help students self-assess might include:

- I learned that...
- I wonder why...
- An insight I've gained is...
- I noticed a pattern in...
- I know I learned something when I...
- I was surprised...
- This is similar to...

(Wormeli, 2006, pp. 52-53)

6. Create a Culture of Art

In discussing the importance of promoting a motivational orientation in students geared towards competence (learning orientation) as opposed to the acquisition of grades (task-oriented) Meece reports that, "Ryan, Connell, and Deci (1985) proposed that the availability of choice and some degree of student control can enhance feelings

of autonomy and self-determination. These conditions are likely to result in higher levels of self-regulated learning, because students are less likely to believe that their learning is controlled by others (Grolnick & Ryan, 1987)” (Meece, 1994, p. 40). It is this environment of choice, self-regulation, exploration, discovery and introspection that we can build and nourish within our fine arts classes where we create an atelier atmosphere, allow students to choose their projects, linger over what they like, set their own goals and assess their own learning and progress. All of these factors help build a ‘culture of art’ in the classroom – a culture which resembling art in the wider context outside of school can best be thought of as truly authentic.

As I’ve stated several times earlier in this thesis, it is important that we remain focused on the larger purpose played by the arts inside the realm of a democratic, public education. Falk and Darling-Hammond speak of the need for a focus on creativity and imagination when they conclude:

Schooling is an integral part of society. It has the responsibility to prepare citizens to survive economically, as well as to nourish their spirits so that each can develop his or her unique capacities and contribute to the betterment of public life. To accomplish this goal, schools need to teach students how to imagine and pursue new ideas and to work together to address the complex issues facing our human community. (Falk and Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 79)

The culture of art includes students making art, working alone or in partnerships. It includes students reflecting on their own art pieces and sharing their writing with others. The culture of art includes students looking at and responding to other students’ pieces of art. Henderson and Cunningham state that, “A major task of educators seeking to use sociocultural theory as a guide to instructional design is to create activity settings that enable students to accomplish tasks in partnership with others. Self-regulation skills are included among the higher mental functions that develop through such social interaction” (Henderson & Cunningham, 1994, p. 277). In the classes in which I have worked, we have set aside a regular block of time, for us it has traditionally been Thursday afternoons (called Fine Arts Thursday or FAT) for students to spread out around the classrooms (we have an opening wall) and work on whatever projects or portfolio writing they wish to.

It is supportive of the culture of art being established to hang student art on the classroom walls and in the school hallways. In my Master's Thesis I spoke of a school where the administration had invested in large motivational posters that were hung all around the hallways, thus restricting the students artwork to the areas outside the art classrooms in the basement. "Now, in place of the student' work fancy photographs of mountain climbers or flying eagles with poetic messages and bold words like "Achieve" and "Persevere" were on display in the main hallways" (Saul, 2004, pp. 73-74). It is my contention that it is better to display student work including student artwork up front and center along the hallways and in the public areas of the school. It is my experience that this work is appreciated and communities of response come into play around the works. As noted above, we had two classrooms of students working together on Fine Arts Thursdays this past year, and two bulletin boards full of various projects that came out of the classes. They were impressive to behold, and it was a rare week where I didn't end up in a discussion with another teacher, a parent or a student in the school about the body of work or a particular piece that had grabbed some attention.

As students created and submitted their portfolios to us electronically using the SPS program discussed earlier, I had photos of their work and copies of the commentaries they did on their pieces. Further to hanging the work in the classroom and school, I was able to create a web page art gallery (wiki) for the class and for future classes to see examples of the work and the writing.

Minimizing the Damage: Letter Grading in Fine Arts Portfolios

Summative evaluation systems involving letter grades and any type of portfolio, whether a writer's or architect's portfolio, do not always work fluidly together. It can be very difficult to arrive at a summative letter grade, for example, by browsing through the work in a portfolio. Portfolios also require a great deal of time and effort in their completion. Many of the authors I've read cautioned against assuming that they are easy to create, don't involve a lot of time, or don't involve the creation of careful criteria. High school students in B.C. were asked to create portfolios as part of their graduate requirements several years back, and the program was recently shelved largely due to teacher and student complaints about the time, effort and resources required in order to support the program (cbc news, 2006).

Deborah Meier, who has written about her work at Central Park East Elementary and Secondary Schools (CPESS) in Harlem and her subsequent work at Mission Hill School in Boston, discusses the central part played by portfolios in much of her work. Her students completed a complex series of fourteen portfolios⁴⁵ leading to graduation in New York, and presented them to a school committee. These portfolios are "the primary record – transcript – of a student's success at CPESS, and the basis for receiving the diploma" (Meier, 2002, p. 60). But Meier notes that there is an uncomfortable incongruity created between the portfolios and the letter grades (which she would like to replace) when she writes:

But the more we worked at it the more complex our systems became and the less relevance the grade had to our parallel development of

⁴⁵ In her work with eighth graders at Mission Hill, Meier reduced the number of portfolios to six.

exhibitions, portfolios, and graduation committees. Now we simply have both, and the contradictions between them are showing up and confusing issues. We adapt. But uncomfortably. Sometime soon we'll need to tackle the conflict the systems represent, two different ways of 'counting' what matters." (Meier, 2002, p. 149)

I have shared, in this paper, a great deal of information and research to establish that using fine arts portfolios to assess students in fine arts is the most powerful, authentic method of assessment we can use. I have also provided a body of research and a set of arguments to establish the fact that these portfolios should not be letter graded. As a teacher in B.C. one rather inconvenient fact remains to be dealt with – I am required to furnish a letter grade in fine arts for my students.

I will focus here on the *Visual Arts K-7 Curriculum* in B.C. As I noted in the introduction to this thesis, it would complicate matters at this stage of the argument to try and focus across all the art curricula. The visual arts curriculum is quite open and provides for diverse classroom experience. The learning objectives all begin with words like 'create', 'analyse and apply', 'demonstrate', 'describe', and 'assess'. For example, objective A1 for grade 7 states, "It is expected that students will use a variety of image sources to create images, including observation, emotions, ideas and concepts, imagination, memories and sensory experiences" (B.C. Ministry of, 2010, p. 40). A wide variety of art projects are possible given this statement, and there is no firmly established assessment routine set out in the curriculum itself.

How letter grades are to be arrived at, in B.C., is set out in a separate document - *Reporting Student Progress: Policy and Practice* (Education, Reporting Student Progress, 2009). This document reiterates a number of times that letter grades are "to indicate the student's level of performance as it relates to the learning outcomes for each subject or course and grade" (Education, 2009, p. 9). *The Provincial Letter Grades Order* (Education, Provincial Letter Grades Order, 2009) is referenced a number of times, and it is this third document that establishes, for example, that there are letter grades of A, B, C+, C, C-, and F (with some other symbols such as SG for 'standing granted, etc.). This same document, then, establishes that on a final report A will mean "The student demonstrates excellent or outstanding performance in relation to expected learning outcomes for the course or subject and grade", B will mean "The student

demonstrates very good performance in relation to expected learning outcomes for the course or subject and grade”, and so on (Education, 2009, p. 2).

There is, I believe, wide latitude of interpretation possible within the framework created by the three documents – curriculum, policy and practice document and letter grades order. The curriculum objective given above states students will use a variety of image sources to create images. No number is set, no standard is defined and which image sources will be used is left wide open. As discussed in ‘Competing Curricular Theories’, this statement looks more like a curriculum outcome than an objective, and as such is a more open-ended experientially-based educational endpoint. Such curricular endpoints, as discussed, don’t necessarily lead to measurable end points, and don’t tie in well with letter grades.

Unfortunately, the document Reporting Student Progress: Policy and Practice does not appear to allow school boards, schools or teachers the flexibility of forgoing the use of letter grades. “Letter grades will appear on report cards in Grades 4 and 5 unless the board chooses to communicate them to parents in another document. Letter grades must be included on report cards in Grades 6 to 12” (Education, Reporting Student Progress, 2009, p. 7). So I must currently letter grade in fine arts and the letter grade must indicate the student’s level of performance in relation to the outcome. But as I’ve shown, the curricular statement is not an objective but an outcome and outcomes don’t have specifically defined endpoints.

In this case, I have created a number of assignment suggestions and ideas for students, and time is provided for students to work on their art projects and portfolio entries. Assignment suggestions are structured to carefully include elements from all of the curriculum objectives provided in the visual arts curriculum. I allow students to work in and around the projects they choose, and do not add restrictions that might have them forced into completing a project representative of each curriculum item, but I am able to negotiate with students and suggest they move to projects that represent a wider range of these ‘ideas to explore’ as the opportunities present themselves.

Heeding the ideas that I discussed in the motivation section of my argument against letter grades, I know there are aspects of the students’ work that I don’t want to

letter grade. I do not, for example, grade or provide any numeric assessment for the students art works. The students know I will not grade these. I also do not provide a letter grade for the portfolio entry itself. I want the students to continue thinking creatively as they reflect on their work, I want them to be open and honest about their thinking with me, and I want them to feel safe to express themselves. What I have done, in order to generate a letter grade, is create a sort of mastery grading scenario and set criteria, each term, for how many portfolio entries need to be created. Students, for example, might be asked to produce 5 portfolio entries with photograph of art piece and accompanying written reflection for an 'A' grade, 4 for a 'B' and so on.

This criteria itself can be somewhat flexible, and this is communicated to the students. If, for example, a student become intrigued by an assignment such as the charcoal portrait and spends hours of class time working on the piece then I believe I need to support that as the teacher. I let students know that if they've spent that kind of time on a project and find themselves within a few weeks of the date by which portfolios receive the final term assessment, I really don't want them to rush another two or three projects through to completion and write poorly conceived entries in order to meet the 'A' criteria. As such, students are encouraged to talk with me, let me know how their portfolio and art pieces are coming and bargain for adaptations to the set criteria.

I also insist that there is flexibility to the 'A' criteria on the other side. That is to say, if a student has completed five projects and written entries for each, but I find that the entries are not complete, don't demonstrate adequate reflective or reflexive thinking or don't speak enough about the student's thinking, that an 'A' grade isn't guaranteed. There is always a negotiation process in play. Students are invited to show me entries as they work on them so we can have these discussions. My students post their portfolios to me using a course tool, and before I submit my report cards to the office or principal for approval the students are able to review the grade I've provided and the comments I've made. They know that if they disagree with the grade I've provided or any of the comments I've made they can come to me to converse and negotiate any meaningful changes.

The critical pieces in this grading scheme, in light of the research I've uncovered in this thesis, is that I am not grading their art pieces and I am not grading the depth or

skills shown in their reflective or reflexive thinking. The only thing the letter grade I'm providing them reflects is their work towards meeting a certain number of pieces and reflections created, which in turn leads them into a natural exploration of the ideas outlined in the curriculum. And, as I've stated, there is room for negotiation of the criteria set where adaptations are sensibly made.

It cannot be helped that where any letter grade is generated I believe this becomes too much of a focal point for both the students and, at the age level of students I teach, their parents. I am careful to communicate in the report card what the letter grade represents, and I make comments about their work in class and their work in the portfolio, usually integrating what the students have said themselves about their own work in the portfolio in another collaborative process. This statement preceded the letter grades I provided in art each term in the 2010/2011 academic school year:

This year students were asked to take control of their own learning and control their own evaluation by working towards firm criteria in art. Projects were presented regularly, and time provided for both completion of the projects and self-assessment through their art portfolios. Their updated portfolio should be posted on the moodle. Student's letter grades are assigned according to the established criteria for completed portfolio pieces, and a format or set of questions is provided to guide student writing with each piece. Five portfolio pieces from this term were set as criteria for A, 4 for B and 3 for C+. Students without a portfolio are assigned an Incomplete/F in art for the term.

Fine Arts Portfolios at Work: A Snapshot

It's 12:45 pm at Highland Park Elementary School in Pitt Meadows B.C. Afternoon attendance has been taken in the intermediate classes, and about 160 students have hit the halls heading for their Fine Arts Thursday (FAT) modules. Almost 90 of them, a truly diverse mix from grades 4-7, are streaming into the gymnasium where they meet every Thursday to work on the musical production that will be staged at the ACT Theatre in Maple Ridge. It's mid-February, 2009, and their production of "Annie Junior" hits the stage in early May, so casting is complete and several of the larger musical numbers have been introduced with the choreography loosely covered.

Today, one large group of students is working on learning choreography for the piece "I Think I'm Going to Like It Here" while a large group of orphans practices and refines the pieces "Hard-Knock Life" and "Never Fully Dressed" in the neighbouring, rather crowded multipurpose room.⁴⁶ Three teachers work cooperatively to run rehearsals and manage the program, while a fourth teacher runs a multi-disciplinary stagecraft group designing and making props and set pieces. Several student teachers in the building are also helping to choreograph and work with groups of students.

During today's rehearsal, with groups working in both multipurpose room and gymnasium, one of the teachers moves into position to take digital video of several of the numbers. The two orphans' pieces are recorded, and then the group learning "I

⁴⁶ The multipurpose room has a collection of costume boxes growing at the back and a series of 'booked' set flats being put together and prepared for painting and finishing details. All of these will need to be stuffed away before the end of the day, as a community after-school childcare group is run in the room after hours. It is a vital program for this designated inner-city school, but the production group is having to learn how to rehearse, prepare sets and props and put together their show with space and storage at a premium.

Think I'm Going to Like It Here" is asked to take a break from the current work and practice a previous number they've learned (NYC). At the end of the session, as dismissal nears, the students gather in the gym to pick up their learning journals and spend a few minutes reflecting on their work that day. As this is a large cast of students from nine to thirteen years old, and large-scale rehearsals with so many bodies can become depersonalized, the teachers have created smaller pods of students within the cast, with each teacher taking on a sort of 'homeroom teacher' status with a group of less than thirty students. This allows the teachers to check in with their smaller groups during journal writing, answer any questions, and take the set of journals from that group of students and read and respond to them through the week. There are, in fact, several IEP students amongst the grade 4 and 5's whose level of writing skills would prevent them from being able to effectively do a journal. Some of the senior, grade 7 students who completed excellent journals the year before take turns skipping their own journal entries, from class to class, to help the younger students complete their entries.

The students are asked to respond, briefly, to a specific writing prompt most days, though some days are left for any type of reflecting they wish to do. Today, each student is given a small piece of homework. They are asked to go to the production website over the next week, and download and watch one of the posted videos taken during the session (a piece in which they dance). The students are asked to complete a reflection on their own work in the number, and comment on matters such as the timing of their moves, the dramatic physicality of their performance and their facial expression work. Instructions on the website are as follows:

These are the video clips from the February 19th practice. Please pick one in which you perform, and watch your own performance. Respond to the following questions in a journal entry. You may do this in handwriting or on a computer. Hand the response in to your group leader between now and February 26th FAT. There's a lot to think about, so take a page and write as much as you can!

1. How was the timing of your movements? Did you properly time all your movements?
2. Are your movements 'big' enough? Are you being physical enough in the dance and expressing the energy you want to express.
3. How is your facial work? Are you expressing yourself in your facial expression?

4. Are you always on? Are you fully expressing and working well, even when not singing or engaged in the dance parts?
5. The sound quality on these clips is bad, so talk about the group's work in singing the song. Where could the song improve the most?
6. What can you do at this point to advance the performance?

Portfolios that students will create from their work in the production will include their learning journals, a digital video disk that includes pictures taken by one of the parents, and a slideshow, a copy of the program, bits of costume, self-assessments, reflections and the practice disc they used to practice their songs with.

For Further Consideration

My goal in this thesis was to make an argument about letter grading in the fine arts, to demonstrate why letter grading is a poor form of assessment in the fine arts using multiple lines of argument, and to advocate the use of ungraded portfolios as an authentic and powerful assessment device. It has become evident to me, during the course of my research, that many of the arguments I've made and a good deal of the research I've uncovered can be used to argue against letter grading inside other disciplines and subject areas besides fine arts. At this point, I feel ready to argue that grading could be eliminated immediately by teachers who are ready to engage with fine arts portfolios. However, I would like to caution against wholesale change such as eliminating grades in fine arts across a system (school district or province) or eliminating letter grades in a number of subjects across a number of grade levels simultaneously. The research discovered in this thesis is what makes me cautious.

A portion of my concern comes as a result of the research and theories dealing with motivational orientations. Recall that Pittman, Emery and Boggiano (Pittman, Emery, & Boggiano, 1982) questioned, in the conclusion to their study, whether repeated experiences with an extrinsic motivational orientation might cause a student to approach tasks, as a habit, from within the mindset of an extrinsic motivational orientation. Can they make the transfer to intrinsic motivation? If they can, what are the best methods to help students make this change? These are vital questions, and ones that require further research.

I believe we start meddling quite seriously with the motivational orientation of students inside the education system as soon as we begin letter grading everything we do. In B.C., as demonstrated within the curriculum documents I introduced earlier, it is at the grade 4 level that letter grades are proscribed in all of the subject areas. By the time students come to the level where I teach, grades 6 and 7, I am able to see a good number of students who appear to demonstrate to me a thorough tendency to approach

all their learning from the extrinsic motivational orientation. If all letter grades in all subjects were eliminated at once, I would be concerned about the ability of these students to cope. That is not to say that I am arguing against myself. That is to say that it would take awareness and guidance to make the change.

For example, if one wished to move away from letter grades in elementary school, it might be sensible to do so using a moving timeline. Letter grading might no longer be mandatory at the grade 4 level this year, then it would no longer be mandatory in grade 4 or 5 next year, and so on. If it is true that a great deal of the move from intrinsic to extrinsic motivational orientation comes about as a result of our evaluation routines involving letter grading, then the most cautious approach is to begin bringing people through the system without introducing the letter grade, but to avoid the difficulties that are likely to be had in completely changing the system for those who have become habituated to letter grades.

I believe that fostering lifelong learners who approach heuristic tasks creatively is an important even critical task for our public education system. I think, then, it would be unacceptable to conclude that students in the older grades who have come to approach more and more of their learning with an extrinsic motivational mindset can not or should not be 'weaned' from letter grades. I am just advocating a cautious approach.

I have written about fine arts in this thesis, but I don't think fine arts is the only discipline within our schools that is primarily heuristic in nature, demands creativity, risk-taking and all those types of thinking that are optimized when approached with an intrinsic motivational orientation. Other examples of students whose learning is highly limited when working from an extrinsic motivation orientation include those engaged in project-based learning, exploring issues of ethics and morality, studying what sorts of solutions might help third world poverty and starting to apply them in social studies or completing powerful, creative science fair projects. Though these types of projects can be graded, they philosophically lend themselves to a non-standardized, non-graded approach.

Fine arts provides a sort of 'liminal' space from which to begin working on alternative forms of assessment. As explored in this thesis in the Literature Review on

Letter Grades, fine arts teachers have traditionally been resistant to letter grades or standard forms of assessment. (MacGregor, Lemerise, Potts, & Roberts, 1993)

Teachers in the fine arts, perhaps more than in any other subject area, have been working diligently to reduce the importance of letter grades in the minds of their students, working towards establishing that 'motivational synergy' that Amabile examined. Also, though many teachers (myself included) shudder a little at the binary classification of subjects in school into 'academic' and 'non-academic', many see art as a non-academic subject, and thus view it as not a core subject. This is a frustrating state of affairs for arts teachers, but one that on the other hand presents a sort of interesting opportunity. Changing methods of assessment, eliminating letter grades and fundamentally altering the teacher-student relationship in the fine arts will be unlikely to garner the sort of public vehemence we've seen with programs like 'new math' or 'Year 2000 Curriculum'.

I believe it would be a mistake to mandate, across a system, that letter grades be removed from fine arts for all students in all classes. Again, I believe a gradual changeover, involving access to adequate professional development and conversations such as those I've put forth in this thesis for teachers, are called for. That's why I've suggested, above, that rather than removing letter grades from fine arts, teachers should merely be provided with the *option* of moving away from grades. Some teachers may be content to move into this type of curriculum immediately, and some may require more time and the opportunity to see these changes happening in other classrooms. This process, of taking into account teachers' comfort levels, and where they are starting out from in changing curriculum is called 'edging in' by Dorothy Heathcote. This sort of approach doesn't make for sweeping, overnight change in the classroom, but I believe it makes for much more effective and sustainable change. Wagner notes that in Heathcote's ideal, "You have to start from where you are, and she frequently reassures teachers that 'wherever you are is all right'" (Wagner, 1976, p. 34)

Heathcote suggests that teachers need to examine and be aware of what she calls their various 'thresholds of tolerance'. Two of these thresholds, 'decision taking' and 'status as a teacher' deal directly with the implications of moving from a traditional classroom environment where the teacher expects to make the critical decisions and be the person in control to the more open kind of educational goals and assessment routines discussed in this thesis. As I've discussed in this paper, eliminating the letter

grade does create a shift in the student-teacher relationship, and demands changes in the way curriculum is conceived and delivered. Teachers need to be prepared for this, have a good philosophical background to what they're doing and be ready to deal with all the day-to-day implications for classroom management that will follow.

Many of the reasons and arguments that I've given for eliminating letter grades in fine arts and using ungraded portfolios as the assessment tool will be also valid reasons for having the same sort of discussion in other curricular areas, but many won't. In each discipline, parallel conversations can be expected as teachers work through what 'authentic practices' in the discipline outside of school can be brought in to play as assessment routines in the classroom. But where these conversations will go is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Most importantly, eliminating the letter grade does not imply the elimination of assessment and evaluation. Donna Kay Beattie in *Assessment in Art Education* (Beattie, 1997) spends a great deal of time detailing how art can be 'scored and judged', a process I've argued against. She does obviously approach her writing from a DBAE perspective. For example she states, "The reader is also introduced to strategies that may be new to the art education field. Presented strategies delve much deeper into the assessment of content-based knowledge," (Beattie, 1997, p. xi) I have argued against such an approach. Nevertheless, Beattie presents many assessment tools in her book that are still relevant to the ungraded fine arts portfolio. She gives an example of a 'Student Portfolio Interview Schedule' that includes questions for the students to answer such as "Describe the overall quality of your portfolio to me in terms of unacceptable, needs work, mediocre, well done, outstanding. Defend your position," and "To what degree does your portfolio exhibit creative or personalized thinking and processing? (Describe.) Where is there evidence of original ideas?" (Beattie, 1997, p. 70) Many such assessment tools remain completely relevant, they can simply be used without completing that final step of scoring, classifying, judging and coming up with a letter or number to represent the learning.

We can recommend that the changes made in fine arts education serve as a model for other curricular areas where we want to encourage creativity and divergent outcomes. When I consider, as an adult, how rare the instances are outside of formal

educational settings where I've been assessed on the things I've done, in my job or in the community, using letter grades or other oversimplified symbol-systems I wonder at the manner in which they dominate assessment in public schools. As Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick note, "We must ask ourselves, are we educating students for a life of tests or for the tests of life?" (Costa & Kallick, 2010).

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