

Editorial

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The launching of a new journal is always a major event in a discipline. So, we welcome the arrival of this timely and important publication in the arts. *ArtsPraxis* is an electronically published periodical posted at the Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions at New York University's website. The journal provides an opportunity for scholars, artists, educators, therapists, administrators and community workers in the arts to have a dialogue and discussion on the pressing issues of the day. *ArtsPraxis* is a deliberate title choice highlighting the critical orientation of the publication to stimulate good and collegial debate across the art forms. I hope you will find the articles provocative and helpful in your own work.

The first issue of *ArtsPraxis* focuses upon a complex issue in the field of arts education, assessment. At the Forum on Arts Education Assessment at NYU in the summer 2003, over a 130 leaders in the arts gathered at our Washington Square campus to interrogate the pressing issues which educators across all levels experience as they make decisions about human achievement. With the current emphasis on standards in arts education it was timely to revisit the question of

whether these liberate or stifle excellence in creative arts praxis. To what extent do the standards facilitate interdisciplinary discourse on arts education assessment?

The Forum was not meant to deify standards or attainment levels but rather to critique them, explore how usefully they can be applied in diverse settings, and equally how problematic they might be. The Forum approached assessment from a multi-arts perspective and profiled creative work in dance, music, and theatre. It was structured around creative work, interdisciplinary panels, workshops, and plenary “Arts Roundtable” sessions. As well, discipline-specific presentations were included where participants could meet with colleagues and consider the following issues:

- What assessment models do arts educators share?
- To what extent do standards liberate or stifle human achievement in arts education?
- Who benefits from national and local assessment standards?
- What contributions have the standards in arts education made to creative arts praxis?
- What are the pressing issues arts educators face when grappling with assessment?

The inaugural issue of *ArtsPraxis* publishes some of the contributions from the NYU Forum. The four contributors neatly highlight the complex material Forum participants were grappling with:

Richard Colwell on Evaluation in the Arts

Colwell argues that assessment depends upon a clear definition of the discipline. Assessment within the reform movement (including standards) and assessment in curricula require a broader approach including a differentiation between program evaluation and evaluation to improve student competence. These and other assessment issues are raised as a means of initiating professional dialogue in contemporary arts assessment and the demands being placed upon the arts.

Patrice Madura Ward-Steinman on Assessing Creativity

Ward-Steinman posits that many music teachers consider improvisation to be a creative musical activity, without questioning whether student improvisations are really “creative.” Others claim that improvisation skill is not dependent on creativity, and suggest that while anyone can create a solo, that solo may or may not be “creative.” No significant correlations were found between the improvisations of college jazz singers and their Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking scores, yet musical creativity emerged as a factor. This factor accounted for a very small amount of variance, suggesting that an effective jazz improvisation solo may not be primarily a creative activity.

Marleen Pennison on Rubrics as an Integrated Tool

Pennison examines assessment experiments which grew from two directions: the need to create clear standards for students, and the need to find a stronger structure for a student-centered, project-based curriculum. These needs led to a study of the assessment techniques developed by Harvard’s Graduate School of Education’s [Project Zero](#), as well as a series of consultations with Heidi Andrade, one of their foremost assessment researchers. The study reveals how students gained a clearer understanding of class standards, became more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and took more responsibility for setting and reaching higher goals in their work. The paper cites examples of student interviews in tandem with the author’s own notes and observations on the benefits of implementing assessment techniques from both sides of the classroom.

Carole Miller and Juliana Saxton on Standards

Miller and Saxton argue how theatre pedagogy demands a constructivist pedagogy built upon questions, discourse, reflection and, if it is to be transformative, action. Most teacher education takes place within pre-service programs and schools that practice the traditional educational model. The authors examine the lack of arts discipline experience that pre-service teachers bring with them. Where, then, is the depth of knowledge and experience to support the application of

standards to student work? How can standards in the art form become internalized and actualized in classrooms?

I hope you find this first issue of *ARTSPRAXIS* illuminating. Please forward to me any responses you might have about this new e-journal and its content.