

*Dear Art Teacher,*

*It has been a pleasure to hear about the variety of ways assessment and The Yaven Protocol are being put to work in real classroom settings. Thanks to everyone for writing. This month we address questions about grading and which protocol to emphasize given limited class time.*

*One teacher shared a great idea calling it “Lessons I Learned”:*

*Due to time limitations I have not been able to go through the entire process with my Elementary Art Students, but we have had some invaluable art talks that pull on many of the ideas taught by Ms. Yaven in our training. When there is not enough time to critique all work give the first 10 minutes for students to write down some things they like about each work. This way all students get feedback.*

*She also suggested:*

*Introduce this art critique to Classroom teachers so that they may incorporate it into their classroom since they have more time with students.*

*Another teacher wrote:*

*I have begun implementing the evaluation process...I heard from a fellow teacher that some students were using our strategies/appropriate positive comments in other venues outside the art room.*

*Super! When students do this independently that's a sign something is working!*

*Lastly wanted to share next steps I am developing alongside The Yaven Protocol regarding making assessment visible. Mark Bignell has told me some of you are now or come September will be using digital cameras in the art classroom. I have been doing same documenting my students and their artwork. I find it irresistible and useful. Will keep you posted on how this is works with my own classes.*

*Would enjoy hearing from you about your ideas, experiences and stories with digital cameras in your classrooms. Please write!*

*Thinking of you,  
Linda*

1. A teacher writes:

I thoroughly enjoyed Linda Yaven's guided "critique" exercise and the ideas she presented. On my way home from the training, it occurred to me that the workshop about assessment — never addressed grades.

It is wonderful thing to guide students into thinking about, their art work and the art process

(which in my mind is more important than a grade). It is also a good idea to guide teachers in how to conduct a critique. However.... In the real world students are conditioned to receiving grades for their work.

I would like to know Ms. Yaven's thoughts about grades and her process for assessing student performance.

Thanks for the kind words!

At the start of the new school year I assemble a packet of handouts for my art students about class. They receive a syllabus, materials list, info on upcoming art projects. Included also is one on grades. Alongside white paper I print these on hot pink, blue, yellow – you get the idea (it is after all an art class ☺). We go over these and read them aloud on day one.

There is another reason I print these official sounding handouts about ground rules and regulations on different colors. I want to lighten the mood. As a beginning teacher my stomach flip-flopped whenever it was time to read the handout on grades. I found myself falling into the “how will they feel if I give them a tough grade?” question. To ease into this I stapled – and still do - a second sheet to the grade handout. It is by the artist John Cage and is entitled *Some Rules and Hints for Students and Teachers or Anybody Else*. In the list Cage speaks to the basics of what being a learner is all about (have attached Cage’s list below for you).

In my grading handout I speak about how “projects are due when they are due.” They receive a zero for turning it in late. If the work merits an “A” they get an “A” with a zero next to it – all of which figures into the final grade. I speak about my policy on absences, lateness and extra credit. Most importantly their grade for any art project depends on how well they meet the given standards for that project. I share my policy on grading in the context that this works for my students and knowing this may not be appropriate elsewhere.

However, if our grading policy is clear, our students are better able to succeed. So I spell out as much as I can. Then I add:

Our class is based on taking responsibility for your own learning. Contribute, be generous, participate, ask questions, make us laugh, take risks. The only way to achieve and accomplish is to push yourself beyond your usual comfort zone.

Step into the shoes of an inventor. Experiment. Put yourself in territory you haven’t been in before. Bust out of your usual way. Try something else. In the end it’ll be more exhilarating.

My goal is to weave together their specific numeric or letter grade on a project with “big picture” skills: cooperation and the capacity to collaborate, to take risks, to be proactive.

Grading can seem especially tough or pointless in the arts. Here we need to make the distinction between qualitative and quantitative feedback systems. The arts have a leading roll to play in the development of qualitative feedback systems through portfolios,

critique conversations, and documentation of student artwork. These methods can be contrasted with quantitative feedback – numeric or letter feedback. The sanctity of qualitative feedback in the arts, particularly through whole class feedback conversations, must be conserved even as we create standards in the arts and give out grades. That’s why critique conversations are foundational in the arts.

At the very top of my handout on grades I always write: “These guidelines would pretty much work even if we didn’t have grades.” The aim is for my students to understand that although we are going to be playing a game called “grades” these happen within a larger learning context: one in which each individual student is beginning to build and meet an inner standard of what is acceptable work.

Grades are the area where I make public and take a stand about what is acceptable or not regarding student work and attitude. I have spelled out the criteria in my guidelines; at the point that I grade I am putting my money where my mouth is especially in the context of grade inflation everywhere. My students may not like the grade they receive but after going through in-process and final critiques they will know why they received it and what steps to take to improve next time.

Remember the word “*protaganista*” introduced at the workshop via the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy? Ultimately my responsibility as I see it is to *condition* students to the fact that they are the key players in their own learning, in the way they resolve an art project and, yes, even in the grade they receive. Here we have an understanding of grades as not simply something being “done” to them. Rather students have an active role to play - through the quality of their artwork and their habits of work - in shaping the grade they receive. Theirs is a pro-active role.

One of the key steps in grading happens prior to and outside of The Yaven Protocol during those moments we spend designing an art project. As part of my preparation of the art project I need to delineate clearly what the specific criteria for the project are (i.e. a dynamic positive/negative composition, clean cutting and gluing, etc.). These later become our focus during critique.

How do I assess student performance? This is related to Protocol #5: assess in terms of the specific criteria and standards of the project. That is why we need to make the art project crystal clear to students at the beginning. To the degree that we articulate these criteria do our students enjoy the heightened possibility of success.

The Yaven Protocol #5 is the conversation about the criteria of the art project. It is the grounding for the grade. Recall the conversation we had on the 5 steps for grounding an assessment. When we say “all 3 edges of your collage shapes have been glued with no overlap” or “your shift of scale in the horse shape activated this edge” we are making grounded assessments.

By itself a grade is an unembellished assessment: “This is A work” or “You received

a C-.” In each the receiver has been assessed. The Yaven Protocol occurs before the grade is given out. It is an elucidation of the grade not yet received and the *grounding* for the grade yet to come. When we start by engaging in critique conversation by the time the grade is given there should be little surprise in it. My intent is for students to move from the debilitating habit of making unreal assessments to making more grounded ones – about their artwork and their habits of working.

Let’s make a distinction between the grade for an art project and the final grade for the class. In the latter I certainly consider the degree to which a student grew or took risks. In light of this, the in-process critique takes on greater import, for that is when a student gets feedback about whether they are pushing themselves enough or how much their artwork and their art process has grown.

I make clear to my students that a specific art project grade is not a reflection of their potential or even of how hard they pushed themselves. The art project grade reflects the degree to which they met and accomplished the specific art project criteria – and these we can observe in the artwork. This sounds hard nosed but in the context of art being seen as a frivolous subject it is important to reveal the real standards that each art project is designed to address. The conversation we had with teachers in R.A.F. Lakenheath, England comes to mind here. That afternoon we spoke about how to get the non artists to take art seriously.

In California where I live we now have VAPA in place – standards for Visual and Performing Arts. This past week a high school art and math teacher told me he felt relieved we had VAPA because it meant educators are taking art seriously enough to have standards. This is exactly where we are in implementing visual arts standards in DoDEA.

It is great when students resolve projects in unexpected ways. Yet it also happens that a student resolves an art project in a fabulous way without demonstrating comprehension of the task at hand. While I will make absolutely clear that their solution is fabulous it does not necessarily mean they acquired the skill set we were after or that they addressed the problem as posed. It may. Yet while inventive their solution may not demonstrate comprehension of the criteria we were after. Their grade - or a request for a “redo” - will reflect this, in addition to any verbal applause.

Frankly though I diligently do it grading is still not my favorite thing to do. It is to conserve qualitative assessment in the arts that I created The Yaven Protocol ☺.

2. A teacher writes:

If we as Elementary Art Educators need to condense this critiquing experience what would Ms. Yaven consider to be the most vital of her steps?

As I considered my response to this question I kept getting up from my computer and walking into the kitchen to stare at The Yaven Protocol poster hanging on the wall there. How could I choose? This was tricky.

Before choosing though, there was something else I wanted to mention. In an age of sound-bites, spin, and thirty second spots there is a shortage of public spaces to engage with others in ways that go beyond superficial posturing. In light of that, nothing more extraordinary than a classroom becomes a public space of rare potential in 2004. Out of the conversations taking place a student gains experience in what it means to be a reflective practitioner.

If this is so for a “regular” classroom it is even more profoundly so for our DoDEA classes given the particular stresses our children contend with. In this context a caring teacher creating a cohesive class makes a huge difference. You know this firsthand and better than anyone. Unless we consciously build these kinds of *conversational spaces of equanimity* in our classrooms they disappear as options from children’s lives. They live unaware of their possibility.

The Yaven Protocol is designed to support and/or create a mood of equanimity within which feedback conversations can take place. So to answer this I would emphasize the context for choosing one of the protocols is an understanding that there is already a good mood of mutual respect and trust in the classroom.

Let’s also highlight the obvious from the outset: as teachers we are the experts regarding our classrooms and what’s taking place there. When I created the protocol it was very much with this in mind: meaningful assessment implies that each teacher chooses for themselves what parts of The Yaven Protocol makes sense for them to emphasize with their particular students. My intention was to create something flexible and alive that teachers could interpret for their real classrooms. As an art teacher myself those are the kinds of educational experiences I gravitate towards: not something prescriptive but rather learning that I can make my own.

So really another way to answer this question is by having each teacher choose what makes sense for their own group of students.

Someone once said, though I have no idea who, “If I haven’t contradicted myself it’s because I have nothing serious to say.” That said let me contradict myself. If we need to abbreviate the assessment process and in many instances we do I would highlight Protocol # 7: the feedback session which arises out of a cohesive mood in the class - the pluses and delta’s, or stars and wishes, as Julia, a teacher in Georgia, so aptly put it. (Note to this thoughtful teacher: forgive me in advance if I got your name wrong!!! Let me know☺)

The artist Franz Marc, a member of the group Blau Reiter, said that all colors exist to support the color blue. He described the color blue as the most spiritual color. In a sense

then I could say that the whole protocol was designed in order to support the delta/wishes conversation. What do I mean?

The Yaven Protocol is a sequential way to have a respectful conversation in public in which students speak about matters close to their - and our – hearts. It is a sequential method for building trust within a community (and I like to consider my classroom as a community). In a context of trust the delta/wishes feedback can be given and make a difference. The delta/wishes feedback moment occurs only once trust has been built in the group.

The mission that DoDEA has set through visual arts standards is for students to make *progress* in their art *product* through *process*. By process we mean not only the student's art process but also the assessment process that teachers and students are engaged in. Let's not forget: students improve in direct relation to the kind of assessments they recurrently receive. The delta/wishes feedback is a key in clarifying for students what they need to work on or redo or change.

In isolating the delta/wishes protocol however I have a concern. By itself delta/wishes feedback without any preparation is something we witness around us more or less all the time. It's the so called negative feedback incessantly given and given cold in so many instances within and without the classroom – without trust or respect being present. While there are moments and times this may be called for and is appropriate usually this approach breeds resentment and fear. The class itself curdles.

We are after something more here. The aim is for students to have a constructive and safe experience when receiving delta/wishes feedback so that they do not shrink from it but even begin to seek it out because they grow as a result. They are expanding their stamina for learning.

The idea is to get students to feel hungry for this feedback. We want them to experience how grounded delta/wishes feedback actually deepens their art practice. New possibilities open for them through it. In a sense we are saying through delta/wishes feedback “look you could do this even better, you can push yourself even further than you ever thought possible and get better results in your artwork.”

Everyone wants a cohesive class. As teachers I know we are always trying to create this. To the degree that we are able to, we open up a conversational space in which teacher to student, student to student, and student to self, it is safe to speak directly about what is working and what is not.

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3.

*Some Rules and Hints for Students and Teachers or Anybody Else*

By John Cage, Performance Artist and musician

Author of *A Year From Monday*

- Rule 1 Find a place you trust and try trusting it for awhile
- Rule 2 General duties of a student:  
Pull everything out of your teacher.  
Pull everything out of your fellow students
- Rule 3 General Duties of a Teacher:  
Pull everything out of your students
- Rule 4 Consider everything as an experiment
- Rule 5 Be self-disciplined. This means finding someone wise or smart and choosing to follow them. To be disciplined is to follow in a good way.  
To be self disciplined is to follow in a better way.
- Rule 6 Follow the leader. Nothing is a mistake. There is no win and no fail. There is only make.
- Rule 7 The only rule is work. If you work it will lead to something. It is the people who do all of the work all of the time who eventually catch onto things. You can fool the fans but not the players.
- Rule 8 Do not try to create and analyze at the same time.  
They are different processes.
- Rule 9 Be happy whenever you can manage it. Enjoy yourself. It is lighter than you think.
- Rule 10 We are breaking all the rules, even our own rules and how do we do that?  
By leaving plenty of room for x qualities.