Teacher Work Sample Methodology: Assessment and Design Compatibility with Fine Arts Instruction

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ABSTRACT

The Teacher Work Sample (TWS) model of evaluation for teacher education is fast becoming a viable alternative to the portfolio required by teacher education programs. It has found support from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and aligns with Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Standards (INTAS) (Dener, et. al., 2004). This research examines the issue of limited scale in the TWS assessment planning and design for instruction elements. Do pre service candidates feel the TWS standards and scoring prompts restrict them to a positivist (a stand and deliver traditional thinking process) approach to assessing and instructional delivery or do the TWS guidelines account for a more constructivist approach, allowing students to construct and define meaning? The evidence from this research indicates that the TWS does allow for any pedagogical approach to teaching and learning.
Introduction

The Teacher Work Sample (TWS) has become increasingly popular as an assessment tool among teacher education programs around the nation. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has endorsed the TWS as a means of addressing its required standards (NCATE, 2003). One important question worth considering addresses the universal application of the TWS across all disciplines. Does the TWS effectively measure teaching effectiveness in the area of fine arts education? In this article “arts education” is defined as graphic arts, music (instrumental and vocal) and theater. For instance, Berghoff, Borgman, & Parr (2005) draw a distinction between the fine arts from other disciplines, which have a highly codified knowledge structure. The arts, they contend, “educate the aesthetic way of knowing wherein meaning is personal and emotional” (Berghoff, Borgman, & Parr, 2005, p. x). The TWS that, for many, can become inflexible and highly structured if interpreted as a unit design that only renders discrete knowledge of P-12 learning and ignores other ways of knowing.

As a reliable alternative to a teaching portfolio, the TWS grew from work started at Western Oregon during the 1980s (Henning & Robinson, 2004; Schalock & Myton, 1988) and continued through the efforts of the Renaissance Group during the 90s (The Renaissance Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality, 2001). Teacher candidates completing a TWS must set learning goals guided by contextual factors relative to the classroom environs. Based on these goals, a unit of study is designed and implemented using pre assessment data. Goals must also align with local, state, and national content standards. Finally, teacher candidates must examine the overall teaching and assessment results, reflect and revise their teaching, much as an experienced practitioner might (Henning, et. al., 2005). Thus, teacher candidates must focus on P-12 achievement and outcomes.

Teacher candidates in the fine arts can be challenged by the TWS structure on two critical levels. The first challenge requires pre-service candidates to design meaningful instruction, with limited instructional time for implementation. Second, they must honor an instructional tradition that extends knowing beyond the gravitational pull of minimal facts and procedures. Instead, they must consider an instructional design for their students that offer a more personal and emotional experience and one that is open to student interpretation and exploration (Shallcross, 1985).

A Question of Time for the Arts

Planning for the TWS is based on learning goals that meet national, state, and local standards that reflect what fine arts P-12 students should know and be able to do. As a result, learning goals construct a road map for designing pre/post and formative assessments for the instruction (The Renaissance Group, 2001). Learning goals drive the pre and post assessment criteria and anticipate that pre service candidates will modify
their assessments to meet the individual needs of students. Assessment and learning goals in the arts require a deep understanding for the content and clear expectations of intended results.

Further, unit-learning goals must capture both the cognitive and affective sides of learning; be assessed meaningfully; and promote an instructional design that connects with creative sensitivity. Add to this list the challenges that many arts programs may only meet two or three times a week. Pre-service candidates must schedule lessons and assessments that quickly find the essence of student participation and interpretation (NCES, 1997; MENC, 2002; von Zastow, 2004). Contrast this intermittent schedule with other content areas such as math, language arts, science or social studies where meeting times are five days a week from 50 to sometimes 80 minutes (von Zastow, 2004).

Because of a teacher candidate’s limited time with students, the assessment element requiring a pre and post test, measuring the impact of instruction on student learning can be easily compromised with the TWS. Teacher candidates are easily drawn away from performance assessments in favor of more discrete measures of knowledge: true-false items, multiple choice questions, and constructive response items (Stiggins, 1997; Wiggins, 1995; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). These are simple to develop and provide uncomplicated percentile ranks. However, such assessments for the arts do not have to be tests of rudimentary cognition only. Rubric scores, observational notes and interviews can provide keen insight into student growth over time. Further, such results can inform instructional planning that meet the needs of a class or an individual. Such links to design and assessment can be liberating to the fine arts teacher candidate. For the candidate, they are flexible enough to embrace creative planning and multiple assessment strategies.

**Designing Assessment and Instruction with Performance in Mind**

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) make it clear that “good teaching is dependent upon good design” (p.159). The TWS asks teacher candidates to think critically about planning activities based on student context, learning goals, and pre assessment outcomes. Combined, the TWS elements above provide teacher candidates informed preliminary data that helps the instructional design emerge, using the following six criteria:

- Alignment with learning goals;
- Accurate representation of content;
- Lesson and unit structure;
- Use of a variety of instruction, activities, assignments and resources;
- Use of contextual information and data to select appropriate and relevant activities, assignments and resources; and
- Use of technology (Watkins, et. al., 2005).
These can build links to the learning structure that are consistent with instructional purpose, sound practice, and individual and group needs. Such building blocks can be a tremendous advantage in teaching the arts.

The TWS requires teacher candidates to develop a plan for assessment that aligns goals with the unit of instruction. This plan must include a pre assessment that measures what students already know and can do; formative assessments that benchmark level of learning during the TWS instruction; and a post assessment that measures the ultimate extent of student learning. An analysis of the pre and post test results demonstrates for the pre service candidate that instruction made a difference with students (Renaissance Group, 2001; Girod, 2002). A concern is that fine arts teacher candidates approach the assessment planning much as they would if they were teaching in other curriculum areas such as social studies, science, math or language arts, using traditional paper-pencil tests measuring minimal cognitive skills.

Such assessment models are simple to design and result in descriptive data that easily graphs and ranks students. In contrast the arts offer a place where students can both create meaning and explore concepts without the risk of class rank or absolutes. Green (1996) explains for us the significance arts education holds for students:

Children create meaning by using paintbrushes, pieces of chalk, triangles, gongs, by making shapes with their bodies in time and space. They construct what are accepted as ‘unreal’ worlds by improving in theoretical spaces coming together, they often engage in construction of distinctive social realities that they can comfortably inhabit while such realities remain unrecognizable by those ‘outside’. (p. 123)

Green’s view of how students communicate through art is complex. As a result, it can challenge fine arts teacher candidates to develop assessment plans that support student understanding. Shepherd (1982) pulls Green’s conclusions into the assessment world saying that evaluation must focus on process behavior of the participants rather than the product. For someone, using the TWS structure, it can be easy to ignore creative expression and the social realities it may evoke and find only a raw score. The TWS, however, does not have to be that confining.

The TWS does not require cognitive, skill driven assessment. In fact, the assessment element is much more flexible and allows the pre service teacher to assess student outcomes and understanding at high levels (Fredman, 2004; Girod 2002; Wiggins, 1995 and Arter & McTighe, 2004). With this in mind, fine arts faculty must assist and guide their teacher candidates in the challenges of designing assessment that examines the creative process and makes art a more authentic performance than an often decontextualized drill. For example a teacher candidate teaching rhythmic patterns can have students clap in time with rhythm, move with the rhythm patterns they interpret, or simply count the number of times a rhythmic pattern was used, thus verifying student understanding of the rhythmic influence in music. They must further certify that their candidates are able to create and use such tools in both their assessment planning and formative learning design. Fine arts candidates, as a result, will have assessments in the field that in most cases will look very different from those in the core subjects.
Method

The primary question for this research asked how differently students in fine arts approach the TWS construction compared to students in other disciplines such as social studies and English and math. The belief prior to the study was that preservice students in the arts would perform the same as their peers in other disciplines. The predicted reason for their similar results was that preservice candidates in the arts were constructing assessments and the learning designs much the same way as other disciplines with a heavy use of multiple choice pre and post testing and lessons with primarily teacher directed instruction and low level formative assessment. Further conjecture placed blame for such a minimalist approach on P-12 student contact time and teacher candidate comfort level with the TWS structure. The results, however mixed, indicated quite the opposite.

Analysis

Summative Teacher Work Samples scored by faculty were made available for this research. These were developed by students in their final preparation courses prior to student teaching. Because the research question addressed pre and post assessment and formative assessment within the lesson design, only three elements of the TWS were considered relevant to the study: Learning Goals, Assessment Plan, and Design for Instruction. Learning Goals establish the broad learning expectations for. The Assessment Plan provides for pre and post assessment, formative evaluation and any accommodations anticipated for special needs students. Finally, instructional design determines how the content is delivered: learning activities, lesson structures, formative evaluation, and objectives that promote the instructional goal.

Table 1 displays the descriptive data for social studies, music, English, math, theater and graphic arts. Science was not included in the study because only one TWS had been scored.

| Table I |
| TWS Elements by Discipline |
| Element/Content | N  | M    | SD  | SE  |
| Learning Goals  |    |      |     |     |
| Social Studies  | 13 | 26.38 | 4.17 | 1.58 |
| Music           | 14 | 33.50 | 4.12 | 1.10 |
| English         |  5 | 27.40 | 4.33 | 1.93 |
| Theater         |  3 | 31.00 | 2.65 | 1.53 |
| Art             |  2 | 25.00 | 1.41 | 1.00 |
| Math            | 11 | 24.81 | 4.26 | .75  |
| Assessment Plan |    |      |     |     |
| Social Studies  | 13 | 35.54 | 9.55 | 2.67 |
Table I
TWS Elements by Discipline (Continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Element/Content</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>64.43</td>
<td>9.87</td>
<td>2.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
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<td>48.50</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>3.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math</td>
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<td>34.63</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>4.16</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>0.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>43.63</td>
<td>10.55</td>
<td>3.18</td>
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</table>

Music consistently demonstrated a higher summative score mean than the other content areas across all elements of the TWS. The remaining content areas were closer over all in the summative score means. Several variables may be in play to explain music's summative score means: Students in music may be more motivated, the instructional level is different for music than the other disciplines, or grade inflation may be at work. It is clear, however, that music results are different. The question remains, however, are the results of music Teacher Work Samples different from other content areas.

The results in Table II reject the null hypotheses that there is no difference in the Teacher Work Samples of teacher candidates in the fine arts and those of pre service candidates in other curriculum areas. A contributing cause for this difference rests in the development of the TWS for students in the arts.

Table II
Analysis of Variance for Learn Goals, Assessment Planning, and Designing Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TWS Elements</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Goals</td>
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<td>.002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Planning</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>14.33</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design for Learning</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6.01</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p > .05

These teacher candidates develop a different approach to assessment and learning designs based on their goals. They indeed hold to a curriculum that is authentic and open to P-12 student interpretation and exploration. Graphic arts and theater Teacher Work Samples dramatically support this understanding.
After an examination of the Teacher Work Samples submitted for summative review, three themes advanced the purpose for this study: student contact time, authentic assessment structures, and lesson designs encouraging student collaboration. Exploration of unique designs and interpretations for art forms also influenced the teacher candidate’s construction of assessment planning and formative within the lesson design in the TWS.

Through their reflections teacher candidates in all three areas of arts education under study were overly concerned about the amount of time they had for instruction. Generally, students adjusted and adapted to the school teaching schedules. The lessons were scheduled from as few as five days to as many as eighteen days during their assigned field experience for an average of 50 minutes periods. Because the teacher candidates were assigned to the field 2 to 3 days during the week where their teaching was limited, they did not have complete access to classes as they do in their student teaching. However, from the summative results, contact time with middle and high school students did not negatively affect candidates’ performance on their TWS. Pre service teachers in the content areas had a full schedule of classes five days a week for 50 to 80 minutes a class period.

When asked to reflect on teaching barriers, instructional time was among the several other concerns such as student motivation, classroom management and limited access to teaching resources. Teacher candidates were confounded by their limited access to students. One teacher candidate commented “my largest problem was that I was only in the classroom for two days a week.” As a result, this teacher candidate went on to add that staying consistent from one class period to the next was a challenge. Another student who was working with a high school theater class had similar concerns: “The two greatest barriers to learning for my students were lack of time to prepare a full-length audition and a lack of access to dramatic texts.” Time was again an issue for another candidate who was surprised by the weeklong spring assessment and the spring break. “Going into this teaching, I know that I would be on a time limit. . .  I planned accordingly but found out once I was there that MAP (Missouri Assessment Program) testing and spring break would both cut into my time with kids.”

Teacher Work Samples in the areas of the visual arts, music and theater relied heavily on pre and post assessments that measured knowledge and comprehension, which drove the teaching design toward more teacher-directed instruction. This was entirely the case with music. Music work sampling demonstrated a high degree of skill testing. These teacher candidates were assigned to junior high school band programs in grades seven, eight, and nine. Because these middle grade students have little if any prerequisite knowledge and because they are learning to perform as a band, these students need fundamental grounding in simple behaviors and knowledge such as rhythmic patterns, scales, and finger and lip positioning.

The visual and theater arts, however, were not altogether ambivalent toward authentic assessments. These content areas approached assessment with more authentic structures. One student gathered pre assessment structures by interviewing students through discussion. A visual arts student, as a preassessment activity, asked students to give “two ideas” for a clay teapot they were to construct. The teacher candidate went on to explain that students for the pre assessment “will also do sketches” to conceptualize the teapots. These approaches to the preassessment asked students to expand on their
prerequisite knowledge to assess visual design and patterns. As a result the instructional
design can more effectively draw from what students know already and add new and
challenging constructs that add to their understanding and skill. As a pot assessment
students would again assess visual design and its impact on the final product.

The TWS requires that teacher candidates develop learning goals that align with
national, state, and local goals for their content area. The learning goals must also be
aligned closely with the day-to-day teaching plans throughout the unit of study. Thus, the
design for instruction and formative assessment has a cohesive ideation of learning
activities and teaching objectives. Learning goals for music were much more skill
driven, thus the assessment planning relied on concrete learning patterns. For instance,
one candidate stated learning goals, which were actually learning objectives, but not
unlike those of her music cohort. Students were to demonstrate good tone, hear pitches,
and sight read through a piece. Another music student’s goal was to improve posture that
improved tone qualities, playing with flat chins, proper hand position, and sitting posture.
The outcomes here were concrete and quantifiable not unlike those found in the core
disciplines. Compare this approach to the teacher candidate teaching designing and clay
teapot functionality.

Discussion

Prior to conducting this study, it was believed that the Teacher Work Samples’
assessment and learning design elements would not be different from those of the content
areas of, social studies, math and English. Because the TWS scoring guides and
guidelines encouraged pre and post assessments that must render percentages, arts
assessments would use multiple choice, true-false, and matching items; not authentic
assessments requiring students to conceptualize or invent products or socially explore
solutions to complex problems. Further, it was believed that the design for learning
would be driven by the pressure to present concrete, skill-based learning experiences that
would render high scores on selected response post tests. Limited instructional time
would exacerbate the desire to focus on discrete skill mastery from pre to post testing.
As a result of these intervening pressures, students in the arts would shy from more
complex, experiential learning activities in favor of more teacher directed lesson
planning.

Looking at the summative TWS results across content areas in social studies,
English, visual art, theater, and music revealed that differences did exist between all
content areas. The actual TWS documents revealed that art and theater did assess students
using more authentic procedures. Music, however, assessed more for student skill
development. The design for these work samples relied on discrete skills that focused on
mastery through repetition. Pre and posttest construction in the content areas relied
heavily on selected response items. Some of the content areas used more interactive
activities to support learning, but a larger number of the content area Teacher Work
Samples focused on lecture and worksheet completion.
Concluding Remarks

The results of this study indicate that the Teacher Work Sample is a flexible tool when it comes to assessing and designing P-12 learning. It accommodates a variety of approaches for assessing student knowledge, prior to and following teaching. Faculty in all disciplines can benefit by explaining how such designing can occur through a TWS methodology and both model and support authentic and interpersonal approaches to assessment and lesson planning. The teacher candidates must also have a willingness to take risks and explore rubric designs, annotated note taking, interviewing, and student observation that provides a richer context into how students know and how they bring meaning to ideas. The TWS as a program evaluation does not restrict authentic assessment either as a summative or formative measure of student growth.

References


