

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICE TO INCREASE  
STUDENT USE OF CONTENT SPECIFIC VOCABULARY

by

Katy Govan

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Faculty of

The Evergreen State College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Master in Teaching

2015

This Action Research Project for the Master in Teaching Degree

by

Katy Govan

has been approved for

The Evergreen State College

by

---

Sara Sunshine Campbell, Ph.D.

Member of the Faculty

## ABSTRACT

In a Visual Arts studio classroom making the work of art often supersedes students *talking* about how they made the work of art. This action research project examines the relationship between formative assessment practices in a studio arts classroom and students' use of content specific vocabulary. Students in this project participated in assessments designed to increase their use content-specific language to talk about the criteria inherent in the studio process of creating artwork during studio work time. The data collection and analysis from this four week project showed that content specific vocabulary expectedly increased during studio conversations and surprisingly increased in student written assessments as well.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of the people who supported me through this process. Greg, your love, laughter, and insights helped keep me moving in the right direction. Maya, you remind me that it takes courage and strength to keep doing my best everyday. Sunshine, thank you for showing me what it means to be a good teacher and to keep trying new things even if I am not good at them, yet. Tania Busch Isaksen, Lori Govan, Carrie Skelly and Katie Gates thank you for the countless hours of proofreading and cheerleading, I am lucky be surrounded by so many intelligent, strong women.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	1
Background .....	8
Making Criteria Explicit Through Use of Student Dialogue.....	2
The Role of Assessment in the Visual Art Studio Classroom.....	7
The Role of Assessment <i>for Learning</i> in the Visual Art Studio Classroom.....	8
Problem Statement .....	11
Statement of the Question .....	13
CHAPTER 2: METHODS AND ANALYSIS .....	14
Description of the Practicum Site .....	14
Data Collection and Analysis .....	21
Pre and Post Assessment .....	21
Student Journals / Sketchbook.....	23
Teacher Field Journal.....	23
Limitations .....	24
CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS .....	26
Findings.....	26
Studio Check In .....	27
Written Formative Assessments.....	36
Content Specific Vocabulary Use in Peer-Critique and Self-Critique .....	39
Implications and Recommendations .....	43
References .....	47

## CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Background**

In the Visual Art studio classroom, students engage in a creative process and produce works of art. While students are working on projects during studio time, there often are limited opportunities for students to practice talking and writing about the processes they are using. As a result, these students do not have the opportunity to learn how to talk about their process and product using art specific vocabulary.

Traditionally in most studio arts classes, student dialogue occurs at the end of a project during critique. This is often a summative process where students have had little chance to practice using the vocabulary of the project to learn how express their ideas. As a result, these summative critiques are often not helpful in aiding students to discuss their final product in an academic way. My observations from teaching, coupled with my review of research related to these problems of practice, led me to wonder about ways to increase conversation with and amongst students throughout the studio process. I wanted to improve my ability to encourage students' use of content area language in their conversations about the work they are creating. I hoped this would also increase their use of the vocabulary words throughout the studio practice and critique.

In reviewing the research literature related to student work in a visual art studio classroom, I found that formative assessment (FA) was a way to increase student talk using content-specific vocabulary during the studio process. Specifically, a teacher can use FA to provide qualitative feedback that focuses on the details of content and performance in a way that helps the students understand where they are at in their

learning progression. This increased clarity through conversation helps students learn what they need to do next to meet the learning objective for an assignment. Informal studio conversations with students about their creative process and work serve as a tool teachers can use during studio work time to help adjust teaching and learning activities to support students in meeting the criteria of a learning objective.

### **Literature Review**

As I examined the research literature related to assessment practices, student discourse, and academic language development, three significant themes emerged that influenced this action research project. First, making assessment criteria clear in a studio assignment helps students understand what learning is expected of them. Second, when students are clear about assessment criteria they are better able to voice their understanding of what they are learning using content specific discourse around the assessment criteria. Third, the role of assessment in the Visual Arts classroom allows the teacher to move students' learning forward as they engage in discourse centered on clear criteria. In the next section, I will review the research literature related to these themes.

### **Making Criteria Explicit Through Use of Student Dialogue**

Research has shown that increasing a student's understanding of criteria for assignments can improve performance because these criteria state clear expectations for the quality of work and learning. (Al-Amri, 2011; de la Harpe, Peterson, Zehner, Neale, Musgrave, & McDermott, 2008; Gruber, 2008). In the creation of visual art, students are asked to create products that are a combination of effort, planning, and

skills executed together to create an original work of art. Using clearly stated vocabulary related to the criteria increases student talk around artistic creating practices and focuses studio conversations around content-specific vocabulary. When a teacher uses an instructional routine, students gain practice using content-specific language to talk about the criteria inherent in the studio process of creating artwork, both with the teacher and fellow students (Barrett, 2004; Gruber 2004; Hetland, Cajolet, & Music, 2009). Students need to participate in developing the criteria for which they will be assessed (Hattie, 2007; Havens, 2012). Increasing opportunities to discuss the criteria helps students link the content specific vocabulary to the work they are creating (Exley, 2008).

Clearly articulated assessment criteria provides well-defined guidelines for both experienced and inexperienced students to follow (Harpe & Peterson, 2008). Explicit criteria used in assessment allow students to self-assess and peer-assess during the studio process. These types of formative assessment allow students to make changes throughout the creative process rather than limiting them to feedback from a summative assessment, a point in which corrections can no longer be made. This permits a broad range of learners to work independently, advancing their own learning in an individualized manner. Additionally, conversation around assessment criteria teaches students to take an active role in knowing where they are in the creative process and reduces ambiguity and confusion about assignment expectations (DeLuca, 2010; Stiggins, 2002).

Studio talk centered around clear criteria creates a learning rich culture where students learn to peer assess and evaluate each other's work through conversation.

This teaches students how to use their peers as a resource in the learning process. (Popovich, 2006). Increased opportunities for students to have focused conversations also capitalizes on how much students enjoy talking with one another while helping them practice using academic language.

In the visual art studio classroom, student voice is a term that describes the process of students' expressing their understanding of their learning objectives. When students have a clear understanding of their learning purpose, they have a clearer understanding of the learning objectives of a lesson. As a result they perform better on a learning task and are better able to explain in their own words what they have learned (Havens, 2012). For example, students put the learning criteria into their own words when they are analyzing and evaluating their studio work against a standard. Furthermore, they express what they have done and what they still may need to do to complete their project. This encourages students to focus on the intended knowledge, skill or behavior in the lesson, while learning to express that understanding in their own words (Gruber, 2008).

Clarifications of learning objectives create well-defined and consistent feedback that supports students in learning to voice their own understanding of their learning (Gruber, 2008; Popovich, 2006). When a teacher provides students with descriptive and clear criteria, opportunities increase for students, teachers, and peers to have conversations centered on the process and production of making works of art using the vocabulary (Lindstrom, 2007; Onore, 1992). This increases shared accountability on the part of the teacher and the student to use the vocabulary correctly to describe the process and products of making art. Increasing students' opportunities to engage in

dialogue with the teacher during studio work time provides opportunities for them to test what they are learning, while taking responsibility for how they are applying it to the work they are creating (Brewer, 2008; Carroll, 2008). Students working this way have more opportunities for self-reflection during the process of creating artwork. Self-reflection provides students valuable practice forming opinions and thoughts needed to articulate their process, thereby increasing the likelihood of meaningful dialogue about their process (Sabol, 2006). Therefore, when teachers are explicit with their requirements, and students are informed and able to give input about what is expected of them, creativity and conversation in the studio increase (DeLuca, 2010; Johnson, 1982; Lindstrom, 2007).

When educators shift the focus from solely process and product outcomes and include opportunities for student-centered dialogue centered on the process, students can take more control and actively participate in conversation in the classroom (de la Harpe et al., 2009; Onore, 1992). Making criteria explicit and open to the inclusion of student voice allows increased opportunities for students to participate verbally in the studio process creating a language rich environment (Onore, 1992). This moves learning beyond a surface understanding of creating art and encourages students to thoughtfully explore a deeper understanding of the studio arts process through talking with teachers and peers. By adding a talking component to their studio process, students are required to begin a verbal investigation about their process and product through discussion and dialogue. This happens through increased conversations with the teacher around the criteria expectations, and with other students in the class about the creation of art (Pennisi, 2013).

One of the most important ways of giving students access to content vocabulary is to provide them with opportunities to learn, practice, and master their command of content-specific language. The practice of using content-specific language also increases the amount of student conversation in the process of assessment, giving them a chance to learn more through the creating process. The creation of levels of expectations through clearly articulated assessment criteria provides students the academic language to articulate where they are at in their process and what they need to do to improve. Additionally, clear assessment criteria can aid in teaching students to act as peer reviewers for each other's work by engaging in studio relevant conversation (DeLuca, 2010). Peer conversation during the studio process provides modeling of the use of meaning of language as it applies to creating work. Subsequently, all students present in the room can hear multiple examples of how peers apply the knowledge they are learning to their artwork. Students need time during class using content-specific language to talk. These opportunities to talk about the criteria increase student understanding of content specific vocabulary (Exley, 2008).

Students exposed to examples of teacher-student and peer dialogue in a classroom environment are more likely to feel comfortable engaging in art-centered conversation themselves (Johanson, 1982). As students learn the norms of entering into dialogue based on listening to those around them, they can begin to utilize their own voice in the studio process. Moreover, students who are given the opportunity to talk thoughtfully and meaningfully about the studio process form a deeper understanding of art (Barrett, 2004).

## **The Role of Assessment in the Visual Art Studio Classroom**

A well-designed assessment plays an important role in curriculum design and assures that teaching and learning throughout the studio art process is clear and effective (Popovich, 2006). As Elliot Eisner (1996) states, "...failure to assess art education in ways that show distinct features of art learning may be a form of professional dereliction. One of the purposes for assessment is to protect students from incompetent teaching and educationally diluted curricula. Without assessment in art education, there is no way to determine whether pedagogical practices have consequences and there is no basis for changing them" (p.14).

Formative assessment during studio work time provides in-the-moment feedback, so students know what to do next (Brewer, 2008; DeLuca, 2010; Onore, 1992; Parr & Hattie, 2010; Thurling et al., 2013). Moreover, FA establishes teaching and learning objectives during a studio project (Brewer, 2010). Students and teachers working together, with the same goal in mind, create clear discussions centered on criteria for assessment (Dorn, 2003). Formative assessment has the benefit of increasing the amount of content specific vocabulary students use to talk about process and product in the studio arts classroom (Barrett, 2004; DeLuca, 2010). Creating opportunities for students to talk during studio helps them take an active role in the assessment process (Johanson, 1982).

Furthermore, student voice and concerns are included in how the work is formatively evaluated (Bressler, 1994; Lindstrom, 2007; Stiggins, 2002). Through conversation around criteria, students and teachers can negotiate what tasks the assessment will evaluate and how the tasks will be evaluated by the selected criteria at

the end of the project during critique. Student negotiated criteria allow for adjustments to be made that can better serve students' learning styles and needs, as they relate to the assignment. This clarity of criteria creates agreement about what is required for assessment (Al-Amri, 2011).

### **The Role of Assessment *for Learning* in the Visual Art Studio Classroom**

Teachers need to consider how feedback will be helpful to students in the process-of-making (Havens, 2012). Formative assessment helps both teacher and students understand where the student is at in the making process while teaching students how to self-monitor their own progress. Self-monitoring enhances engagement by affording students opportunities to consider where they are at, and what they need to do next (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Havens, Smith, Dysthe, & Ludvigsen, 2012; Stiggins, 2002). Formative assessment in the visual art classroom increases learning opportunities for students throughout the process of creating because it happens in the moment, allowing students and teachers to make adjustments and keep learning moving forward (Carroll et al., 2010).

Formative assessment results in greater exposure to content-specific vocabulary throughout the studio process because of increased opportunities for dialogue (Carroll et al., 2010). Increasing the frequency of targeted assessments using content-specific vocabulary increases the likelihood that students will be able to fluently communicate around their creation process (Onore, 1992). The socially situated use of content-specific vocabulary promotes high engagement (Carroll, Britos, Koh, Royalty, & Hornstein, 2010; Popovich, 2006).

Optimizing the type of feedback provided by a teacher provides a richer and individualized learning opportunity for students (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Havens, Smith, Dysthe, & Ludvigsen, 2012). The teacher determines what feedback students need. Task-level feedback can be very effective for student growth and can help students understand, through dialogue, what the expectations are for their learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Good feedback gives students the chance to adjust their learning in the moment and allows students the opportunity to make changes to their creative process resulting in a product that is better aligned with the assignment's expectations (Havens, Smith, Dysthe, & Ludvigsen, 2012).

Teachers must work at developing a classroom culture where feedback is seen as a useful tool. This type classroom culture allows for greater communication between teachers and students about what is useful feedback, why it is important, and how it can help to inform future learning. In a visual art classroom, it is important to be aware of a student's perceptions of feedback. Reflection time is necessary to understand how feedback can be useful (Alverman, 1996). Time for reflection coupled with increased talk in the studio classroom creates opportunities for students to explore how to use feedback.

Formative assessment that increases dialogue is an effective tool for assessing the arts because it promotes the formation of ideas and allows for the development of foundational skills, all while giving students the opportunity to self-reflect throughout the art making process (DeLuca, 2010). Formative assessment used multiple times during class also increases opportunities for student voice (Miles, 2010). Additionally, FA encourages students to practice entering into academic conversation of a studio

classroom using their own point of view. This dialogic practice establishes a common understanding of the criteria through conversation.

It is important to assess the quality of some of the research reviewed in the previous section. "Quality indications for qualitative research are dependent on the approach and purpose of the study" (Mertens, 2010). Therefore, in the midst of reviewing research to support my action research project it is important to pause and critically analyze the validity of the research being reviewed for two studies reviewed in this section. "Standards for evidence and quality in qualitative inquiries require documentation of how the research was conducted and the associated data analysis and interpretation process" (Mertens, 2010). In the following paragraphs I will do that before returning to a review of the literature.

For the study conducted by Onore (1992) the credibility is high because the researcher conducted the study over a long period of time and the data sources were triangulated to provide a strong analysis. Additionally, the researcher performed member checks with both the classroom teacher and students that participated in the study. The transferability is poor for this study because there is not thick description of the classroom site studied and it was limited to one classroom. Dependability is strong for this study because the findings are consistent with other similar studies. Lastly, the confirmability is good because it was audited by a source outside of the study.

For the study conducted by Pennisi (2013) the credibility is strong because the researcher conducted the study over a prolonged period of time. In addition to using member checks the researchers also triangulated the analysis of their data from a broad source of collection. The transferability is not very good because although there is thick

description of the research site it is limited only one school setting. Dependability is strong because the study demonstrates similar outcomes that are consistent with similar studies. Lastly, the conformability is strong because an outside party audited the data analyzed.

### **Problem Statement**

I have observed that students in a studio arts environment often progress throughout the artistic process without ever engaging meaningful content specific dialogue. Research has shown that this can result in lost opportunities to incorporate feedback into their final product. Based on my observations, I saw three opportunities where dialogue could be encouraged during studio work time. First, incorporating the use of content specific vocabulary into daily use. Students often appeared uncomfortable using content specific vocabulary to discuss making artwork. Teaching students that their voices and opinions matter in the creation and evaluation of their work helps them to stay active and engaged in the creation of artwork. Furthermore, when students can actively participate in the discussion of criteria, this allows them to include their real world experiences in the process-of-making art and increases the likelihood of a more authentic and engaging process (Wiggins, 2011). At my school site, I have noticed that studio work time is an ideal opportunity for students to practice the use of content-specific vocabulary while they are working on their project.

Second, I have noticed that there are three natural points in the process where students could be encouraged to discuss their work: at the beginning of a project when students are forming their ideas, in the middle of a project when students are in the process of making so they can practice talking their work, and at the end, when the

work of art is complete. Finally, students can describe how their product fulfills the criteria for the assignment. Often the assessment of a student's art is given in a summative fashion. This denies students the multiple opportunities throughout the studio process to reflect on feedback and make changes to their final product. My hope was that feedback received through these conversations would encourage students to articulate how they apply reasoning to their acquired studio skills and knowledge base while creating a work of art. Additionally, these conversations would give me a better understanding of where students are in their learning process and what adjustments I need to make in my teaching to better support their learning.

Third, students need opportunities to learn how to talk about their work with each other. Students in my classroom enjoyed talking to and learning from each other. It seemed to me that peer-to-peer interactions were one of the richest, but most under-used resources in the classroom. High school students are very social and care a lot about what their peers have to say about their work. The feedback they receive from each other, even more so than from the teacher, has the potential to be the most powerful and effective influence on how they develop their work (Onore, 1992). Creating a shared common vocabulary in the studio and encouraging students to develop these conversations with each other can create a shared common learning community created in the classroom where students can be a resource to one another.

My hope is that by creating opportunities for students to participate more actively in the academic talk during the creation of artwork, they will gain the valuable skill of critiquing their artwork and the artwork of their peers using the vocabulary of visual art. I believe that helping students build fluency with art-specific vocabulary through practice

describing their work in the studio will also help them see and understand how the work they are creating can be contextualized within the broader academic context of Visual Arts. During studio time, students often silently engage in their work or have conversations about topics other than art. Additionally, formative assessment provides opportunities to verbally practice using content-specific vocabulary for the required criteria from an assignment. This, in turn, would help support the development of student voice and enhance engagement with their personal, art-centered discourse.

### **Statement of the Question**

In the art studio classroom there is a need for clear and well-articulated criteria so students know what learning is expected of them for an assignment. Involving students in discussion, throughout the assessment process, can help students learn to clearly understand and talk about criteria while making a work of art. Therefore, I am interested in examining the following question: What is the relationship between formative assessment practices in a studio arts classroom and students' use of content specific vocabulary?

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODS AND ANALYSIS

### **Description of the Practicum Site**

I student taught in a public high school in an urban community just south of a large city. The school serves about 1100 students, grades ninth through twelfth. The student body was comprised of 37% Hispanic, 23% White, 14% Asian/Pacific Islander, 14% Black/African American, 10% two or more races, 8% Asian, 7% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native students. Over 13% of the student population was transitional bilingual. The high school was situated in a diverse socio-economic area, with 79% of the school population receiving free and reduced lunch. Finally, the presence of a military base in close proximity to the school contributed to a significant transitory student population.

At the time of this Action Research project, I was a student teacher beginning my second year of my Master in Teaching program at The Evergreen State College. My first year practicum placement occurred in this classroom in the fall, winter and spring quarters of the previous school year. I was a 40-year-old, white, female teacher. I earned a Bachelor of Fine Art in Photography and a Master of Fine Art in Book Arts. I had five years of experience teaching studio art classes at the college level.

### **Instructional Context of the Study**

Studio work time at the school site typically spanned 8-10 class periods for a single project. At 90 minutes per class, students spent approximately 12-15 hours on a given project. I was curious whether the increased opportunity for student-to-teacher conversations might enhance opportunities for reflection and improve students'

understanding of where they were at in the criteria. Specifically, I wondered whether using formative assessment would help students engage in meaningful conversations around the criteria of the assignment. Research has shown that when students are encouraged to talk to each other about their artwork process, they are more likely to experience a higher quality of learning throughout the studio process (Aleverman, 1996; Onore, 1992; Johanson, 1982).

The students who participated in my action research project in the *Exploring Art* classes typically mirrored the school-wide demographics. This class was considered a beginning art class and required students have no prior experience with art. At the beginning of the school year I asked students to complete a survey that asked them to describe their prior experiences and dispositions surrounding their formal or informal experience with art. Of the 29 students who completed the survey, 16 of the students said that they had participated in art occasionally at school. Notably, all of the students in this class indicated that they felt like they were not good at art.

This class had a variety of learners at different levels including: two students who had Individual Education Plans (IEP), eight students who were underperforming or have gaps in their academic knowledge, three of the students in the class were English Language Learners, and two students had 504 plans. The class I used in this study was the first class of the day for these students and began at 7:25am. Needless to say many of the students were sleepy and often required some time and cajoling before they would wake up enough to talk.

The class's size was typical for this high school and contained 38 students on the attendance record for the class. Over the course of my study only 29 of the 38 students

came consistently enough to collect information from to inform my project. Another challenge of this study was the high transitory rate where students were regularly adding and dropping the class throughout the grading period. It was not uncommon for 1-2 new students to be added to the class on a weekly basis, with the same amount dropping the class.

In addition to the high transitory rate of the student population, there were other additional challenges that influenced my action research project. First, there was high absentee rate for the *Exploring Art* class. Often a quarter of the class was absent from a single period. This could have been attributed to it being the first class of the day. Additionally, some of those students missed multiple classes, or even weeks at a time. Based on my conversation with students from the previous year, their absences are typically because of prolonged personal illness, lack of transportation to and from school, or family emergencies. This made it very challenging for these students, when they returned to class, to be current on what was happening in class from day to day activities and in the unit of study as a whole. I also observed that after long absences students found it difficult to re-enter the routines of the studio classroom, particularly because they had fallen so far behind on a project. In teaching mini-lessons at the school while I was there for my practicum placement, I also encountered the challenge of trying to help multiple students, in various stages of learning, catch up on missed work, while continuing to teach the current lesson.

A second challenge was that, although the classroom setting was fitting for a high school level visual art classroom, the room was often very cramped. There are eight tables in the classroom, six tables seat four students and two tables seat ten

students. Due to the high volume of students in each class, space was often cramped and therefore, it was difficult to move about the room and work efficiently. Students often had to work in very cramped conditions. The limited storage space in the classroom sometimes made it difficult for students to keep work neat, or to keep track of where their work was stored. This made it difficult for them to get started on their projects in a timely manner at the beginning of class.

A third challenge that came from my observations in this classroom was that there were a higher number of students who were in different stages of language acquisition than the numbers posted by the district for this school. Often there were students that, while not listed as ELL or receiving language support services, seemed to be struggling with speaking and comprehending English. Frequently in these cases, other students who spoke the same language would help translate more complicated ideas from English. Because the classroom was language rich, many of the students were comfortable with multiple languages and were quick to help support one another when challenges arose; they really seem to enjoy working together to problem solve. During class time, I noticed that as I worked with many students whose spoken English was excellent, they seemed to struggle more with the content-specific vocabulary.

### **Description of Action Practice**

This study was focused on a four-week unit on the elements of line for a total of ten class meetings. The data collected from this study was derived from one specific section of the *Exploring Art* classes, an introductory-level, elective studio art class. The school used an alternating schedule, such that classes met every other day for 90

minutes. The class in this project was evenly split between male and female students and encompassed all grade levels at the school, ninth through twelfth grade.

This study examined the effects of using formative assessment during studio work time to give students more opportunities to practice using academic content-specific vocabulary. During the unit of study, students engaged in learning about the different properties of line and how those can be combined to create intentional visual expressions in a work of art. Students had the option of selecting one of five different drawing projects that used the element of line in this way. Regardless of which project the student selected, the finished work of art had to convey meaningful content as determined by the student. For the unit, I selected 12 specific vocabulary words that embody the properties of the expression of a line and these were taught during direct instruction at the beginning of the unit. Students were asked to write down the definitions of the words provided during the lecture in their sketchbooks along with a drawing that represented an example of the definition of the word. This piece of instruction was done so that each student would begin the unit with the same definitions of the 12 vocabulary words and examples of the words. Students were then given the option of including additional notes and examples of their own creation. The 12 words students were given included: line, contour, gesture, edge, staccato, legato, line expression, direction, movement, thickness, length and abstract. Students were encouraged to keep this sketchbook out during studio work time to refer back to their notes and add to them throughout the unit. For the remainder of the unit, I tracked whenever students used any of these words with me during a studio interaction.

In addition to studio work time during the unit, students typically spent the first 10-15 minutes of each class engaging in activities designed to increase their opportunity to speak and write about content-specific vocabulary before engaging in individual work. These activities included sketchbook entries, small and large group discussions during a Visual Thinking Skills practice, and written/drawn formative assessments that required students to demonstrate their understanding of the unit vocabulary words. Students spent the remaining 60 minutes of the class working on their individual studio assignment. During studio work time, I used a seating chart to keep track of which students I had talked with and if the students had used one of the 12 tracked vocabulary words from the unit.

I used these daily interactions as a record of how, and if, the students were using the vocabulary words. I then used this information to guide my instructional decisions in four ways. First, I used the interactions in the moment, formatively with students, to get a sense of where they were in their learning and what steps they needed to take next. Second, I used the interactions to make decisions about what content needed to be reviewed and retaught for the following day. For example, if multiple students showed misunderstandings or misconceptions about a vocabulary word and its expression then I would review that word, its definition, and provide additional examples of the word. I did this at the beginning of the next class period during a whole group lecture. A third way I used the studio interactions to inform instruction was by creating written assessments that allowed me to see how students were thinking about the vocabulary and if they were able to apply the vocabulary in a writing to an image they had not seen before. More specifically, in these assessments students were shown a work of art and

asked to write about how the targeted vocabulary word was being used to convey meaning through types of lines represented in the image.

In addition to using these three ways to formatively assess how students were engaging with the studio check ins, analyzing the written assessments, and reviewing their sketchbooks, I was curious to see if students could also generalize the vocabulary they had been using to describe a novel work of art also about line through an whole group discussion of a work of art. To do this I used a teacher facilitate discussion technique know as Visual Thinking Strategies developed by Philip Yenawine. The VTS process was a whole class conversation of an art image that centers on helping students closely notice a visual image. They do this by making notes of their observations of the image, followed by an account of what they notice about the image while providing direct observable evidence from the image. I engaged students in discussing the image using the three designated VTS prompts: What is going on in this image? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find?

It is important to note that I had been using the VTS process with students since the beginning of the school year, which at this point in the study had been almost eight weeks before I began my action research project. Therefore, students were comfortable and familiar with the process. From prior use of this activity with these students I had observed that it was an effective and efficient tool for engaging them in a class dialogue about art. I believe this was because the in VTS process there were no wrong answers, so it was a low stakes activity that students eagerly participated in. Students had responded positively to it from the beginning of the school year and I knew from speaking with them informally, and notes recorded in my field journal, that they enjoyed

it. These observations helped me decide that VTS would be a good assessment tool for hearing how students were applying the targeted vocabulary words to a work of art they had not seen before.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

This action research project was a qualitative project. During the project I collected data from one specific class period of *Exploring Art*. I was the lead instructor for this class during the period of data collection and had been since the beginning of the school year. The data collected was gathered from multiple sources such as pre-assessments and post-assessments, a teacher-field journal, oral and written formative assessments, student sketchbooks, and peer and self critiques.

### **Pre and Post Assessment**

At the beginning of unit, students were given a pre-assessment in the form of a selected response assessment to check for prior understanding of the vocabulary that was used for the unit. This allowed me to select an appropriate set of words that the students did not already know and would benefit from learning as they engaged in the unit on the element of line. I used the result of the pre-assessment to determine the 12 vocabulary words that I would track throughout the unit, because they supported the criteria about the line theme of the unit students were expected to learn. At the end of the unit, I designed and implemented a written response post-assessment that measured students' use of the targeted vocabulary words from the unit. I analyzed the data from the pre-assessments and post-assessments by comparing how students' use of content specific vocabulary changed from the beginning to the end of the unit.

### **Student Check-In**

I conducted daily brief, about 3-5 minutes each, individual student interviews with about ten students during their studio class period. The length and amount of students sometimes varied according to the daily bell schedule. The questions I asked students during check-ins were designed around the targeted content-specific vocabulary. This allowed me, through questioning, to examine how students were applying the vocabulary to their work, while it was in process, and to record whether or not a student had used any of the selected content-specific vocabulary. The content of these conversations were recorded by hand using a code that allowed me to track if a student had used a content specific vocabulary word. This also allowed me to see exactly how they were applying the new terminology to their projects during the studio work time. I analyzed the data from these interactions daily so I could take a closer look at how students' thoughts were developing throughout the project and how they were able to use the vocabulary of the assignment to practice engaging in studio conversations. It also allowed me to formatively assess which targeted vocabulary words individual learners were gaining fluency with and which words they needed more of an opportunity to practice with to gain fluency. Upon reviewing the data collected each day, I made generalizations about the whole class. These interactions gave me a clearer sense of how to adjust future oral and written formative assessments to meet the learning needs of my students based on where they were in their studio process. The interviews also helped me determine how to formatively adjust my teaching of the content-specific vocabulary for students who would benefit from more language support.

### **Student Journals / Sketchbook**

During the four-week unit, students were given exercises in their journal/sketchbooks to practice learning the content-specific vocabulary for the unit. They were asked to demonstrate their understanding of the content-specific vocabulary, both through use of written language and application of the new vocabulary to art-related drawing exercises. I collected the sketchbooks weekly and observed how students were utilizing content-specific vocabulary through writing and drawing. I coded and tracked trends in students understanding of specific words and used the information to inform the teaching moves I needed to make next. This sometimes meant speeding up or slowing down instruction according to the needs of the learners in the classroom. I analyzed the data from this source by reviewing the student entries weekly to check that they were working off correct and consistent definitions of the 12 vocabulary words being tracked over the course of the unit.

### **Teacher Field Journal**

My teacher field notes were taken after each class and consisted of my observations and reflections with regard to student-teacher interactions. I typically wrote brief notes to myself directly at the end of class and then revisited the notes at the end of the day to add in greater detail of what had happened during studio work time. This helped me strengthen my ability to document what I was observing along the way and reflect upon changes I perceived during my action research project. I used the journal to: track my thought process as I planned lessons, created expectations for a lesson, made notes of important student interactions, recorded ideas for future improvements, recorded observations about my teaching methods, determine what assessments

needed to occur next with individual learners and the whole class, and recorded my post lesson impression of my teaching. I used this journal to compare trends that I noticed throughout all of the data collection methods. At the end of the unit I went through the journal and coded themes that emerged and created categories for those reoccurring themes. After I analyzed this data source, I used it to triangulate with the other data sources to observe patterns. Identifying these patterns helped inform my understanding of the methodology of formative assessment and how it could change over the course of the project.

### **Limitations**

While implementing my action research project I found constraints in the process of conducting the project in my classroom setting. The art studio classroom was a complex environment, and I was a student teacher learning how to navigate my first placement. I was planning and conducting research while simultaneously lesson planning, improving my classroom management, learning new teaching strategies, improving my pedagogical practice and learning how to meet the learning needs of my students. I was also working under the guidance of a mentor teacher and had to adjust my practice to learn from his input and advice, so I could continue to improve as an educator.

Another area of concern was studying the relationship between formative assessment practices in a studio arts classroom and students' use of content specific vocabulary. As stated, the studio classroom was a complex environment particularly because students had the option of selecting from five different final projects about the element of line and each with its own criteria. Even though the 12 vocabulary words I

tracked applied to each project, the meaning of each word varied slightly from project to project, as did the students' approach to applying it. Additionally, in a studio classroom, students typically work at their own pace to meet the project due date; this meant that every student was at a unique stage of the project at any point when I checked in with them. As I was monitoring the day-to-day learning activities of the students, I was also practicing and learning how to use formative assessment in the moment to help advance student learning.

Time was another area of concern. The research period took place over a four week time period. Monitoring this practice, while collecting data, creating written assessments, monitoring students learning progress through studio check-in, and keeping current entries in a teacher field journal was challenging. However, I collected a variety of different types of data to triangulate the information in a way that helped me track and analyze patterns over such a short period of time. This strengthened the credibility of my research. Although I did not perform member checks during my action research project, I did strengthen the confirmability of my findings by having colleagues, on two different occasions, review my data sources and the analysis of them. These practices all helped me reflectively consider my action research project and how it involved my own biases as the practitioner. In describing my process and making clear the steps I took throughout the collection and analyzing phases of my research, I have attempted to provide thick, rich description so as to help future practitioners generalize my findings to their classroom setting. This strengthened the transferability of my research.

## CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this action research project I examined the relationship between formative assessment practices in a studio arts classroom and students' use of content specific vocabulary. In order to analyze this relationship, I collected data from multiple sources over the course of a four-week period. At the beginning of the unit I determined 12 content specific vocabulary words that I tracked throughout the course of my project and looked at how students were using those words overtime, if their use of the words was increasing, and how students' use of content specific vocabulary supported their learning. I tracked student use of vocabulary through pre-and post-assessments, teacher-student interaction during studio time, written formative assessments, student journals, and a written self-critique of their final project along with field notes from my teacher journal. Each of these data points allowed me to track student use of the 12 designated content specific vocabulary words and to determine patterns within these data sources.

### **Findings**

As I analyzed my data, I identified three themes around which my findings are organized. First, I found that during studio check ins students became more proficient using the content specific vocabulary during the four weeks. Over time students were able to use the vocabulary without needing prompting or scaffolding. My second finding was that as students' ability to use the language increased orally so did their ability to use the vocabulary when prompted in writing about their project. This led to my third finding which was that near the end of the eight studio classes students were able to use the vocabulary without being prompted or scaffold when writing about their work. All

of these findings have important implications for my future teaching practice, which will be discussed in the final sections.

### **Studio Check In**

Studio work time for students occurred over eight class periods during the four weeks data was collected. During work time, while students were engaged with individual projects I circulated around the studio checking in with individual students. The objective of these check ins were to formatively assess where students were in their learning progression and what they needed to do next on their project. I kept a clipboard with me that had a seating chart of the room with student names. This allowed me to record which students I had spoken with and to see if I was circulating the entire classroom and meeting with a variety of students, all while recording the content of the conversation I had with those students. In particular I was collecting coded data about how students had used the 12 vocabulary words. I was coding three specific aspects of the conversations. One, I was recording if the students used one of the words without being prompted during the interaction. Two, if they did not use the vocabulary without being prompted I would formatively assess what they needed to know in order to use the words and then scaffold my questions and prompts until they were able to use the targeted words. Sometimes this required reminding and encouraging students to check their sketchbooks as a resource because it contained all of vocabulary words along with the definitions and accompanying visual examples from the direct instruction at the beginning of the unit. In a reflection from my teaching field journal I noted that early in the studio process students sometimes seemed uncomfortable with such direct questioning. I recorded that I had the sense that at first they felt put on the spot by this

process. Over time I tried to be more sensitive to this reaction and softened my questioning. Additionally, I also noted that students seemed to become more comfortable with the questioning over time. I believe this was not only because of familiarity with the process but they had already heard and seen the repeated routine with other classmates as well.

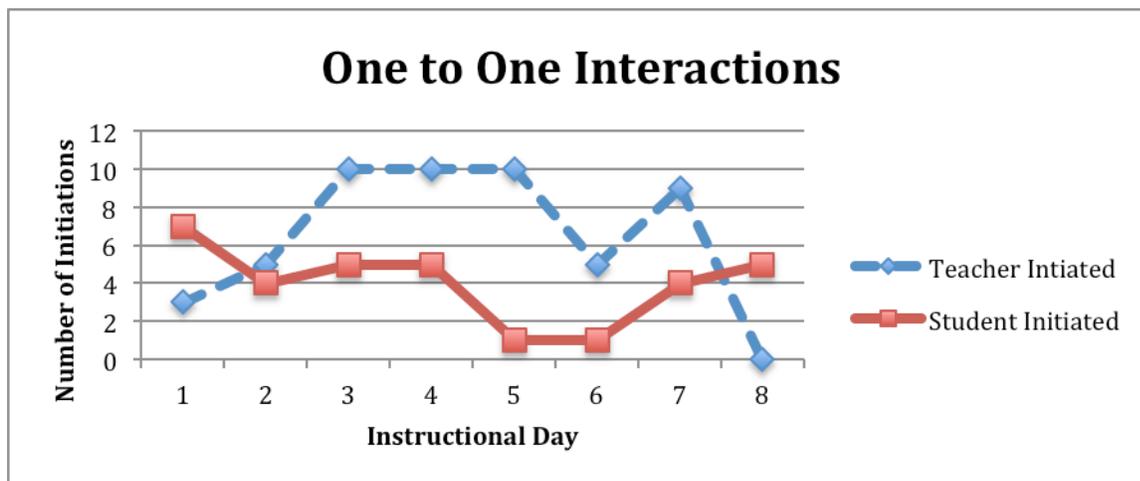
The third type of response I recorded was student use of prior vocabulary. This was not a criteria that I considered during the first two days I recorded data during studio work time. However, students were using prior vocabulary from the previous unit so consistently and it occurred with enough frequency amongst students I decided it was important to include it as a data point. Both students' entries from their sketchbook, which had the previous unit's vocabulary and my teaching journal confirmed what I was noticing about how students were using academic language from their zone of competence before transitioning into their zone of proximal development with the new vocabulary. In other words, I noticed that at the beginning of the project when formatively assessing students in studio conversation they would first use vocabulary from the prior unit to explain their ideas. I also noted that use of prior language could be used as valuable scaffold for helping students understand and attempt using the new vocabulary. The pattern was so consistent I felt it was important to affirm their prior knowledge and include it as a data point to establish a point from which they could explore practice using the new content specific language.

In this section I will present the data collected from the studio check ins and provide possible explanations for the outcomes I observed. The first pattern occurred during every studio period over the eight days of my data collection. I noticed that over

the course of the unit that students became more comfortable using the tracked vocabulary words in studio conversation. I would circulate the studio and talk with students about their projects while tracking their use of the terms and making notes about what I observed. I used a seating chart to make sure I was consistently moving around the room and checking in with different students each time. I was tracking the 12 targeted words and formatively assessing how students were applying them to their work. The 12 vocabulary words were important for this unit because they were words that more richly described the artistic element of line. I selected them from the information I had gathered from the pre-assessment at the beginning of the unit because students did not already know them nor were using them describe how line operates in works of art. These words were important for students to know and use in conversation to convey a deeper and nuanced understanding of how the element of line works in art. These 12 tracked words help students to practice talking about their work and using a varied and sophisticated understanding of line in studio conversation and will also support future learning of the elements of art. During these studio periods I also made notes on whether students initiated the conversation or if I did. I was also keeping track of whether the students used one or more of the words without being prompted or if I needed to scaffold the student with prompts to get them to use the word in conversation.

There were a total of 84 interactions over the eight days of studio where I engaged in a conversation with an individual student about their work. Of those interactions students initiated the conversation 32 times by getting my attention and engaging in a conversation where they used one or more of the 12 vocabulary words to

describe the project they were working on. I initiated the conversation with students the other 52 times by asking them questions about their work. Figure.1 below is a summary of those interactions across the eight studio periods.



There were four interesting points that emerged from this data collection point that happened on studio days one, two, three through seven, and eight. On day one there was the highest rate of student-initiated interactions. I believe this was because students were navigating the new criteria and vocabulary for the assignment and required assurance through check in that their actions were moving them towards meeting that criteria and learning objectives. In my teaching journal for that studio day I noted that students questions were centered on asking clarifying questions around the new vocabulary.

On day two the relationship between student-initiated and teacher-initiated check ins were almost even. In my journal I noted that students understood what learning was expected of them and were beginning to work independently on their projects. On this studio day I also recorded that students were often using vocabulary

from the prior unit when I was checking in with them. It was at this moment that I decided to add their use of prior vocabulary as a data collection point. Over the course of the data collection most of students' use of prior vocabulary happened at the very beginning during the first three studio days. Out of a total 84 interactions with students across eight studio periods students accessed prior language from the previous unit 30 times, 25 of which occurred during the first three class periods. During those conversations I would help the student make connections between the vocabulary from the prior unit to the new vocabulary by asking guiding question and helping to clarify misunderstandings and misconceptions. I observed that as students became more comfortable with the new vocabulary through practice using the 12 vocabulary words during studio they gradually replaced their use of prior vocabulary and began to primarily use the language from the current unit to discuss their work.

Between studio days three and seven, the check ins consisted primarily of my initiating the majority of the conversations and very few students initiating conversations. From the observations I recorded in my journal I noted that this seemed to happen because students were engaged in the making process. I noticed that they had fewer questions about how to use the vocabulary because they were developing greater fluency with it by how they use it talk about their work. However, I also noted that, when I initiated conversations about how they were making their work of art, students were both eager and open to engaging in a conversation around their process. These conversations played an important role by giving students the opportunity to practice applying the tracked vocabulary words to their process and product while developing fluency through studio conversations. It also allowed me to formatively

assess how they were using the words in dialogue, which then allowed me to scaffold any misunderstanding or misconceptions. When misconceptions occurred I first offered the student several scaffolds to help move their learning forward toward using the language. I noted an example of this in my journal. During an interaction initiated by a student, the student asked if they were using line correctly in their drawing. I told the student that they were using line correctly for their drawing. I then asked the student if they could name the kind of line they were using and the student said “a wavy line”. I asked the student if they could remember the name the class had learned for lines that were wavy, and the student paused for a few moments before answering “no”. I asked the student what might be a resource that would help them remember the name for wavy lines. The student then took out their sketchbook and turned to the page where they had recorded the vocabulary for the unit. After looking through the list of words the student asked “is it”? I told the student they were correct and, to check for understanding, followed up with “and how is a legato line different from a staccato line?” The student replied, “Legato lines are wavy and staccato lines are sharp and angular”. Another example of a studio check in I recorded in my journal was with a student where I initiated the conversation. I noticed the student was struggling to draw the contour line of the image they were working on. I asked the student “so tell me what you are working on”? The student replied that they were having a difficult time outlining the object they were trying to draw. The word outline was a vocabulary word from the prior unit. I asked the student to identify the edge, one of tracked vocabulary words from the current unit, of what they were trying to draw. The student traced the edge of the object they were trying to draw with their finger, so I asked “do you remember edges are what we see.

What do we draw”? The student replied “contour”. Contour was the word from the current unit that had a very similar definition as outline. By prompting the student this way I was able to scaffold their response and get them to replace a prior vocabulary word with word from the current unit.

When these types of supports did not work I asked the student to refer back to their sketchbook as a resource for accessing the vocabulary as their sketchbooks contained the correct definitions from the beginning of the unit. Of the 84 studio interactions, both teacher and student initiated combined; I provided scaffolds in 37 of the exchanges to prompt students to use the targeted vocabulary. Of the remaining 47 interactions students used the vocabulary without being prompted during studio check in.

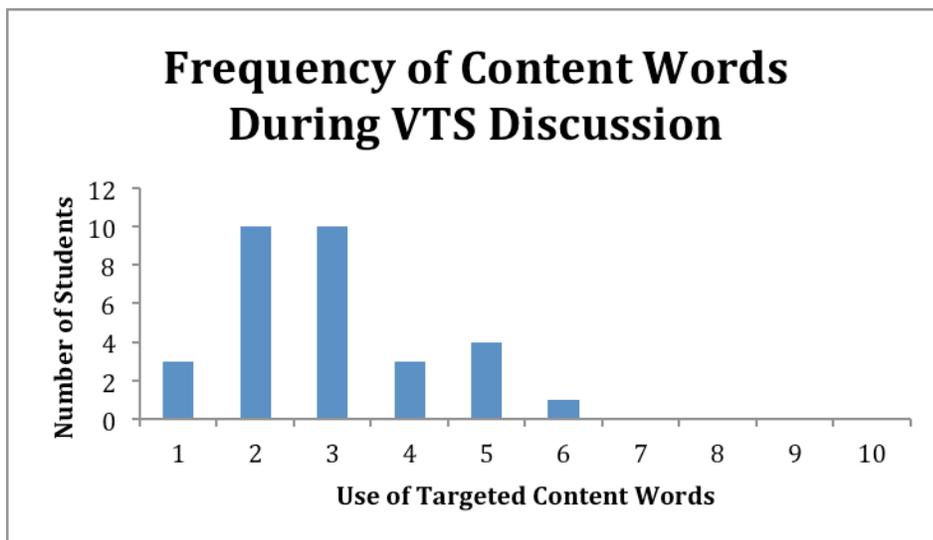
One last point of interest, on the eighth studio day, there was a noticeable increase of student initiated exchanges and a decrease in teacher prompted. This was the final studio period before students submitted their finished assignment. I noted in my field journal that students were checking in frequently to make sure that they had properly met the criteria for the learning targets of the assignment. They were self regulating their learning by initiating conversations with me in greater frequency as compared to the previous several class periods. I believe this was because the students were confident about taking an active role in their learning while completing their projects. I noted in my journal that students were comfortably talking about their work using the vocabulary words, more so then they had been at the beginning of the unit. My data collected from that studio day also showed that I provided no scaffolds or prompts during those interactions. Not only were students initiating conversation about

their project, they were also using the content specific vocabulary without being encouraged to do so. This demonstrated to me that students had internalized this language as an aspect of art making. An important part of learning to become an artist is being able to describe the thought process used while making an artwork and how those choices supported the overall meaning conveyed by the final work of art. Being able to do this fluently using the correct vocabulary demonstrates the depth of understanding about what they have learned while creating their work of art. The words selected for this action research study were selected to help students learn how to engage in this process of becoming an artist.

In addition to studio check ins I also had students participate in a whole class VTS exercise on the fifth day of the unit. Through the data I had collected from check ins, their first written assessment, and my reflections in my journal I had noticed that students were beginning to use the tracked words with greater fluency while needing less prompting to do so. I decided to use a VTS exercise as a formative assessment to test this wondering because it is teacher facilitated and students do all of the talking. I was curious to hear how students would apply the words to a work of art about line without being prompted or provided a scaffold. I projected an image that contained multiple examples of line that could be described using the focus vocabulary words. I gave students three minutes of silent reflection viewing the image before asking, “What is going on in this image?” and then following up with “What do you see that makes you say that”?

As students engaged in a conversation focused around the image I made note of how often and which students used the tracked vocabulary words to describe what they

were seeing. As can be seen in Figure 3, three students used one of the tracked vocabulary words during the discussion, ten students used two, ten students used three, three students used four, four students used five and one student used six vocabulary words from the unit to describe what they were seeing in the image.



Through the data I collected during the VTS exercise and notes written in my journal I noticed that almost all of the class participated in the conversation about the image. This was important because up until that point in the unit I had only heard from a few students at a time during each of the one on one studio check ins. The strong class participation in the VTS activity demonstrated that they were now able to apply the targeted vocabulary words during a group discussion as well. Students had also applied the vocabulary words correctly to the image that was being talked about. This was important because it demonstrated that not only had students become more comfortable with the focus vocabulary words, they were also able to apply them correctly during a group conversation where no teacher prompts or scaffolds were provided. Another observation I made from the VTS activity was that students were now able to generalize the words to a novel work of art they had up until this point only been

applying to their own work. Up until this point I had only assessed whether or not students were able to apply the targeted vocabulary words to familiar examples of it such as their own work or examples given during class time. Their participation demonstrated to me that they had learned the vocabulary well enough that they were able to use it to talk about a work of art they had never seen before.

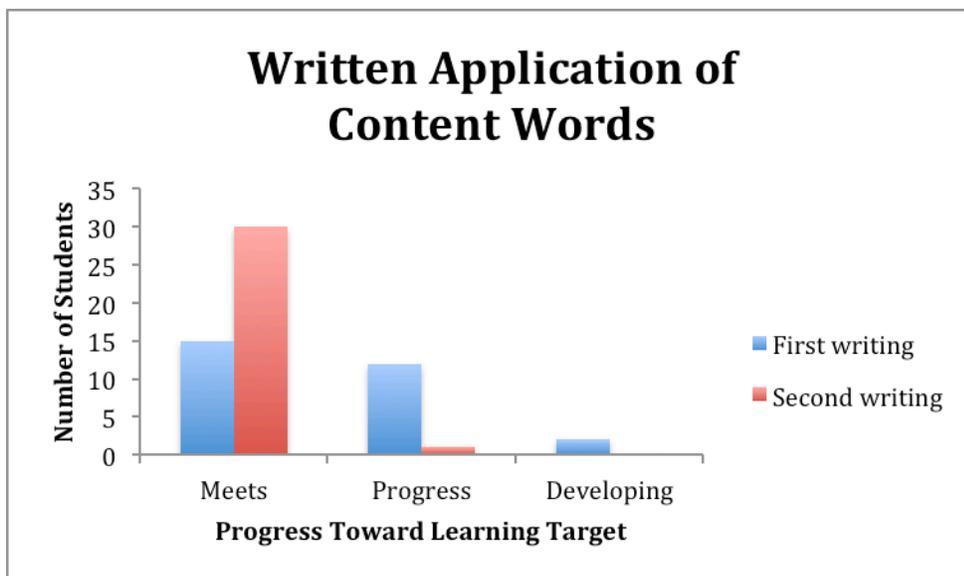
### **Written Formative Assessments**

As students began to internalize the vocabulary, I noticed that their understanding and appropriate use of the words also showed up in their writing. Overall, students demonstrated an increased use of the vocabulary between the two written assessments in which they were prompted to use the vocabulary by applying it to an image about line. Based on my analysis of the data I was collecting during student check ins and my field journal I found that students' use of the tracked vocabulary words increased significantly more than I originally expected. Written formative assessments were given at the beginning of class on the third and sixth days of the studio cycle. I prepared both of these written assessments in response to patterns that I noticed from studio check in time with students. Each assessment was designed around the misconceptions or misunderstandings I noticed students had related to the same word(s). In the first written assessment students were asked to write about legato and staccato, for the second assessment students were asked to write about edge and contour.

My strategy for both of the written assessments was to spend five minutes reviewing the words with the whole class at the beginning of the period before giving them the written assessment. I began by asking students to take out their sketchbooks

to use as a reference as they had all recorded the definition of the word at the beginning of the unit during direct instruction. Once students had out their sketchbooks we went over the definition again and looked at several examples and non-examples of how the vocabulary word would appear visually in a work of art. I encouraged the students to add any new insights or understanding they gained about the words from the review to their sketchbook. At the end of this review I gave students the written formative assessment to complete to see how they understood the word after the review.

The written assessments required that students used the two reviewed targeted words by first looking at an image and then using those words to describe how line was working in the image using one to two complete sentences.



After the first writing assessment on the third studio day there were 15 students in the meeting category, 12 in the progressing category, and two in the developing category (See Figure 2). A student in the developing category attempted to use the vocabulary but only to name the line represented in the image. For example, one student in this category wrote on their assessment “This image has a legato line”. A

student in the progressing category was able to name one type of line being used with the correct vocabulary and give an example of it from the image. This sounded like “The line used in this image is a legato line because it is wavy and rounded”. A student in the meeting category could use both of the reviewed vocabulary terms and provide direct examples from the image being viewed.

This assessment took place early in the unit but captured how students were still in the process of learning to use the content specific vocabulary words particularly while applying it to the novel task of writing. At the time of the assessment I reflected in my notes that the results of the assessment seemed to accurately reflect where the students were in their learning progression. The assessment results also helped me to form a strategy to continue to check in with the students who fell into the progressing and developing categories. I made notes to myself to follow up with those students during the fourth studio work period to continue assessing how they were progressing in their understanding and use of the vocabulary words.

The second writing assessment took place on the sixth day of the studio cycle. I repeated the same process I had implemented for the first one but with different words from the tracked vocabulary words. This time the focus words were edge and contour. After the second assessment, 30 students were in the meeting category, one was in the progressing category, and none of the students were in the developing category. Based on these results, I inferred that students demonstrated an even stronger understanding of the vocabulary because they had had several more studio days to practice using those words. After six days working in the studio, students had more practice using the vocabulary from check ins and applying the words to their work. I noted in my journal

that I also wondered if this had happened because students had more opportunities to hear the language being used by their classmates during causal conversation during studio both with their peers and me. Although I was not tracking that type of interaction I noted it in my observations because peer-to-peer conversations using the content specific vocabulary occurred with greater frequency as the unit progressed and this meant more opportunities for students to hear the words being used in conversation. This also led me to wonder if it had helped students to hear their teacher in conversations with their peers using the 12 content specific vocabulary words about line. Often as I performed check ins during studio with individual students there were several more within listening range that could hear the conversations and perhaps benefit from the conversational exchanges.

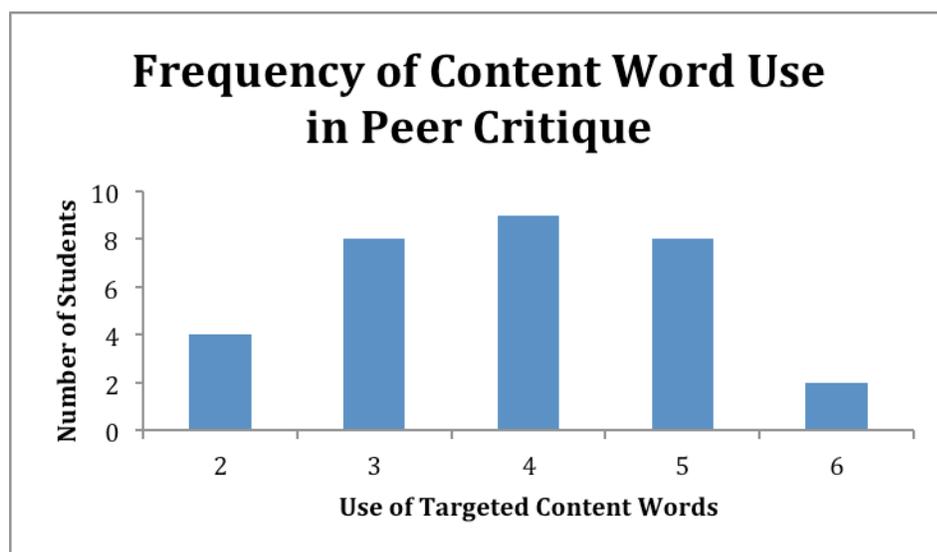
The goal of this study was to investigate the relationship between formative assessment and student use of content specific vocabulary. Through analyzing the results of the student's written assessments, my observations recorded in my teacher journal, and the formative assessments taking place during studio check ins there seemed to be a pattern emerging that these practices were supporting and increasing student use of content specific vocabulary as I heard an increased use of students using the words to talk about their work.

### **Content Specific Vocabulary Use in Peer-Critique and Self-Critique**

My analysis of the studio check ins, written critiques and the VTS exercise all showed me how students were using the vocabulary words during studio work time to talk about their work. Through the formative assessments I had also noticed that they were able to correctly apply the words and were developing fluency with them. For the

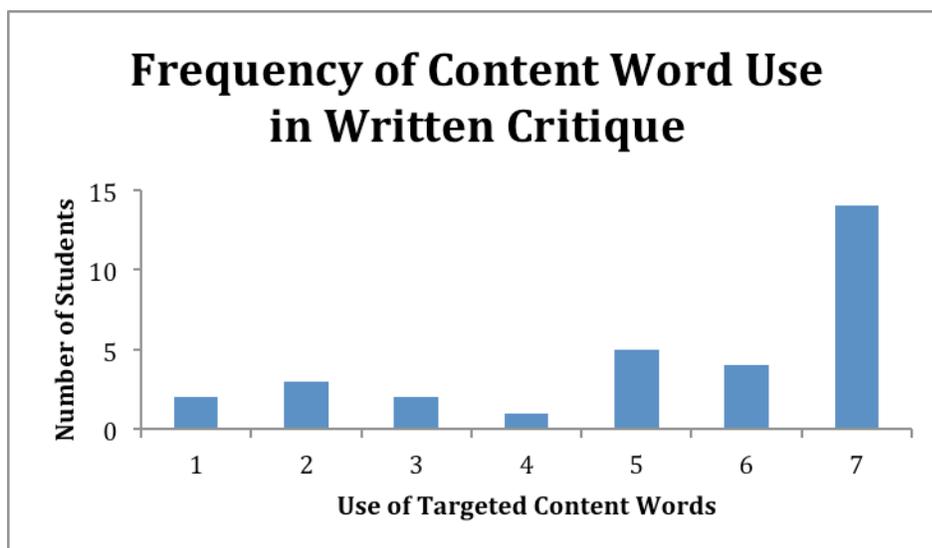
remaining two assessments I wanted to determine if students could now apply the words in written form without being prompted. Use of language shapes student learning and peer to peer feedback helps demonstrate how students are applying what they have learned” (Onore, 1992). I was curious if by no longer providing scaffolds and prompts if students would use the focus work to discuss their work and the work of their peers, if they could put the learning into their own words. Students had demonstrated a strong unprompted use of the vocabulary words during the oral VTS exercise and the two written assessments, I was curious if they could apply the content specific words to their classmate’s projects through writing.

Once they had each completed creating their work of art on the second to last day of the unit on line, students were asked to work in pairs to critique each other’s finished artwork. Without using their sketchbooks or any other resources, students were asked to spend thirty minutes writing a description of their classmate’s work using as many of the 12 words as they could. As seen in Figure 4, unprompted student use of the targeted vocabulary occurred was performed by all of the students.



In my reflection I felt this assessment demonstrated a strong overall use of the vocabulary for students to write about their classmate's work. They were able to increase their understanding of the vocabulary of line to express how it was working in their classmate's art through writing about it. Not only were they able to use the words correctly they were also able to use the focus words to describe how their classmates had applied the words in their artwork to meet the criteria for the assignment.

This finding made me curious if they could also write about their own work with similar success. On the last day of the unit the class was asked to write a critique of their own project using the vocabulary from the unit but without using their sketchbooks as references. In this assessment illustrated in Figure 5 students were equally, and in most cases even more, successful in applying the vocabulary words to their own work. I believe this happened because students had been given many opportunities during the eight studio periods through check ins with the teacher, through studio conversations using the vocabulary and the two written assessments to practice and receive feedback on how they were applying the language and therefore had great success applying it to their own works of art.



The 12 targeted words that were tracked for this unit included: line, contour, gesture, edge, staccato, legato, line expression, direction, movement, thickness, length and abstract. One student who used two vocabulary words said “I used *line* to draw the *abstract* feeling of chilln’ cause there are no pictures in my drawing”. Another student wrote about their work using five focus words saying “For this drawing I used line expressions that represent how butterflies make me feel. Butterflies make me feel calm so I used legato lines not staccato lines to draw an abstract picture of a butterfly. I repeated the line multiple times to make the picture show the gestural movement of the butterfly”. A different student who used five words stated “The image I created was a line expressive image. My image is abstract because it is not representational. I used both staccato and legato line to express movement in my image and create a feeling of frustration”. An example of a student who used seven words read “I used line expression to create a feeling of tension in my abstract art work. I used staccato lines to show anger and legato lines to show tranquility by having them move in different directions against each other to create a feeling of tension. I also made my anger line short in length and sharp feeling and my tranquility lines wavy to create feeling of waves for the anger to move through”.

All of the above examples were successful examples of how students applied the 12 focus words about line to their artwork to demonstrate how they met the criteria for the assignment. Students’ writing also illustrated how they were able to increase their ability to discuss their personal expression of their artwork by using the vocabulary of the unit. Their access to more detailed language about line gave students the

opportunity to describe their work in their own words. This happened through self-assessment of how they used line to meet the criteria for the assignment.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Before beginning my action research project I observed that, in a Visual Arts studio classroom, students' skills in making artwork took precedence over being able to talk about how the work was made. I found this problematic because often students would reach the end of a project and not be able describe their work or the processes they had used to create it using content specific vocabulary. I became curious if the time during studio could be used to increase student talk about concepts directly related to visual art. While reviewing literature I learned that formative assessment could be an effective way to encourage students to practice using content specific vocabulary through conversations between student and teacher. As I read the research literature about assessment practices, I learned that "in classrooms where assessment for learning is practiced, students are encouraged to be more active in their learning and associated assessment" (Wiggins, 2011). I then became curious about the relationship between formative assessment practices in a studio arts classroom and students' use of content specific vocabulary.

Reading the literature on formative assessment three themes emerged from the literature; making criteria clear, using clear criteria to engage students in dialogues about making, and using formative assessment to move students' learning forward. In the following section I will draw on the literature, my observations of student learning during my action research project, and the three patterns that developed to make recommendations for future implementation of my teaching practice.

The first adaption I would make to my practice concerns how making criteria clear to students allows them to better understand what learning is expected of them. “Using content specific language to talk about the criteria inherent in the studio process of creating artwork helps students clearly understand and demonstrate what learning is expected of them” (Hetland, Cajolet, & Music, 2009). The observations from my research project confirmed that focusing on teaching students to use content specific vocabulary and providing opportunities to practice using it in studio dialogues helped students gain fluency in applying the terms to both their process and product. This causes me to consider the importance of implementing a further practice that includes learning more strategies to formatively assess students using content specific vocabulary. This would help me support practices in the studio that provide students feedback in a way that helps them move their learning forward through creating more opportunities for conversations in the studio classroom centered on content specific vocabulary.

A second observation I noticed was that clear criteria could help students know what to talk about during studio work time which can create more focused, academic conversations. Moreover, “students exposed to examples of teacher-student and peer dialogue in a classroom environment are more likely to feel comfortable engaging in art-centered conversation themselves “ (Johanson, 1982). I would be interested in building on the student-teacher conversations to include more peer-to-peer conversations. A practice I would consider using in the future that could support peer-to-peer interactions would be teaching and implementing groupwork strategies into the studio practice. This would not only increase opportunities for students to talk with and learn from one

another but also teach them the routines about how to talk and listen while giving them the feedback necessary to improve. This would also build on students' interest in talking with one another but also guide their talk toward being more academic in content.

A third recommendation for my future implementation of practice is related to the role of assessment in the Visual Arts classroom. Through my research I learned the importance of teaching students what to talk about using content specific vocabulary and providing opportunities for them to practice this talk during studio work time. Additionally, my observations from my research showed me that using the vocabulary in tandem with formative assessment helped them to self direct their learning while making strong oral connections between their work and the vocabulary. In addition to the oral language, the prevalence of the vocabulary use by students in their written formative assessment was also noticeable. In the future I would be interested in using writing as a way of supporting the development of content specific vocabulary.

Lastly assessment for learning is the use of a task or an activity for the purpose of determining student progress towards a learning target. Implementing formative assessment strategies in my studio classroom afforded me the chance to adjust classroom instruction based upon the needs of the students while giving students in-the-moment feedback on their own learning. This was coupled with increasing the use of content specific vocabulary so students could voice their learning using content specific vocabulary. I found that I often reflected in my journal how much I enjoyed the formative assessment process in the studio. I appreciated how it focused me to engage students in intentional conversations about where they were at in the process of making art and what steps they needed to take next to move their learning forward. I am

interested in learning more about assessment as learning. I believe this practice would push me to continue to create learning tasks and activities that guide students towards learning objectives while allowing students the opportunity to use assessment to understand their own learning. "Self and peer assessments allow students to reflect on their own learning and identify areas of strength and need" (Dorn, 2003). I see assessment as learning as a chance support students to set their own personal goals, voice what they have learned and how to take charge of their own learning.

## References

- Al-Amri, M. (2011). Assessment techniques practiced in teaching art at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman. *International Journal of Education through Art*, 7(3), 267-282.
- Alverman, L. (1996). Peer-led discussions: Whose interests are served? *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 39, 282-289.
- Barrett, T. (2004). Improving student dialogue about art. *Teaching Artist Journal*, 2(2), 87-94.
- Bresler, L. (1994). Imitative, complementary, and expansive: Three roles of visual arts curricula. *Studies in Art Education*, 35(2), 90-104.
- Brewer, T. (2008). Developing a bundled visual arts assessment model. *Visual Arts Research*, 34(66), 63-74.
- Carroll, M., Goldman, S., Britos, L., Koh, J., Royalty, A., & Hornstein, M. (2010). Destination, imagination and the fires within: Design thinking in a middle school classroom. *Journal of Art & Design Education*, 29(1), 37-53.
- DeLuca, C. (2010). The capacity of assessment in arts education. *Encounters on Education*, 11(3), 3-12.
- de la Harpe, B., & Peterson, F. (2008). *A model for holistic studio assessment in the creative disciplines*. Paper presented at the ATN Assessment Conference 2008, Adelaide, Australia.

- de la Harpe, B., Peterson, F., Frankham, N., Zehner, R., Neale, D., Musgrave, E., & McDermott, R. (2009). Assessment focus in studio: What is most prominent in architecture, art and design?. *Journal of Art and Design Education*, 28(1), 37-51.
- Dorn, C. (2003). Models for assessing art performance (MAPP): A k-12 project. *Studies in Art Education*, 44(4), 350-370.
- Eisner, E. (1996). Overview of evaluations and assessment; Concepts in search of practice. In D. Boughton, E. W. Eisner, & J. Ligtvoet (Eds.). *Evaluating and assessing the visual arts in education: International perspectives* (p. 1-16) New York: Teachers College Press.
- Exley, B. (2008). Visual arts declarative knowledge: Tensions in theory, resolutions in practice. *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 27(3), 309-319.
- Gruber, D. (2008). Student learning in art education. *Art Education*, 61(5), 40-45.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*. 77(1), 81-112.
- Havnes, A., Smith, K., Dysthe, O., & Ludvigsen, K. (2012). Formative assessment and feedback: Making learning visible. *Studies in Education Evaluation*, 38, 21-27.
- Hetland, L., Cajolet, S., & Music, L. (2009). Documentation in the visual arts: Embedding a common language from research. *Theory Into Practice*, 49(1), 55-63.
- Johansen, P. (1982). Teaching aesthetic discerning through art. *Studies in Art Education*, 23(2), 6-13.

- Lindstrom, Lars. "Understanding the Creative Mind: Portfolio Assessment in the Visual Arts." The 13th International Conference on Thinking [Conference]. Norrköping. 17 Jun. 2007.
- Mertens, D. (2010). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Miles, A. (2010). Dialogic encounters as art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 51(4), 375-379.
- Onore, C. S. (1992). Negotiation, language, and inquiry: Building knowledge collaboratively in the classroom. In G. Boomer, N. Lester, C. Onore & J. Cook (Eds.), *Negotiating the curriculum: Educating for the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (pp. 181 – 194). London: Falmer Press.
- Parr, T., & Timperley, H. (2010). Feedback to writing, assessment for teaching and learning and student progress. *Assessing Writing*, 15, 68-85.
- Pennisi, A. (2013). Negotiating to engagement: Creating an art curriculum with eighth graders. *Studies in Art Education*, 54(2), 127-142.
- Popovich, K. (2006). Designing and implementing exemplary content, curriculum, and assessment in art education. *Art Education*, 59(6), 33-39.
- Sabol, R. (2006). Identifying exemplary criteria to evaluate studio products in art education. *Art Education*, 59(6), 6-11.
- Stiggins, R. (2002). Assessment crisis: The absence of assessment for learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(10), 158-165.
- Thurlings, M., Vermeulen, M., Bastiaens, T., & Stijnen, S. (2013). Understanding feedback: A learning theory perspective. *Educational Research Review*, 9, 1-15.

Winner, E., & Hetland, L. (2008). Art for our sake. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 4(2), 1-5.

Wiggins, G. (2011). A true test toward more authentic and equitable assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan* 92(7), 81-93.

Yenawine, P. (2013). *Visual Thinking Strategies: Using Art to Deepen Learning Across School Disciplines*. Harvard Education Publishing Group.

