

Article

Performance Assessment in Junior High School Art Creative Teaching: Practice and Reflection

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Abstract: As a competency-oriented assessment approach, performance assessment holds distinctive applicability and value in junior high school art creative teaching. The Compulsory Education Art Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) explicitly mandates the emphasis on performance assessment, signaling a paradigm shift in art education evaluation. This study employs a multiple-case qualitative research method, selecting three junior high school art creative teaching cases—"Color and Emotion Expression," "Picture Book Story Creation," and "Campus Landscape Design"—corresponding to the three learning domains of "Modeling and Expression," "Design and Application," and "Comprehensive and Exploration," respectively. It systematically examines the operational pathways of performance assessment across four key stages: objective setting, task design, rubric development, and feedback implementation. The findings reveal that performance assessment effectively stimulates students' creative practice abilities, facilitates deep learning, and achieves the integration of teaching, learning, and assessment. However, it also faces four interrelated challenges: the structural dilemma of rubrics (the balance between standardization and openness), the practical limitations of class time and class size, the bottleneck of teacher assessment literacy, and the institutional difficulty of aligning performance assessment with high-stakes examination systems. Accordingly, this paper proposes improvement strategies including the development of school-based assessment toolkits, the institutionalization of process portfolios, targeted professional development programs for teacher assessment literacy, and the exploration of integration mechanisms between performance assessment and summative evaluation, emphasizing the need to move from tool-level application to ecosystem-level construction.

Keywords: performance assessment; art education; creative teaching; assessment rubric; teaching-learning-assessment integration

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Problem Statement

Assessment is one of the most influential components of instructional activities [1]. In junior high school art creative teaching, assessment methods directly shape students' understanding of "what constitutes a good work" and "what is worth pursuing," thereby profoundly influencing the direction of creative behavior and the development of thinking dispositions. However, for a long time, there has been a structural contradiction in assessment practices: the essence of creation is open, diverse, and personally expressive, yet assessment has often been reduced to a grading system—teachers judge works primarily on technical proficiency and visual effects, neglecting core dimensions such as creativity and emotional expression. This approach leads students to focus excessively on meeting technical standards while overlooking the heart of art—innovation and emotional expression.

The Compulsory Education Art Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) establishes "aesthetic perception, artistic expression, creative practice, and cultural understanding" as the four core competencies of the art discipline, requiring art education to shift from skills training to competency-based deep learning. The standards explicitly emphasize

Received: 02 June 2026

Revised: 24 July 2026

Accepted: 03 August 2026

Published: 07 August 2026



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performance assessment in their evaluation recommendations, calling for qualitative analysis of students' art learning alongside other complementary assessment methods. This signifies that assessment in art creative teaching must shift from judging the quality of final works to diagnosing the development of core competencies, and from summative grading to ongoing, process-oriented observation [1].

Performance assessment is intrinsically aligned with the logic of art creative teaching—art creation itself is a process of applying knowledge, skills, and creativity to solve problems in authentic or simulated contexts [2]. How, then, can performance assessment be concretely implemented in junior high school art creative teaching classrooms? What practical challenges does it face? How can it be continuously improved? This paper addresses these questions through theoretical analysis and multi-case examination.

1.2. Research Method and Paper Structure

This study adopts a multiple-case qualitative design grounded in the interpretive case study paradigm [1]. Cases are selected using maximum variation sampling: the three cases represent the curriculum-defined domains of "Modeling and Expression," "Design and Application," and "Comprehensive and Exploration," enabling examination of how performance assessment functions across distinct creative teaching contexts and identifying both domain-specific applicability and cross-domain patterns.

Data collection encompasses four sources: (1) classroom observation records spanning three to four weeks per case, supplemented by teacher logs and anecdotal notes on student behaviors; (2) student work portfolios containing sketches, final artifacts, artist statements, and revision documentation; (3) semi-structured interviews with nine students per case—three each from high-, medium-, and low-achievement groups—yielding twenty-seven participants total; and (4) peer critique texts and teacher scoring records [1]. Thematic analysis was applied to all qualitative data, with coding conducted collaboratively by the researcher and a peer teacher-researcher; inter-coder reliability reached 0.83.

Case analysis follows a replication logic: findings from each case are examined independently; convergent conclusions reinforce validity, while divergent outcomes undergo difference-context analysis to uncover contextual determinants [1]. All participant and institutional identifiers have been fully anonymized.

The paper proceeds as follows: theoretical foundations, practice framework, presentation of the three cases, cross-case comparison, critical reflection on challenges, and evidence-informed improvement strategies.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Policy Context of Performance Assessment

2.1. Defining Performance Assessment

Performance assessment emerged prominently in the late 1980s and early 1990s, coinciding with global educational reforms emphasizing standards-based learning and responding to recognized limitations of conventional paper-and-pencil tests in evaluating complex cognitive and practical competencies. It is understood as an approach that evaluates students' capacity to apply knowledge and skills both within academic settings and in broader real-world contexts. Theoretically, it is characterized by four interrelated features: contextual authenticity—requiring tasks that closely mirror real-life situations; process orientation—attending not only to final outcomes but also to problem analysis, strategy formulation, and iterative refinement; emphasis on higher-order thinking—prioritizing problem-solving, critical analysis, and creative application over rote recall or procedural replication; and instructional integration—embedding assessment seamlessly within teaching, such that assessment tasks simultaneously serve as meaningful learning activities [3].

2.2. Theoretical Grounding

The theoretical foundations of performance assessment are rooted in constructivist learning theory, which posits that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through interaction with their environment; accordingly, assessment should focus on observing the process of knowledge construction within authentic learning contexts rather than measuring static knowledge retention [2].

The Zone of Proximal Development provides another key theoretical basis for performance assessment. It emphasizes evaluating not only what learners can achieve independently but also their capacity for growth when supported by timely guidance. This perspective underpins the centrality of process-oriented feedback: through sustained dialogue, strategic prompting, and modeling, educators support learners' development while continuously monitoring progress. The related framework of Dynamic Assessment integrates iterative cycles of assessment, instructional support, and follow-up evaluation—aligning closely with the portfolio-based, staged feedback design adopted in this study.

In art education, core competencies—including image reading, artistic expression, aesthetic judgment, creative practice, and cultural understanding—exhibit inherently performative qualities: they are holistic capabilities demonstrated through acts of creation and appreciation, rather than discrete factual content amenable to atomized testing. Consequently, performance assessment offers a methodologically congruent approach to cultivating these competencies [4].

2.3. Policy Basis

The 2022 edition of the Compulsory Education Art Curriculum Standards establishes a clear policy foundation for implementing performance assessment. These standards prioritize competency development in curriculum design and explicitly advocate for 'emphasizing performance assessment' in evaluation guidance. This policy direction holds significant practical value: historically, art education evaluation in primary and secondary schools has relied heavily on numerical scoring, which indicates students' achievement levels but overlooks the depth of cognitive engagement and emotional involvement in artistic creation. Performance assessment seeks to overcome the entrenched practice of equating evaluation solely with grading and reaffirms assessment's core purposes—supporting learning, diagnosing developmental progress, and fostering student growth.

3. A Practice Framework for Performance Assessment in Junior High School Art Creative Teaching

3.1. Four Core Stages

Implementing performance assessment in junior high school art creative teaching requires an operational framework, structured around four interconnected core stages [5].

Stage 1: Defining Performance Objectives. Unlike traditional objectives centered on knowledge and skills, performance objectives emphasize demonstrable capabilities—what students can do and the quality with which they do it after completing creative tasks. These statements must be specific, observable, and directly aligned with core artistic competencies [6]. For example, instead of stating "cultivate creative practice ability," a precise objective would be "students generate at least three distinct creative approaches to a given theme and select one for further development."

Stage 2: Designing Performance Tasks [7]. Tasks serve as the primary vehicle for assessment and must satisfy three essential criteria: authenticity, openness, and appropriateness (detailed in Subsection 3.2).

Stage 3: Developing Assessment Rubrics. Rubrics translate abstract evaluation standards into concrete, observable dimensions, each accompanied by level-specific descriptors. This shifts assessment from impression-based judgment to evidence-based evaluation. In art creative teaching, common rubric dimensions include conception and creativity, technique and expressive application, emotional and thematic communication, and reflection and iterative improvement [8].

Stage 4: Implementing Assessment and Feedback. Assessment should occur continuously—through conception exchanges at the outset, draft discussions and revisions during the creative process, and exhibition-based critique upon completion—each phase offering distinct assessment opportunities. Feedback must be constructive, specifying not only areas needing refinement but also actionable strategies for enhancement.

A critical distinction must be clarified: performance assessment and project-based learning are conceptually distinct. Project-based learning is an instructional approach organized around learning through sustained project engagement; performance assessment is an evaluation methodology focused on judging learning outcomes through direct observation of task performance. Although these practices frequently co-occur in classroom settings, this paper centers exclusively on the assessment methodology—analyzing how assessment tasks are designed, rubrics are constructed, and feedback is delivered—rather than pedagogical strategies for project implementation [9].

3.2. Principles for Designing Performance Tasks

The design of performance tasks must satisfy three interrelated principles. Authenticity requires that tasks function as meaningful creative activities rather than artificial assessment exercises; students should perceive them as purposeful endeavors with real-world relevance, not merely as assigned work. For instance, "designing a poster for the school's campus culture festival" demonstrates higher authenticity than "painting a poster," because it involves a genuine context—such as a real client (the school), a concrete purpose (event promotion), and an authentic audience (the broader school community). Openness requires that tasks avoid prescribing a single correct solution or model output; artistic creation fundamentally centers on individual expression, and assessment tasks that admit only one acceptable outcome contradict this principle. Such open tasks support flexible interpretation of themes, diverse material choices, and varied modes of expression. Appropriateness requires alignment between task complexity and students' developmental level—tasks that are overly simplistic fail to elicit deep cognitive engagement, while those that exceed students' current capacities may hinder learning. A structured framework incorporating Goal, Role, Audience, Situation, Performance or Product, and Standards offers practical guidance for implementing these principles.

4. Practice Cases: Three Explorations of Performance Assessment in Junior High School Art Creative Teaching

4.1. Case 1: "Color and Emotion Expression"—Performance Assessment in a Color Unit

4.1.1. Case Background

This case was implemented in a Grade 7 class at an ordinary junior high school in a Chinese city, with 45 students, as part of the instructional unit "The Charm of Color." In conventional instruction, color knowledge is typically delivered through teacher-led lectures, followed by student completion of standardized color exercises; assessment relies primarily on visual quality. As a result, students may recall factual information about color but often lack deep understanding of how color conveys emotion [1].

4.1.2. Performance Task Design

A performance task titled "Color and Emotion Expression Competition" was designed. During the school's Mental Health Education Month, the counseling office requested student-created works themed around "color and emotion" to decorate an emotional expression corner. Each student selected a recently experienced emotion, used color knowledge to visually convey it, and provided a concise artist statement.

4.1.3. Rubric Development

A rubric was collaboratively developed by the teacher and students, covering four dimensions: accuracy of emotional communication (30%), richness and harmony of color application (25%), creativity and personal expression (25%), and quality of reflection in

the artist statement (20%), each assessed across four performance levels—"Excellent," "Good," "Satisfactory," and "Needs Improvement."

4.1.4. Implementation and Feedback

Assessment was integrated throughout the creative process: during conception, students submitted a "Color Emotion Plan" for initial teacher feedback; during implementation, the teacher monitored color-mixing attempts and adjustments through classroom observation; upon completion, a classroom "gallery walk" and structured peer critique were conducted. Final feedback was delivered via a "radar chart" accompanied by specific, actionable improvement suggestions [9].

4.1.5. Outcomes and Reflections

Students' creative motivation increased significantly, and their understanding of color progressed from "knowing" to "applying." However, this case revealed a structural limitation in rubric design: one student conveyed the emotion of "nothingness" through a "blank canvas + a single line"—minimalist in execution yet highly effective in emotional expression—yet the rubric's "richness of color application" criterion assigned a low score. This situation highlights an important consideration: when student creativity demonstrates exceptional insight beyond standard criteria, how should evaluation adapt? The provisional approach adopted in this study was to introduce an "Unexpected Excellence" category at the end of the rubric, allowing teachers discretionary bonus points, while framing the rubric as a "basic evaluation framework" rather than a rigid checklist [3]. Nevertheless, this issue remains unresolved at the institutional level.

4.2. Case 2: "Picture Book Story Creation"—Embedding Performance Assessment in a Unit

4.2.1. Case Background

This case originates from an action research study conducted within a junior high school unit entitled "Picture Book Story," spanning a six-week instructional period [10]. The central task required students to collaboratively produce a complete picture book through group work, encompassing multiple sequential stages: script writing, storyboard design, illustration, layout composition, and bookbinding.

4.2.2. Embedding Performance Assessment

Performance assessment was embedded throughout the entire process, with four designated assessment nodes: (1) story conception and script development—evaluating originality and structural completeness; (2) character and scene design—assessing character recognizability and expressiveness; (3) final illustration and production—examining technique application and collaboration efficiency; and (4) completion and exhibition—employing rubric assessment, portfolio assessment, and presentation evaluation in combination [7].

4.2.3. Distinctive Features of the Rubric

A distinctive feature of the rubric was the inclusion of a "team collaboration" dimension, encompassing timely completion of assigned tasks, active participation in group discussions and decision-making, and proactive exchange of support when encountering difficulties. Another feature was the documentation of "growth trajectories"—each student maintained a process portfolio and composed a "creative growth narrative" at the conclusion of the unit.

4.2.4. Outcomes and Reflections

Students shifted focus from solely evaluating the final product's appearance to engaging reflectively with their processes of conception, revision, and growth [11]. Implementation encountered practical difficulties: in the fourth week, one group fell a full week behind schedule due to divergent views on narrative direction—specifically, whether to develop a "sci-fi adventure" or a "school friendship" story. The teacher had initially intended to apply rubric-based adjustments under the "team collaboration" criterion; however, follow-up interviews indicated that the divergence stemmed from differing interpretations of "appropriate reader awareness for a picture book." In response,

the teacher introduced a dedicated discussion session on audience analysis and resumed project work only after shared understanding was achieved. This experience clarified that effective collaboration assessment must go beyond timeliness to include how differing perspectives are constructively reconciled. Consequently, the rubric was updated to include a "collaborative decision-making record" sub-item within the collaboration dimension.

This instance also highlighted operational considerations related to scheduling and assessment load—teachers must monitor each group's and each student's progress while delivering timely, individualized feedback, placing significant demands on instructional capacity.

4.3. Case 3: "Campus Landscape Design" — Performance Assessment in an Interdisciplinary Project

4.3.1. Case Background

This case presents an interdisciplinary project-based learning activity centered on "Campus Greening and Landscape Design," implemented over eight weeks with Grade 8 students. It integrates concepts and competencies from art, biology, geography, and mathematics [2]. The core task requires students to conduct field research on a designated campus site, develop a landscape renovation proposal, and communicate their design through physical model construction and oral presentation.

4.3.2. Performance Task and Assessment Design

The task comprised three phases: Research and Analysis—assessing the comprehensiveness of investigation, accuracy of data, and depth of problem analysis; Design Proposal—evaluating creativity, feasibility, and integration with the overall campus environment; and Model-making and Presentation—where a review panel comprising teachers, peers, and school facility management personnel assessed model craftsmanship, presentation clarity, and alignment with preliminary research findings [12].

4.3.3. Multi-Stakeholder Assessment

This case fully embodied the curriculum standards' principle of "multi-stakeholder assessment." Assessment involved teacher evaluation (focusing on aesthetic quality and professional rigor), peer evaluation (assessing creativity and persuasiveness), self-evaluation (reflecting on individual contribution and learning gains), and user evaluation (feedback from facility management personnel on practical feasibility).

4.3.4. Outcomes and Reflections

Students gained firsthand insight into real-world design evaluation, where proposals must meet the expectations of art teachers, end users, school administrators, and peers. Yet new challenges arose: assessing student performance in interdisciplinary projects demands evaluative competence across disciplines—a capability in which most art teachers have limited formal training or practical experience. Moreover, balancing disciplinary depth with interdisciplinary integration remains an evolving pedagogical priority [10].

4.4. Cross-Case Comparative Analysis

To reveal the applicability characteristics of performance assessment across different types of creative work, a cross-case comparison of key elements is presented in Table 1 below:

	Case 1 (Color Emotion)	Case 2 (Picture Book)	Case 3 (Landscape Design)
Corresponding Domain	Modeling & Expression	Comprehensive & Exploration	Design & Application
Authenticity Level	Medium (school counseling office request)	High (public exhibition)	Very High (actual campus renovation proposal)

Assessment Stakeholders	Teacher-led + Peer	Teacher + Peer + Self	Teacher + Peer + Self + User
Rubric Focus	Emotional communication accuracy	Narrativity + Collaboration	Functionality + Feasibility
Duration	3 weeks	6 weeks	8 weeks

Three common patterns emerged: First, higher task authenticity correlates positively with student engagement—students in Case 3 invested an average of 2.3 times more autonomous time outside class than those in Case 1. Second, greater diversity among assessment stakeholders broadens students' understanding of what constitutes "good work"—in Case 3, 73% of groups made substantial revisions based on feasibility suggestions from user-evaluators. Third, rubric dimensions must align precisely with task types; overly generic rubrics risk misdirecting assessment priorities.

In terms of differences, Cases 2 and 3, which involved team collaboration, required assessment to serve a "management" function—monitoring progress and coordinating work allocation—whereas Case 1, focused on individual creation, directed assessment toward the technical translation of internal emotional expression [4]. This distinction suggests that, for collaborative creative tasks, performance assessment must incorporate an explicit "collaboration process monitoring" dimension; otherwise, it cannot reliably differentiate between "lack of ability" and "lack of engagement."

5. Practice Reflection: Outcomes, Problems, and Improvement Pathways

5.1. Practice Outcomes

Across the three cases and broader practice, performance assessment yielded multiple positive outcomes: enhanced creative practice ability—students transitioned from passive replication to expressive application of technique; promotion of deep learning—students moved beyond superficial technical imitation toward deeper understanding of emotional expression and social context; seamless integration of teaching, learning, and assessment—evaluation became an intrinsic component of instruction rather than a separate, external activity; and strengthened metacognitive capacity—ongoing self-reflection empowered students to actively regulate their own learning processes.

5.2. Real-World Constraints: Four Interrelated Constraints

Despite notable successes, the broader implementation of performance assessment encounters four interconnected challenges.

Challenge 1: The Professional Complexity of Rubric Design and Its Inherent Duality. Developing effective rubrics requires teachers to possess a deep understanding of instructional goals, disciplinary knowledge, and student developmental trajectories. In practice, two common tendencies emerge: rubrics that are overly general lack diagnostic and instructional utility; rubrics that are excessively detailed may inadvertently constrain creative expression. A fundamental design challenge arises from balancing rubric precision with flexibility—the "blank canvas + single line" example illustrates this clearly. The provisional approach adopted in this study—introducing an "Unexpected Excellence" criterion—offers only temporary mitigation; the underlying design challenge persists.

Challenge 2: Practical Limitations Related to Instructional Time and Class Size. Junior high school art classes typically meet once or twice weekly [3]. Delivering high-quality performance assessment within such constrained timeframes places significant demands on teachers' instructional planning and time allocation. Among the three cases examined, Case 3 required eight weeks—substantially exceeding typical unit duration—and relied heavily on out-of-class time. In classes with 45 or more students, delivering meaningful individualized feedback becomes logistically unfeasible.

Challenge 3: The Developmental Gap in Teacher Assessment Competence. Effective performance assessment requires educators not only to teach content but also to assess

learning effectively—designing authentic tasks, constructing sound rubrics, gathering relevant evidence, and offering constructive, actionable feedback. Yet assessment competence has received limited emphasis in most pre-service teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development initiatives. Many educators interpret performance assessment narrowly—as simply increasing student presentations—rather than as a comprehensive, evidence-informed practice.

Challenge 4: The Systemic Challenge of Integrating Assessment Outcomes with Existing Evaluation Frameworks. This represents the most systemic challenge. High-stakes evaluation systems—including senior secondary school entrance examinations—continue to rely predominantly on standardized, summative scoring methods. Although art is not currently included among mandatory examination subjects, a key question remains: how can process-oriented performance assessment outcomes be meaningfully translated into comparable, reliable data for broader student quality evaluation frameworks? When such assessment results cannot be systematically incorporated into school-level accountability mechanisms or student advancement pathways, they risk being treated as supplementary rather than integral components of teaching and learning [13].

5.3. Improvement Pathways: From Tool Application to Ecosystem Construction

Addressing these challenges requires shifting from "tool-level application" to "ecosystem-level construction."

Pathway 1: Building a School-Based Performance Assessment Toolkit. Specific operations: at the beginning of each semester, the art teaching research group completes three standardized tasks during lesson planning sessions—(1) allocating instructional time: identifying "key creative nodes" suitable for embedding performance assessment (3–4 per semester), avoiding assessment in every class; (2) piloting rubrics: after drafting a rubric, using representative student works from prior cohorts at high, medium, and low performance levels for trial scoring to ensure level descriptors are clearly differentiated; (3) involving students in refinement: sharing the rubric draft in class and inviting student representatives to comment on clarity of descriptions and appropriateness of criteria, with finalization achieved through collaborative discussion. The toolkit is maintained in shared digital documents, annotated with applicable grade levels, unit topics, and estimated time requirements; at semester end, teachers contribute suggestions for revision to support continuous improvement.

Pathway 2: Establishing a Process Portfolio System. The routine art creation portfolio should include key process materials from each major creative unit. For large class sizes, a streamlined portfolio approach may be adopted—collecting only 3–5 pivotal artifacts (e.g., concept sketch, revision draft, final work, and reflection card) with digital photo documentation, rather than retaining every draft. A dedicated 1-period "portfolio review exhibition" held at semester end enables students to select and present "three moments of growth they find most meaningful," reducing teacher workload while making learning progress tangible and visible.

Pathway 3: Strengthening Professional Development in Teacher Assessment Literacy. Education authorities and schools should embed assessment literacy within structured professional development for art teachers, utilizing workshops, collaborative lesson study, and peer mentoring to build practical competence in designing performance tasks, developing effective rubrics, and delivering constructive feedback. Training should emphasize hands-on practice to ensure skill transfer into classroom implementation.

Pathway 4: Developing Integration Mechanisms between Performance Assessment and Summative Evaluation [14]. For example, portfolios may be assigned a defined weight in semester final grades; key dimensions from performance assessment—such as creative practice ability and aesthetic judgment—may inform comprehensive quality evaluation frameworks; outcomes may be reported through descriptive narratives rather than numerical scores for advancement decisions. Successful integration hinges on aligning each assessment type with its distinct purpose and function.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

The practice of performance assessment in junior high school art creative teaching responds fundamentally to the essential question: "What kind of people should art education cultivate, and what should assessment assess?" Positioning art education as "cultivating core competencies through art"—rather than "training artistic skills"—requires a corresponding shift in assessment logic: from "judging the quality of works" to "diagnosing competency development."

Through theoretical analysis and cross-case comparison across three learning domains, this study demonstrates that performance assessment can effectively activate creative practice ability, promote deep learning, and achieve integration of teaching, learning, and assessment. However, four persistent challenges—the rubric tension, time and class-size limitations, teacher assessment literacy, and institutional alignment—require sustained attention. These are not barriers to implementation but focal points for iterative refinement.

Looking ahead, advancing performance assessment in junior high school art creative teaching demands coordinated progress across three dimensions: at the conceptual level, reinforcing the principle that "assessment is learning"—oriented toward guiding growth rather than delivering final judgment; at the capacity level, systematically strengthening teacher assessment literacy so that every art teacher functions fluently as both an instructional expert with assessment insight and an assessment expert grounded in pedagogical practice; at the institutional level, cultivating a supportive school ecosystem—including flexible scheduling, equitable resource allocation, and aligned evaluation systems—that creates space and provides scaffolding for meaningful implementation.

The essence of artistic creation is "expressing one's understanding of the world in a unique way"; the essence of performance assessment is "seeing every individual's growth from multiple perspectives." When the two converge, the result is not merely a methodological update—but a values-based transformation in art education: from selecting a few exemplars to nurturing every unique life.

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