

Assessing Competencies in Visual Arts

The Case of Francophone Europe

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In PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE ARTS
Directed by Diane Leduc and Sébastien Béland, London, Routledge, 2021 (chapter 10, p.187-205)

Summary

Seeking better assessment in visual arts leads naturally to moving beyond the simple grading of an object to appreciating a broad range of more authentic behaviours. From this perspective, it seems that the evolution of the notion of competency resonates strongly with the visual arts, provided that some specific aspects of the artistic domain are taken into consideration, and caution is exercised with respect to the reliability and viability of a competency when this concerns an expressive discipline. A comparison of diverse competency-based formulations from visual arts programs in secondary schools in francophone Europe reveals a common inspiration, but also uncovers a range of sensibilities, thus underscoring the political-social dimension of choices at play. This is developed with a questioning of the assessment of acquired knowledge at university, beyond that of the usual academic learning and skills in art, and this leads to a debate on the existence of ontologically artistic indicators.

Objectives

- - *Discovering the principal sources which have contributed to the evolution of learning assessment in the arts.*
- - *Sharing the idea that, in an expressive discipline, the competency-based approach is particularly useful for the instructor.*
- - *Adopting a specific critical stance in the arts in all circumstances.*

The objectives of this chapter are to list and condense some key references on academic assessment and the notion of *competency and* redeploy them in a critical manner to underscore their vital contribution to the assessment of learning in the arts in higher education, but also to foster a specific understanding of the artistic field.

A competency-based approach (CBA) is not a novelty in visual arts; once one intends to go beyond the simple learning of techniques, all reflections on the assessment of achievements must take this into consideration. Yet what can one hope for and what can one assess in terms of competency in art? What are the expectations and according to what terms? These many questions, bringing together the purpose and the reliability of the assessment, will be addressed here in four stages, from a Franco-European perspective.

Prima facie, it is important to remember what may contribute to a better assessment in the visual arts (Section 1). Then, while the linkages between the visual arts and the CBA are many, it is essential to bring to the forefront what is unique in the field of the arts (Section 2). Furthermore, questioning artistic skills at the level of higher education can only occur with frames of reference developed at the secondary level. Nonetheless, it is apparent that the order and nature of concerns differ, depending on the country, which leads to weighing the limitations (Section 3). As for extending this approach to higher education, while this is entirely legitimate, it must also be examined in its dimensions (Section 4).

1/Assessment in the visual arts

An artistic creation in the academic context is neither a task to perform nor homework following a lesson. Consequently, what can a grade signify? What is most important? That which has been done or rather that which has been discovered, understood and assimilated? It is generally agreed that learning assessment in visual arts is not easy. In the light of observations from general assessment theories revealing shocking disparities in exam assessments (Piéron, 1963; De Landsheere, 1971; and Noizet and Caverni, 1978), research in the visual arts on grading of artistic productions in the school environment (Gaillot, 1987) confirms the existence of extremely diverse judgements as significant as in other expressive disciplines, despite the fact that it is easier to compare visible works simultaneously than to do so for written works read in succession. In addition, the professor of visual arts would be sensitive to some specific determinants related to the physical parameters of objects to be assessed (colour, complexity, etc.), even when they are not directly relevant to what is being assessed.

Sometimes it appears that a handicap becomes the best of stimulants. The value of these calamitous observations was not to improve the reliability of grades, but to encourage teachers to use them less; these claims acted as a trigger to a radical shift (or a philosophical change), a sort of passage from the *grading* of an object to the *assessment* of competencies genuinely acquired by an individual. Because, in this matter, shouldn't we take responsibility for our subjectivity and know how to draw conclusions from this? Isn't the aim of assessment less to compare a performance to a standard than to assess a person's process of construction? The most evident advancement in assessment considerations in visual arts is surely on the questioning of the *predictive value*, that is, the credibility of what has been learned; the relationship that can be established between *performance* and *competency*: to assess correctly in the visual arts involves assessing "differently another thing produced in other conditions" (Gaillot, 1987, p. 298), that is, basing one's assessment on authentic objects and behaviours.

Authenticity, meaning being in tune with the creative process, requires the *inversion of the didactic pattern* (Gaillot, [1997] 2012, p. 143): in visual arts, learning will not be validated by a task associated with certification; instead, one will establish a "practice situation" (p. 20) and, from this, draw a lesson. The authenticity in question is first that of the production, which means that it gradually frees itself from the conventionally required subjects, attaining autonomy through the capacity to carry out a project of personal expression. Authenticity is then that of learners who organize their work alone, who speak up and know how to argue faced with works (academic productions or works of art), and who, returning to their endeavours, can express what they have learned. "These skills are acquired in situations demanding constant action and reflection, in the expression of a link between an artistic practice and the construction of a culture" (2008, visual arts program for the French college: 10 to 15-year-olds). In France, the emphasis on competencies can be traced from programs in 1995-1998 which pick up on these different aspects. As for the metacognitive perspective, it is present at the heart of the assessment of competencies in visual arts during the presentation of a portfolio for the French Baccalaureate at the end of the secondary cycle (at age 18). These different aspects will be kept in mind when university level teaching is broached in Section 4.

2 /The visual arts and competencies

Reflecting upon learning assessment in the visual arts leads to redefining the aims of such a discipline, its overall objectives, without losing sight of what makes it distinctive and not reducible to the characteristics of general education. Far from Bloom's taxonomies and teaching by objectives, there too, the reluctance to keep count of micro-performances has ultimately led to a largely positive reinterpretation: a differentiation between *responsive* behaviour (reacting to stimulus) and *operant* behaviour (that is, being capable of acting on one's own initiative and over time), which completely coincides with the Aristotelian difference between *poïein* and *prattein* (doing and acting) to which we are so attached in art. This highlights the *psychomotor* and *affective* domain, signifying that the subject also learns with the body (that there is nonverbal learning) and that, beyond that, there should also be consideration of the interest that could be sparked; bringing to the forefront, therefore, the *standards* associated with each operation, which leads De Landsheere (1976, p. 235) to propose a three-level synthesis: "mastery/transfer/expression," recalling the "reduction principle," according to which "repeating a creative process is no longer creation" (De Landsheere, 1976, p. 264-265) and, quoting Eisner, stating that any exploratory situation produces something unprecedented that can only be grasped afterwards.

The notion of *competency* has distanced itself from behaviourist aspects of teaching by objectives and the evolution of definitions is of great interest to the artistic disciplines. Competency designates the ability to resolve a problem or to lead a project successfully, but there is an immense gulf between a standardized task and creative activity. To take a few examples from the francophone literature, one of the first European contributions to clarify the objectives/competencies synergy is that of Hameline, from 1979, which defines competency as "a skill permitting an immediate application stemming from a repertory of available gestures" (p. 116), on the condition of being aware of activated mechanisms, of naming them (metacognition) and of being able to reconduct them. For Meirieu (1987, p. 107), a disciplinary competency is developed when a subject performs a *mental operation* allowing for the successful accomplishment of a task. The methodological capacity activated may be simply mastered (automatic response), but the subject may also transfer it (*decontextualizing it*) to a new situation, which increases its scope (Meirieu, 1989, p. 26-27). Thus, the one who, on his or her own initiative, "attempts to utilize elsewhere and differently what one is taught is also competent" (Meirieu, 1987, p. 100). Perrenoud (1995, 1997) most likely offers the most rigorous definitions of competency, at least if one expects to become an art instructor. This author emphasizes the necessity to call upon "the highest level of expertise, which requires the integration of multiple cognitive resources in the treatment of complex situations" (Perrenoud, 1995a, p. 20-24), and on the capacity to mobilize them wisely, which leads him to recommend the exploratory process and "project" (Perrenoud, 1995b, p. 6). He is followed in this by Wolfs (1998, p. 15). Perrenoud proposes naming "capacity" or "ability" that which is related to a precise operation and competency which allow for the mastery of a category of complex situations, drawing upon various resources (notably declarative and procedural knowledge, abilities, rules and attitudes). Moreover, for Le Boterf, "competency is *knowing how to mobilize*" (1994, p. 16), that is, the activation of an operational plan permitting a dynamic and precise combination of the resources required. The 21st century have seen various researchers, notably Roegiers (2000), Jonnaert (2002), Tardif (2003), and Scallon (2004), retain these same characteristics, the notions of transfer and complexity guaranteeing the aptitude to confront unforeseen and extreme difficulties. While the initial definitions mainly amount to a solid procedural expertise, subsequent ones refer to taking the initiative (indeed, to *creation* in the sense of

Chomsky when he defines linguistic competency by its creative character, once learners free themselves from the repetitive words they are conditioned to employ to have integrated a system of rules which then allow for the construction, the creation, of new phrases). All suggest starting with *situations*—the situated approach, widely valued today (Jonnaert, 2011), is inherent in the visual arts—all encourage a focus on *processes* and on *metacognitive* awareness.

In art, where technical experience is important, it is crucial to be able to differentiate simple *savoir-faire* (to know how to say something again, to know how to redo something) from *knowing how to act alone*; in the cultural domain, the knowledge of works is inseparable from comparative operations of personal argumentation. These include levels of requirement which Rey, Carette, Defrance and Kahn (2003, p. 33) present in three degrees: elementary competency (ability) which consists of carrying out an identified procedure; the second degree of competency which allows for the correct choice among several internalized basic competencies to confront a novel situation; and complex competency which can combine several competences to resolve unforeseen and difficult situations. One of the characteristic traits of high-level competency is awareness that it must be adapted and made use of on numerous occasions: assuredly in the visual arts, competency cannot consist of the simple enumeration of a list of verified capacities. It must include the idea of *going beyond this*; otherwise, Da Vinci would have been no more than a second Verrocchio. We see how this evolution toward an increasing number of requirements has more resonance in the field of the arts (at least, naturally, at the end of secondary school and in higher education), the act of *mobilizing* must articulate itself with the novelty of any given artistic expression, and then extends through an act of knowing *how to go beyond*. This makes it legitimate to envisage (Gaillot, 2009) artistic competency—here we mean competency in terms of creation—as well, as just mentioned, the ability to draw upon and combine instantaneously and uniquely diverse resources acquired through learning and experience (theoretical and procedural knowledge and numerous forms of technical expertise, but also cognitive skills, calling upon various forms of intelligence such as maintaining a critical distance during the journey of research and development, personal qualities such as curiosity or commitment...), indeed as a final layout possibly giving rise to validation when confirmed, but remaining under constant development as the promise of one pushing himself or herself to the limits. Such artistic competency makes possible an arrangement allowing for the confrontation of a particular problem, to effectively conduct a project due to a facility for *improvisation* (every creative act being linked to indispensable *risk taking*), based on the resources deployed to produce original behaviour in facing a new challenge. Yet such a disposition is also, equally, fragile: no artistic situation has the vocation to be reiterated.

Excelling oneself, improvisation, risk-taking, and originality are some specific traits which surely need to be considered.

Once the goal is to go beyond mere technical acquisitions, all reflections on assessment of learning in the visual arts cannot fail to mention the role of competencies drawing on *a measure of authenticity* (inspired by an open situation; collective verbalization stemming from the works; relationship to the art; and capitalizing on acknowledged achievements), thus permitting instructors to ask themselves the right questions:

- Is the student progressing? What more does the student now know how to do?
- Is the student capable of developing and ending a creative process, showing relevance and mastery is the usage of chosen means?
- Is the student capable of expressing what he or she has discovered, understood and assimilated?

- Is the student capable of analyzing works and offering a reasoned judgment on them?
- Is the student now able to act alone?
- Has the student acquired a taste for his or her discoveries (practical or cultural)? Does the student feel more intensely involved?
- Has the student developed abilities and revealed interesting aptitudes for future professional plans?

Attitudes that are open to circumstantial indicators, when related to the progress of a practical sequence, could be presented according to the model of Table 10.1.

Table 10.1/ Competencies and indicative actions related to educational moments of the sequence

Educational moment	General competencies; attitudes	Capacities activated by the student; indicative behaviours
Reception of the proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Understanding and applying instructions •Responding to a request by drawing upon one's experience •Establishing objectives •Demonstrating inventiveness and divergence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Identifying the scope of a question and transposing it into the field of visual arts •Exploring and weighing several ideas •Drawing upon one's acquired knowledge (the language of the image, technical and infographic expertise) and developing a problem-solving approach •Being autonomous in one's choices and open to taking initiative, making decisions and committing oneself
The situation in practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Developing a proposal using sensory language •Organizing oneself to shape a project in an appropriate way •Making full use of resources •Working methodically and rigorously •Ensuring the relevance of one's work •Displaying perseverance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Establishing the physical means to achieve one's goals •Transposing abstract notions into practice •Utilizing and mastering techniques, plastic medium and technologies, including IT tools to develop one's response •Making use of iconographic stock •Knowing how to pause in one's work and make modifications, if necessary, to the ongoing procedure •Taking advantage of the unexpected, daring to take risks •Seeing one's project through to the end
Beyond the practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Mastering language proficiency •Analyzing an object under study •Demonstrating a critical distance •Offering an informed judgement •Listening to the words of others •Enriching one's culture •Bringing together elements from different fields •Preparing an argument •Demonstrating open-mindedness •Assessing one's learning •Conferring meaning on one's work, displaying interest and conviction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Expressing oneself correctly and with ease, both orally and in written form •Offering descriptions using the appropriate terminology •Moving from description to analysis of one's creative process •Presenting one's arguments by comparing one's intention and the efficacy of the means employed •Assessing one's own work and that of others •Connecting artistic references, through researching, tracking, and discovering others related to the question at hand •Developing one's critical thinking and knowing how to construct a personal point of view with respect to artistic works •Having a sensitive approach to reality and cultural facts, cultivating an attitude of curiosity and tolerance •Knowing how to describe what one has learned, knowing one's shortcomings •Creating a dossier or portfolio in which one's works are archived, and explaining one's practice, one's discoveries and one's artistic references

Source: Adapted from Gaillot, 2009, p. 48.

The competency-based approach (CBA), far from minimizing knowledge, is a rigorous school, since it obliges instructors to design learning aimed not only at an accumulation of content or preconceived tasks, but in the form of *operational* capacities. Naturally, the competency in question here is not at all simplistic; there is no competency without knowledge and without internalized expertise to be reactivated. However, one may be knowledgeable without being competent. In the visual arts, all the technical abilities, all the artistic references of the student, of the artist, will be meaningless if they are not drawn upon to respond to an instructor's demands, in the context of a competition, of a bid for a public procurement or even of the students' own vague hopes of personal expression. Knowledge and competencies are not in competition but are rather concomitant. This concern about knowledge is illuminating, since it is a reminder that being able to specify the precise issues involved, as well as the expected results from a sequence, is vital in teaching the arts at all levels. As for the vagueness of competencies which is sometimes decried, when this concerns artistic education, it should instead be acknowledged, since this would then avoid the practice of a pointless assessment activity consisting of checking off predefined items on a grid. While it is essential to define in advance the criteria for success, as well as the intended lessons to be learned during the development of the pedagogical hypothesis, the assessment must remain reasonably *open to the unexpected*, the propensity for something to arise incongruously being inherent to the artistic act. Paradoxically, what one may qualify as productive uncertainty obliges instructors, in each new circumstance, faced with a *fait accompli*, to question the behaviours to which they bear witness, to attempt to identify which new measure seems to be in the process of being acquired, at the price of what risk and with what degree of awareness that the student can verbalize.

The CBA is not a simple reformatting of the content, even if certain commentators refer at times to competency as merely a matter of technical ability. On one hand, the CBA is supposed to completely transform the manner of leading a group, in placing learners in a situation where they can take their own initiative, the assessment of competency calling for the necessity of *experiencing a new situation*, a recommendation of all theoreticians (D'Hainaut, Meirieu, Le Boterf, and Jonnaert), but still not sufficiently followed in the field. Only the practice/verbalization/metacognition synergy may allow for hope in the credibility and viability of the measures observed. On the other hand, the CBA intends to give *meaning* to learning through its attention to its value in the real world: will it still be worth something in students' eyes, is it adapted to the reality of the world today, does it make a valuable contribution to bolstering young people's maturation and, if so, how? This is surely one of the major contributions of the emphasis on competencies: inviting instructors to eliminate certain kinds of knowledge which have become outdated in favour of those oriented to the future (Perrenoud, 2011). To avoid becoming anachronistic, education in the arts must be attuned to that.

Nonetheless, some (Crahay, 2006b) maintain that the dimensions valued in an artistic context (complexity, originality) could be at risk in putting too much emphasis on *knowing how to mobilize knowledge*, but also on how to push to a logical impasse the fears already expressed in the general context, with respect to the uncertainty of assessments once one is dealing with complex situations (Rey, 1996; and Jonnaert, 2007), and even more with respect to their durability. Certainly, expectations vary from one discipline to another: the part attributed to knowledge and abilities is more important in music than in the visual arts. Yet artistic education reminds us of the need for assessment only to consider what has just been accomplished; its role is not to extrapolate to tomorrow, some other place or other way. This is because the expression *assessing competencies* can be misunderstood: we assess a performance and, in the best-case scenario, we hope that the behaviour observed is

transformed into competency! If, in certain cases, the competency may lead to professional qualification, in the academic world, this may be inferred as only in the nature of a *promise* and of *probability*, since the school or university context is never perfectly aligned with the real world and, despite the thoroughness of the judgement, no one knows how long the aptitude which has been validated will endure, especially as each artistic act is unique. This suggests we cannot expect too much of competencies. However, while the CBA calls for a situation of an authentic, closer-to-personal-creation practice in the arts, one associated with an authentic experience displaying subsequent situations of socio-constructivist verbalization which are systematically explained, indeed reformulated in a portfolio, certainly it is quite reasonable to hope that the greater abilities associated with taking the initiative, organizing the work, the faculty of adaptation, argumentation from a critical distance, etc., could be internalized to a greater extent. Yet, on its own, a *genuine resurgence*, on various occasions and quite naturally may, over time, temporarily confirm these achievements, thus sounding a cautionary note.

3 /Competencies in art in secondary school: European disparities

Since the 2000s, under the aegis of the OECD, interest in the competency-based approach has spread at an astonishing rate in many European countries, contributing inevitably to radical revisions of school programs (both primary and secondary), as well as to the re-examination of some teaching.

Concerning secondary arts education in several francophone countries, the establishment of a common framework, far from harmonizing the training, on the contrary reveals disparate goals, which is very enlightening but not at all surprising with respect to some terms employed to qualify the discipline: *visual and media arts* in Québec, but *plastic art education* in Belgium, *artistic education* in Luxembourg, *plastic arts* and *visual arts* in Switzerland and France...

The secondary arts education programs for the French community in Belgium refer to disciplinary, transversal and transdisciplinary competencies. The normal secondary program for the first degree (2000) presents first transversal competencies (the development of the personality/reaching formal thought/transdisciplinary competencies), then disciplinary competencies. The inventory of terminal competencies and disciplinary knowledge for the general second and third secondary degrees (2009) was announced along five lines: doing/looking/expressing oneself/known/appreciating, largely detailed in terms of transversal competencies and disciplinary competencies.

In Luxembourg, artistic education refers to suitably selected content, subject to homework for which grades are recorded and included as part of the general average. Since 2002, competencies have been presented, from the more precise (technical mastery, image analysis, etc.) to the more general (ingenuity, perseverance, etc.). Between 2008 and 2011, the formulations narrowed with respect to disciplinary competencies, aiming to transmit a complex competency around the image following four fields of action (observing, interpreting, creating, reflecting and presenting an argument) oriented to knowledge and understanding of the European artistic patrimony, the development of an artistic language, the encouragement of independent creativity, and the development of a critical sense with respect to the sociocultural environment.

In Switzerland, the new *Plan d'études romand* (2008) encompasses five major areas of transversal capacities which concern all the fields of training. This choice defines the outlines

of various fundamental aptitudes, which cut across both domains of learning and all the years of school. The first two transversal capacities are of a more social nature and the last three more individual (collaboration/communication/the reflexive process and the critical sense/creative thinking/metacognitive strategies and reflection). The teaching-learning for all the years of compulsory education relating to the field of arts incorporates four themes: expression/perception/techniques/culture. Technical and methodological learning predominate.

In France, the *Socle commun de connaissances et compétences* [the Common Foundation of Knowledge and Competencies] (2006) is based on seven pillars: 1) mastery of the language; 2) a foreign modern language; 3) scientific and technological culture; 4) mastery of ICT; 5) humanistic culture; 6) social and civic competencies; and 7) autonomy and initiative. The visual arts programs developed between 2008 and 2016 explain the competencies worked on in secondary school at the end of the years of compulsory education (at 16 years old) in referring to four components: practical/cultural/methodological (development of a project; critical distance, analysis of works)/behavioural. The personal report booklet for pillar 5, humanistic culture, must confirm the following aspects: having knowledge and displaying markers from the artistic culture/situating civilizations in time and space, and establishing links between the works to better understand them/knowing and practicing various forms of artistic expression/displaying sensitivity, a critical spirit and curiosity. Beyond that, the lycée [secondary school] (2010) considers plastic, theoretical, cultural and transversal competencies.

Table 10.2 Formulation of francophone European fine arts programs in high school: summary of content and stated expectations

Apprenticeship registers	Belgium	France	Luxembourg	Switzerland
Technical content	Experiment various techniques Master's requirements	Experiment various techniques	Experiment various techniques Master's requirements	Experiment various techniques Master's requirements
Notional content	Notions leading to practical situations	Notions integrated into problematized practice situations	Observation of visual aspects; image analysis	Observation and analysis of visual perceptions
Plastic expression	Exploiting visual arts language resources Creativity	Exploiting visual arts language resources Choice / initiative / autonomy	Exploit plastic language and its symbolic scope	Use visual language to represent an idea, an imaginary
Autonomy	–	Project around 15 years old	–	Project around 18 years old
Artistic culture Art's History	Associated with practice Cultural references, diversity	Articulated to practice Cultural references, diversity + history of the arts	Separated from practice Art's History of art + plastic exercises of exploitation	Separated from practice Cultural references, diversity
Verbalization; critical review	Reflection on productions Self assessment Analysis of works of art	Reflection on productions Self assessment Analysis of works of art	Reflection on productions Self assessment Analysis of works of art	Reflection on productions Self assessment Analysis of works of art
Portfolio	–	Suggested logbook, final examination file	Presentation and assessment file	–

At first glance, these commonly inspired but diverse programs (in compulsory secondary education) focus on similar, general and disciplinary competencies in the arts, in the same registers (practical, cultural, reflexive and transversal). However, an in-depth examination of texts reveals significant disparities from one country to another (Gaillot, 2009) (Table 10.2). Thus, the Belgian, Luxembourg and Swiss frames of reference clearly place technical learning and the capacity to make use of artistic language in the forefront while France particularly values creation and the acquisition of an independent practice. (Technique

is confined to the professional vocation of applied arts.) In Luxembourg and in Switzerland, art history is more a focus of separate analyses rather than associated analyses (Belgium), or problematized and related to practice as it is the case in France. Finally, while critical reflection and self-assessment are always referenced, the use of a portfolio, as a tool of appropriation, is still not widely encouraged.

The CBA requires a focus beyond illusory academic success with no future and forces a more precise designation of dispositions useful in adulthood. These written disparities underscore the fact that assessment is a value judgement which is not neutral. What does one want to encourage in learning about art? Technique and the entry into professional life? The imaginative, creative and utopian individual? The analytical spirit and critical perspective? The feeling of identity through cultural attachment? It is here we find the eminently social, but also political, dimension of this form of assessment, which is openly reinforced or, at least, brought up to date.

Beyond some differences, what is striking is the extraordinary sophistication of the competency frames of reference (the theoretically targeted aims). These cover a multiplicity of items, sometimes very close to the previous operational objectives, which risk leading to an approval mechanism (sometimes by degrees, sometimes binary!) which ignores the role of the *contextual* and of the *temporary* affecting every competency. While the concern with detail is valuable, for transversal dispositions, it is important to thoroughly comprehend the discrepancies between a range of competencies established *a priori* (theoretical development, since competency is not very predictable; it is a result of an act), conceived to assist the instructor (to develop his or her measure; and to track the indicators), and this may be inferred on the ground in each, modest and uncertain situation. Probably, in a particular sequence, one should favour the simplest markers: for the practice, the investigative process, the intelligibility and relevance of a proposal, and the good usage of available means with respect to intentions; for the commentary on works, the relevant selection of references, and the subtlety of argumentations and comparisons, for example. Alternatively, one could note fields of knowledge/competencies from the three sections: artistic, theoretical and cultural. This is surely an invitation to differentiate what is occasional from what is prescribed.

It is wise to greatly reduce the uncertainties which subsist behind the words. The assessment experts explain that it is unproductive to assign grades for the most precise operations if the markers are approximative. It is pointless to produce the most exhaustive list of indicators of competencies if one is not clear about the demanding nature of the tasks (severity or tolerance), the unconscious hierarchization of different aspects which are supposed to be treated equally, their viability, and the learner's ability to track *where it clicked* even beyond the frames of reference, and what one understands, for example, behind *being capable of associating form and meaning* or, even more, behind the word *project*. What is the ultimate significance of these frames of reference if the instructions do not first inform the students of the necessity to base themselves on genuine didactic situations?

Because what these texts do not say is that they have contributed to modifying didactic and assessment practices. The discrepancy between the substance of programs and the reality observed in the classroom is sometimes enormous, due, especially, to the insufficient resources allocated to the continuing education of teachers, particularly with respect to the assessment of competencies. While general competencies are now a component of teachers' assessments, what is their part, how are they connected with disciplinary aspects? It would be a shame if the required reference to considerable data developed in multiple tables could lead instructors, driven by a concern with efficacy and probably also a lack of information about the changing paradigm, to reinvent teaching by objectives and to propose

closed exercises. The CBA is an improvement if one is careful not to fall into the possible traps, which have been rightly pointed out. On the other hand, if it had to lead to unplanned assessments done in haste, contrary to its intentions, it would not fail to join the scrapheap of pedagogical discoveries. Those are the stakes. As for the reversal of the didactic pattern, already applied in France at the secondary level, it is still far from the majority model in francophone Europe. The creative dimension, largely central in the visual arts, should, nevertheless, allow for the avoidance of this misinterpretation which, otherwise, would be absurd.

4 /Artistic competencies at university

In Europe, due to the independence of universities, there are hardly any generalized national frames of reference for competencies for all higher education. Certainly, in the aftermath of the *Tuning* project, which worked on the convergence of content and diplomas, at the time of their requests for accreditation of their training programs, it is now recommended to universities to relate their teaching to a corpus of duly named competencies. In France, in 2012, the Ministry of Education produced *Référentiels de compétences en licence* [Frames of Reference for Competencies for the Certificate] which listed the generic competencies, then the specific competencies, for each major discipline, though the detail (especially in art) remains terribly succinct: “starting with a personal practice, that is a creator’s practice; being capable of explaining and communicating the overarching principles of artistic creation and analyzing works” (Ministère de l’Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, 2012, p. 14).

Is this a matter of more thoroughly deploying artistic competencies at university? How would this be different from that expected at the end of a secondary education? In western societies, secondary education is a period of substantial learning, permitting a young adult either to start a professional life, or to continue at university: the acquired (or, at least expected) competencies are not specialized in the sense that they relate to all fields of learning (from the most academic to those closest to the necessities of daily life); they are also largely transversal, to the extent that one hopes students develop approaches and a disciplined reasoning enabling them to reflect and make decisions when faced with life’s inevitable events and challenges. For the visual arts, in Europe, as in Québec, but to varying degrees, that may mean, essentially, knowing techniques, due to having had the experience in a creative process, and having a certain knowledge of art history and of civilizations in order to be able to situate and compare works, to be able to form links between the universe of forms and that of ideas and, certainly now, social issues. In France, for example, competencies in visual arts (2010) expected by the end of the secondary cycle are already declared to be:

- Artistic competencies and techniques (to be able to associate and master artistic means to meet their intentions—form and meaning).
- Theoretical competencies (to be able to take a certain distance and reflect on one’s work, and on that of others and, similarly, to analyze any work of art).
- Cultural competencies (to be able to situate and understand a work considering various issues of the time and of the artist’s country).
- Transversal competencies, as well as those relating to attitudes, processes, and methodology.

For one considering the pursuit of artistic training at university, the initial baggage required comes back to the prescribed acquisitions for secondary education, which then must

be furthered and surpassed. Thus, it will also be a question of artistic, cultural and intellectual competencies, now largely refined, permitting the student to have solid insights into his or her own work and, especially, into everything concerning questions of art and social issues.

The specific question which must first be raised about higher education is to know whether the assessment procedures at the secondary level need to be extended. After all, hasn't a pupil who is already trained to control his or her competencies become autonomous in that respect about future studies? Wouldn't making university more like secondary school amount to a counterproductive mothering? However, let us agree that the fragmentation of university studies into short modules does not facilitate the tracking of recognized competencies, which are supposed to be confirmed by the ability to mobilize them over time. Then, if the CBA at the secondary level is intended to favour acquisitions most beneficial for achievements in adult life, should we, in the same way, at university, prefer utility or start from the principle that any research, any practice—even the most out of date—is precious in terms of the progress of ideas? While, instead, the result is the rule in the sciences, due to the financing of laboratories, this is not the case in the arts. This is an argument for a solid training for instructors in higher education to handle the issues underlying the assessment of competencies.

Nonetheless, the control exercised by each teacher granting or withholding the predicted credits for each training unit (if, for example, one refers to the long list of possibilities offered by the bachelor's degree in Visual and Media Arts in Québec) should be sufficient, given the combined strength and variety of assessors, to distinguish students having acquired competency in art from those who could prove to still be too inexperienced. In the same manner, to take a second example, it seems quite obvious that the general objectives of the Master's degree in Visual and Media Arts (training the student in research-creation and encouraging the development of his or her practice, and a critical reflection while considering some current issues and problems in art and in artistic education) could be appreciated as much by various instructors of modules of practice-theory training as during the public defence of the student's personal artistic production.

What happens really about the validation of these dispositions at the end of the courses? We agree to think, for the usual summative or certificate assessment at university, that a positive accreditation attests to an indisputable level of acquisitions, sufficient about a jury's requirements. However, does this practice clarify what exactly the term *competency in art* signifies?

This brings us back once more to the predictive value of any assessment: how can the collected indices provide information on the future aptitudes of students, on their futures, on the fact that they can chart their own course and offer a positive contribution to society? At best, the dispositions observed during the investigation, at the sight of the work presented, upon reading the written analyses, upon listening to the presentation before a jury (earlier works; artistic creation being defended; and reflection on art, and culture), are of such quality that they can lead one to think that candidates already possesses enough attributes which should allow them to succeed in a future in the art world...

Because, for all that, learning is not competency. Competency is the activation in a process of learning. The CBA owes its legitimacy to the fact that it looks not only at the assimilation of learning, but also at the ability to act (to mobilize what has been learned...); it is also committed to diminishing the disparity between what is valid in the university bubble and the rules or challenges of the outside world. Naturally, students' knowledge and competencies have already been tested during their initial immersions in the professional milieu; this interaction is essential, since it is revealing, both for the students testing their

potential, and for the instructor who finds there evidence to confirm a judgement which is conscious of the student's employability. Yet, after this, becoming a curator of exhibitions, a historian or a recognized art critic? Experience and time will strengthen genuine competencies and reveal the real personalities: whoever is not Diderot, Baudelaire, Warburg, Panofsky, Krauss, Arasse, or Didi-Huberman. Becoming an artist? The way in which their works are received by the galleries, the commentators of all sorts, the number of times when they will be approached to participate in international exhibitions, all this will gradually increase their experience and, thus, competency, in this way affording them recognition which will last for a while. For the long term ("the eternal and the immutable," let us add- the universal), one must wait a while.

This suggests that questioning what may be an indicator of competency in art reveals how the usual definitions are still not wholly adapted to specific aspects of this context and leads us to return in this conclusion to two distinct formulations: *assessing learning*; and *assessing competencies*. At the same time, one should probably distinguish *creative competency* (if one may call it such) from *artistic competency*. While learning is easy to trace and can be calculated – even in the field of artistic expression –, complex competency, identified at a particular point in time, will only ever be the translation into words of a successful performance. Moreover, verifying competency in art is not the same as speaking of competency in a craftsman or a doctor. Creative competency is revealed by indicators associating divergence and method, ability to communicate, mastery and surpassing of the usual means. It consists of successful culmination in a creative process and knowing how to put it in perspective. Looking only at the production does not allow for a confident judgement in terms of creation. Therefore, assessors are sensible to the process and the verbalization of the artistic project, prioritizing the questioning of the artistic project over the production/practice (Gaillot, 1987, [1997] 2012). Yet can one truly assess competency in art, at the end of university training, without broaching the question of what is artistic, at the risk of somewhat leaving the framework of this book?

Genuine artistic competency, although hard to define precisely, seems unusual, located somewhere beyond conventions, associated with the faculty of masterfully brainstorming, ignoring the rules and, thus, producing destabilizing objects making people think. It is even more related to passion, an imprudent power of commitment of the person which only time reveals. Common wisdom sees competency as made *to function*, to succeed; such is its predictive aspiration. Yet, the artistic dimension of a behaviour or of an object, however difficult to discern, does not come back to that: art is also to do with what is *dysfunctional*, that which fails. "Art is not communication," Passeron insists (1989, p. 181). Art sometimes springs from a touch of *incompetency*, from an intriguing disparity which is neither always voluntary nor always conscious, even if the contrary is just as unclear.

Perhaps then it is necessary in the same way to seek something which goes *beyond competency*? The most recent definitions of competency, from the early years of the twenty-first century, are quite suited to the artistic domain, since they confirm a unanimous convergence towards a required high level of aptitudes. Yet, while docimology warns against the weakness of our interpretations, esthetics remind us that there is no truth in art. Here, there is no definitive ontology (Pouivet, 1999). As Mallarmé wrote in 1874, defending in the press two works of Manet refused by the Salon, *Bal masqué à l'Opéra* and *Hirondelles*, "The jury has nothing else to say than: this is a painting or: here this is not at all a painting." Can one do no more than, following Wittgenstein, discover some familiarities? Is it enough that the work is produced according to the rules of art (Bourdieu), of which Michaud (1999) provides a contemporary perspective of the implicit norms: returning to a fashionable style; making something monumental; displaying one's virtuosity; cultivating the original, something

shocking, humour, or the obsessional practice? Is it sufficient that the work can function as a symbolic object (Goodman)? For Passeron, creation is a conduit distinguished by “three specific characteristics: the production of a singular object; having the status of a pseudo-person; which jeopardizes its creator” (Passeron, 1989, p. 161). The work (or its creator) is often rebellious: for Baudelaire, “beauty is always bizarre” (World’s Fair of 1855). Thus, isn’t competency in art also a matter of knowing or being able to produce an object-which-says-no, which reflects its *otherness*? After Descartes and Nietzsche, hasn’t there been enough of a recommendation of a clean slate, even promoting the tradition of whatever is new (Rosenberg), questioning ugliness (Boileau, Lessing, and Goodman) or expressing mockery (Broodthaers, Blazy)? Didn’t the Russian avant-garde turn to *sdvig* (dissonance, Bourliouk) and *zaoum* (alogism, Malévitch)? Aren’t those dimensions which can help to identify indicators with an artistic connotation, assessment indicators which are surely fragile, indeed debatable, but which cannot, beyond learning, be ignored?

Thus, to aim for the pinnacles of the competency-based approach, could one be tempted, finally, by modesty? Certainly, a commitment to calculating learning, adding it up, to better define the expected competencies (considered indispensable to the training), sharpens one’s senses and tools so that the tracking of multiple indicators is facilitated. Yet, on one hand, can one accomplish this without forgetting the first assessment principle arising from doubt about the virtues of an assessment unduly augmented (De Landsheere, 1971, p. 150), which encourages a step back; and, on the other hand not lose sight of the fact that, in art, the “esthetic prejudice” (Rochlitz, 1998, p. 186) is inevitably present behind every criterion, indeed, each indicator? What we are seeking could probably be found equally *elsewhere than in competency*, beyond what we are expecting: competency is related to what lies in some *a posteriori*. After all, Matisse began as a notary’s clerk and, if we consider two contemporary artists who are widely known in Europe, Bertrand Lavier was trained in horticulture and Carsten Höller as an entomologist...

Because wouldn’t the ultimate competency (notably at the end of post-secondary studies, in the context of this contribution) always be linked to the capacity to emerge elsewhere and to “swim against the tide,” somewhere unexpected? Then, isn’t assessing competencies in art *also*, if not first and foremost, rendering oneself receptive to this notion of *cropping up somewhere unexpected*? Let allow an ounce of art the right to question this small impertinence.

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