THE COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH

IN VISUAL ARTS

Bernard-André GAILLOT, honorary professor, didactics of visual arts,
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This text is the reduced version, updated and translated into English of a study on the "competency-based approach" (CBA) presented in France and in several French-speaking countries since 2008.

Twenty years ago, the notion of a "common core of knowledge and skills" spread rapidly in many countries, encouraged by the O.E.C.D.[1] then by the European Parliament[2], inevitably contributing to more or less radical rewritings of school curricula as well as the re-examination of certain teaching and assessment techniques. We will try to take stock by first providing a quick overview of the main contributions to this subject and then by referring more specifically and more concretely to the French context of the teaching of visual arts in middle and high school. Successively:

1. Assessment: from taxonomies to expression objectives

2. Assessment in the visual arts

3. The visual arts and competencies

4. Competencies in art in secondary school: European disparities

5. Artistic competencies at university

6. Academic skills and strategies

7. The age of skills: methods and illusions

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[1] *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development*, an international organization founded in 1960 and headquartered in Paris.

[2] The guidelines of the OECD, aiming to define what could be the essential skills for an individual to "face the challenges of life", confirmed by the European councils of Stockholm (2001) and Barcelona (2002), resulted in November 2005 on a proposal for a recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, presented by the Commission. "keycompetences for lifelong education and training". This proposal was adopted on September 26, 2006.

The word "competence" (or competency or skill !) has always been in common use but, curiously, it related more to everyday life (the competence of a court, the competence of a plumber or a doctor…) than to the field school acquisitions. To limit itself to French-speaking countries, entry explicitly called "by skills" was initiated in the course of the 1990s, both in Belgium (French Community, decree of July 24, 1997) and in Quebec (2001), in Switzerland French-speaking Switzerland or Luxembourg. In France, while the "expected skills" (with professional connotations) had long been detailed in technical and vocational education, this formulation appeared more sporadically in the disciplines of general education. With regard to the teaching of visual arts, if the word could be read well here or there for a long time in certain programs (college 1985, high school 1987…), it was necessary to wait until 1998 (college program, 3rd level) to see associates both terms "knowledge and skills" in the same sentence.

1. Assessment: from Taxonomies to Expression Objectives

It is therefore a new approach to assessment, an approach which, in principle, does not primarily evoke either the mark or the school report but suggests a broader mode of assessment which takes into account the long term. This change of point of view is already old even if the rating still prevails in the eyes of the families, so it is perhaps not totally useless to operate a brief historical reminder, a few key moments: a rapid overview fatally incomplete.

First of all, let's start by recalling what "**evaluate**"[3] means. Reflections of a "*docimological*"[4] order are both simple and old. They are simple because they are finally apprehended as the place of a very clear change of outlook (or philosophy): the passage or the shift from the notation of a produced object to the evaluation of the real acquisitions of the pupils. They are already historic because they send us back two centuries. Indeed, as early as 1805, an essay on *The Teaching of Mathematics*[5] explicitly denounced the error of targeting exams: "Since it is not an effort of memory that characterizes true knowledge in mathematics, it is therefore wrong that 'an oral and rote examination is used to ascertain the capacity of

[3] The reader can refer to my doctoral thesis (B.-A. Gaillot, 1987) or to my first article available online on my site: *La docimologie et après?* dating from 2004.

[4] From the Greek *dokimé*: ordeal. The word was coined by H. Piéron in 1922 to name the study of exams.

[5] F. Lacroix, in the context of the creation of the main examinations and recruitment competitions by Napoleon in 1808, quoted by H. Piéron (1963), *Examens et docimologie*, Paris, PUF, p. 3.

young people who devote themselves to the study of science'. This article castigated the time wasted "rehashing", the illusion of "knowledge acquired only to show off for a single day" and the absurdity of an education organized for the sole purpose of obtaining a good grade on the exam. Note that everything has already been said.

But back to "**assessment**". If the word is old (1361/1366), the term remains vague (do not dictionaries juxtapose value judgment, calculation and approximation?). The etymology refers us to the Latin *evaluatio* but also to *valere* or *valor*, where value is close to brave (Corneille!), then to the old French "*value*". Thus, to evaluate is to estimate a strength, a degree of success, the exchange value of a product, it is to make a judgment combining several levels of quality. For Hadji (1989, p. 24- 30, 72), it is the "matching of what exists and what was expected […], between reality and an ideal model", or even between a performance and the targeted objectives. Value judgments are *assessments* (qualitative) and not *estimates* (quantitative), it is still necessary, underlines the author, to have defined a value: "the value is the absolute quality serving as a criterion of judgment to appreciate an object, an action or an individual; […] the criterion is the character or the property of an object allowing a value judgment to be made about it". Appreciation which cannot fail to lead to subjectivity.

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.

The objectives of this text 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. 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. 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. As for extending this approach to higher education, while this is entirely legitimate, it must also be examined in its dimensions.

2. 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).

3. 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 4 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 giver 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 following table :

Competencies and indicative actions related to educational moments of the sequence

Educational moment	General competencies; attitudes	Capacities activated by the student; indicative behaviours
Réception of the proposal	•Understanding and applying instructions •Responding to a request by drawing upon one's experience •Establishing objectives •Demonstrating inventiveness and divergence	•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 prectice	•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	•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
Beyong the practice	•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	•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[6], 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

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[6] Regarding the formulation by objectives, Hameline was already concerned that it might suffice to write "to be able to… and to string the pearls of the program" (1979, p. 87). The remark also applies to skills. For lack of having sufficiently insisted on the preliminary need to place the pupil in a situation of authentic creation, certain European programs (Belgium, Luxembourg) can be perceived wrongly as carriers of a contradiction between an introduction formulated in terms of competences and the body of content expressed in mastery objectives (Kahn, 2012).

(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 7 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*[7], 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 (Mainguy[8]). 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.

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[7] In art, more than in the disciplines of writing, the spoken word cannot be enough to keep track. The (digital) portfolio offers itself as a place where the pupil (the student) can collect his main works and record his achievements. For example, each file can bring together the reproduction of the work, a short text which states the intentions, reports on the development process as well as the evaluative feedback on what has been done. The presentation ends with an inventory of the lessons learned on this occasion (technical discoveries; images of cultural references echoed). The portfolio is in itself an instrument of training and assimilation. Consult on this subject Gaillot ([2005] 2014).

[8] Mainguy, M. (2017) . "Portfolio : an assessment tool in the arts", in Leduc, D. and S. Béland, *Perspectives on learning assessment in the arts in higher education,* London, Routledge, p. 260-275.

4. 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 / knowing / 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 8 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.

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.

Formulation of francophone fine arts programs in high school : summary of content and stated expectations (2015)

	Belgium	France	Luxembourg	Switzerland	Québec
Technical content	Experiment with various techniques Control requirements	Experiment with various techniques	Experiment with various techniques Control requirements	Experiment with various techniques Control requirements	Experiment with various techniques Requirements for mastery of transforming gestures
Notional content	Concepts leading to situations of practice	Concepts integrated into problematized situations of practice	Observation of visual aspects Image analysis	Observation and analysis of visual perceptions	Concepts and notions, vocabulary Appropriate use of disciplinary
Visual expression	Exploiting the resources of visual language Creativity	Exploiting the resources of visual language Choice / initiative / autonomy	Exploiting the visual language and its symbolic impact	Using visual language to represent an idea, an imaginary	Effectiveness of the use of knowledge related to visual language
Autonomy	-	Project around 15 years	-	Project around 18 years	Gain autonomy in creation
Art culture History of art	Associated with practice Cultural landmarks, diversity	Articulated to practice Cultural landmarks, diversity + history of the arts	Separate from practice or art history + exploitation plastic exercises	Separate from practice Cultural landmarks, diversity	Related to practice + Skill 3 : read works of art, cultural objects and media images
Verbalization Critical approach	Analytical thinking on production Self-assessment Analysis of works of arts	Analytical thinking on production Self-assessment Analysis of works of arts	Analytical thinking on production Self-assessment Analysis of works of arts	Analytical thinking Self-assessment Analysis of works of art	Self-assessment. Evaluate its approach and production, its achievements challenges for the future
Portfolio	-	Suggested logbook; high school terminal exam record	Annual presentation and evaluation file	-	Portfolio, review of its approach to creation

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 / 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.

5. 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[9], 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

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[9] This project (Tuning Educational Structures in Europe), launched in 2000 and supported by the European Commission, is a university initiative aimed at harmonizing content and teaching methods according to a skills-based approach, aligning curricula to promote capitalization and credit transfer.

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 craftsperson 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 twentyfirst 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 13 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 pseudoperson; 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.

6. Academic Skills and Strategies

Entering through skills means not being satisfied with measuring learning through replication and skill development. Entering through skills is aimed at developing the ability to face "complex" situations which, for us in art, are mainly situations of expression based on initiative (reflexive autonomy and capacity to create). Beyond that, entering through skills is about developing skills for the long term, "for life".

Technically, according to specialists[10], a skill involves referring to:

1. a *context*;

2. a *person* or a group, here the pupils;

3. a *situational framework*;

4. a *range of previous experiences* which can be taken advantage of;

5. a *framework of actions* implemented;

6. a *framework of* usable resources;

7. an evaluation framework*: the* results *obtained, the observed transformations whose success must be assessed.*

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[10] Jonnaert P., M. Ettayebi. and R. Defise (2009). *Curriculum et compétences. Un cadre opérationnel*, Brussels, De Boeck, p.63-64.

1. To decide on a lesson, to develop a didactic device, is therefore first of all to ask: "*How can this be useful; how will this help the young person to build up to face the challenges of life?"* [11]

No course makes sense if the teacher is not able to answer this question. Beyond the programs, the first question is that of **legitimacy,** and especially in the visual arts!

The validity of the intentions being verified, it is necessary to identify the categories of **circumstances** where, within the framework and beyond a "situation of practice", these competences may have to manifest themselves, and thus build or consolidate**.**

Then, the teacher's reflection must lead to choose among the *different available devices* which seems the most fruitful and the most suitable to arouse the interest of the pupil and then to elaborate the *formulation of the proposal* which will stimulate the task requested, Everyone in France knows this today.

During this phase, the work is then double. On the one hand, the teacher must clarify as best he can the **objectives of achievement** (instructions and accompanying constraints) so that the student immediately understands what he is asked to look for and do, sometimes in the mode of competition. On the other hand, it will establish for itself an overview as comprehensive as possible of the knowledge and know-how (*resources)* He hopes to see the reactivation in practice, as well as those he hopes to see built up through experience or, better still, through initiatives made here and there. These "targeted acquisitions"[12] which constitute the **learning objectives** of the teacher are to be established with the help of the programs. The value of the competency-based approach is that it is understood from the outset that these resources will be multiple and diverse. The set (proposal dynamics + targeted acquisitions) constitutes **the didactic hypothesis** of the sequence.

The authenticity of this approach by competences lies precisely in the <u>separation</u> of these two categories of objectives: there is *practice* and *beyond practice*. Students aim at the achievement goals that guide them to produce as part of what is expected, sometimes trying to outdo themselves (and worry about "what's going to matter"). He must use his own means, even if it means forging them in action. In the past, I had used the term "goal of substitution"

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[11] When I was training trainee teachers, I often asked them this question about the work they had planned for their students: "***What right do you have to make them do this?***"
[12] <u>See two "course sheets" in the appendix of the last part.</u>

to describe the fact that the student here is not guided by a goal of mastery that is realistically named as it can be in vocational education. [13]

It is at the moment of the assessment, by talking about what has just been done, that students will become aware of what has been lived, discovered, succeeded, and enter a phase of understanding. "Beyond practice" is access to art issues, access to understanding of issues. It is at this point that the use of the word "competence" takes on its full meaning.

2. In order to take stock of what has just been experienced, it is therefore necessary not to confuse *the evaluation of a production* (the task), *the evaluation of its approach* and the *evaluation of the student's acquisition*s   (what we can infer – hope for – skills built in light of observed behaviours). All the researchers point out that it is very difficult to know the mental operations actually activated during a manufacturing activity and the time of reflection that can follow. Certainly, the student has made use of knowledge and skills that are discoverable (all the easier when it comes to the visual object) or, in any case, he has done well…

It is clear, then (French art teachers are now trained in this), that the observation of the qualities of the manufactured object is not sufficient, nor as proof of real and lasting acquisitions, nor as a goal since we also aim for access to the understanding of art things. It is for this reason that the approach by competences cannot be carried out without a *verbalization phase* in which the pupil not only describes but also argues his approach, comments on that of others, etc.

The lack of space here, working by skills, is, after having favored a proposal that is located as close as possible to the *project situation*, put in place imperatively a device of *self-assessment,* a phase of *metacognitive dialogue* and worrying, finally and above all, about the way in which we are going to **keep track of the achievements**.

Since the generalisation in France of the course by open proposal, the objective being no longer the mastery of a single manual know-how (or «plastic») but also this "beyond practice", three consequences arise from the inversion of the didactic scheme. The first is that, by placing us in an expression where the production of the student is unpredictable, *we can only learn from what has just been produced.* Secondly, evaluation (the balance sheet) is thus

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[13] By now, we will have understood that the word "objective" is no longer used in reference to the pedagogy by objectives; it is simply a point of view, which must be pursued in an open situation.

one of the privileged moments of teaching[14], "intrinsically linked to the course" (to use the French wording of 1996) and this is where "**metacognition**" is essential.[15]

For Grangeat[16], metacognition serves:

- *build knowledge and skills with greater chances of success and transferability;*
- *learn problem solving strategies;*
- *to be more autonomous in managing tasks and in learning.*

3. Speaking is generally not enough to anchor the acquired knowledge (an oral sometimes built on the video-projection of the work), it seems necessary to equip oneself with the **tools** that will allow, beyond the visual production and the events lived in class, to control these understandings, what remains of them in the more or less long term. Today, more and more French visual arts teachers are accompanying their courses with project sheets, various questionnaires, self-assessment sheets with word searcheskeys, quick games that are not written questions and where the student answers with a few words or by checking boxes or linking items. Summary documents are also frequently distributed with sometimes in vignettes some works of pupils of the class and the works of art encountered on this occasion: the *download* on the school server of a data file, now allowed by the digital tool, will quickly be able to facilitate and develop this practice.

4. In order to better account for learning, it is also important for teachers to equip themselves with **appropriate assessment grids**, we can no longer be content to align figures! What we are interested in are the skills acquired for the long term. Whatever these booklets may be tomorrow, here or there, the essential thing is what the student has really appropriated. The symmetrical aspect therefore consists in asking how the student can keep track of these achievements. *A good question, then, is to ask what the student is able to bring home:* ***"Here's what I did and what I discovered and understood."***

This is where we find the question of the *notebook* thought as **"logbook"**, as **"journal"** accompanying the student and being able to collect the memory of various experiments

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[14] Gaillot, B.-A. (1991). " Enseigner les arts plastiques par l'évaluation", *Cahiers Pédagogiques*, n° 294, may 1991, p.24-25.

[15] In reference to the American J.H. Flavell who created the term in 1976 in an article on cognitive development: it is a question of exercising a reflexive feedback on his own learning process. Read in particular B. Noël, *La métacognition*, Brussels, De Boeck, 1991, pp.19-21.

[16] Grangeat M. and Meirieu P. (eds., 1997). *La métacognition, une aide au travail des élèves*, Paris, ESF, p.27.

conducted by the class and by the student in particular (research, sketches, photos of the work done, vocabulary, artistic references, etc.), an accompaniment that can now take a **digital form** on various media. As a result, the idea is not a new one (the "dossier de recherches personnelles") and is very advanced in Canadian research, for example, under the name **"portfolio"**, our plastic colleagues in Quebec are already making extensive use of it. This type of device thus places a double emphasis on process skills and refers to concepts that have been repeatedly valued in this file:[17] self-assessment *and* metacognition. Many authors suggest elements of commentary that we are already used to, including:[18]

- ***why I felt it was important to select it here;***
- ***how I went about doing this work;***
- ***say what I learned on that occasion.***

In the past, I valued the portfolio a lot. The portfolio is thus at the same time an instrument of formation as it has just been said but also of evaluation in that it contains parts that are the witnesses of the knowledge, the skills and the acquired competences but also, by the way in which the elements are presented, of the perception that the student has of it. It must be recognized that the use of the portfolio is still infrequent at the college in France (contrary to Luxembourg and Quebec), although there are some promising developments here and there. An upgrade to digital equipment should contribute to this, even if the organizational aspect that requires experienced teachers should not be underestimated. However, it is now legitimately (but still timidly) introduced at the heart of the assessment of visual arts skills during the oral presentation of the **"*candidate's work book"*** at the French baccalaureate at the end of the secondary cycle.

5. It would be incomplete to conclude on the competency approach without saying anything about **positive evaluation**. In contrast to the traditional assessment, which often works by taking points from what is not mastered, asking about the acquired skills focuses more on the capitalised potential, valuing what the student is capable of doing. While it is naturally legitimate in a formative phase to identify gaps in order to consolidate the student's learning on as many points as possible, then comes the time when the main thing is to *know*

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[17] Monière, F. (2000) « La voie artistique, un projet pédagogique intégrateur » in Gagnon-Bourget, F. and F. Joyal (2000). *L'enseignement des arts plastiques : recherches, théories et pratiques*, London, Canadian Society for Education through Art, University of Western Ontario, p.115. See also: M. Mainguy, « L'usage du portfolio comme outil d'évaluation en arts », in Leduc, D. and S. Béland (2017), *op. cit.,* p. 299-318.

[18] Paris S.G. and L.R. Ayres (2000). *Réfléchir et devenir. Apprendre en autonomie. Des outils pour l'enseignant et l'apprenant*, Brussels, De Boeck, p.94.

what we can rely on to succeed in life. Our concerns must therefore be broadened to two directions:

<u>What concerns the construction of the adult person</u>: what about, of course, the curiosity and interest aroused for art (for example), but what about also the transversal acquisitions developed (mastery of the language in small classes, analytical skills, critical thinking skills, ability to build and carry out a project to its end, civic attitude or involvement, etc.)? While the notes refer only to school play, addressing a student's dispositions through skills sheds light very favourably on the teacher-parent dialogue.

<u>What is self-esteem and life profile</u>: how can what has been experienced and produced in the visual arts help to build a future? Practicing a positive assessment in a competency-based approach means striving to identify the circumstances in which the student is successful (and his skills in terms of seriousness, intuition, creativity, perseverance, thoroughness, but also in terms of assimilation, self-analysis and questioning, for example), it is to highlight the share of excellence that each one possesses in himself.

7. The Age of Skills: Methods and Illusions

To have a global look at the device, let's go back to the chronology of the didactic sequence: in view of the assessment by skills, the teacher must first ask himself:

- • - *What question(s) do I want the students to ask themselves?*
- • - *What practice situation should be established so that these questions arise and so that students learn by doing and by taking risks?*
- • - *What initiatives do I expect from them regarding this issue?*
- • - *Will they be able to analyze their approaches and evaluate each other?*
- • - *Will they be able to understand the challenge of this work and its link to art?*
- • - *To capitalize on these discoveries in a fund of personal resources?*

It is from this didactic hypothesis that the teacher will invent the work proposal that he will present to his students. During the visual arts sequence, the student is constantly asked to put in place an appropriate response. He must organize himself, summon his means, take a step back. A reflection focusing on anticipating the skills activated by a device and concerned

with highlighting "action", that is to say what comes from the initiative and the method, can be based on the didactic time. Each of the points listed can then serve as a benchmark to assess the progress of the students.

As a general rule, a simple mastery objective can be controlled by a single performance (e.g. in 5th grade, about "*Storm at sea; storm in painting*" echoing Turner's two periods: knowing how to differentiate between two materials - sky and seawater – by the mixture of the primary colors, the degree of dilution and the touch).

A higher objective of competence refers to a diversified palette of research and possible individual initiatives (an open proposal could be in 3rd grade "*Carry us to the heart of the blizzard; free techniques*"): on the one hand, the performances then become plural , even unexpected, on the other hand, the competence extends to a grasp of the artistic fact where "understanding" is no longer reduced exactly to "doing" and opens up very broadly to the history of art. When observing his students, the teacher must bear in mind, with a view to the evaluation to come (but also the more distant assessment at the end of the cycle), a certain number of indicators - already seen here - and which inform his assessment:

- *- Are students making progress? What else can they do?*
- *- Is he able to develop and complete a creative process with relevant and controlled means?*
- *- Is he able to name what he has discovered, understood, what he has appropriated?*
- *- Is he able to analyze works and make reasoned judgments?*
- *- Is he now better able to act alone?*
- *- Does he enjoy his discoveries (practice or culture), does he feel more involved?*
- *- Has he developed skills and demonstrated interesting abilities for his future career direction or project?*

Of course, these generic capacities are to be selected and/or specified **according to a given practice situation**. See two "course sheets" in the appendix of this last part.

This being now clear as to the didactic and docimological objectives, let's summarize the lessons that seem to emerge from these "competency-based approaches" and the debates that they helped to raise. What lessons can we learn?

- We must be aware of the polysemy of the word "competence", which can just as easily refer to a simple, well-mastered know-how as to a high-level arrangement to cope with any new situation. At the school level, this means knowing the difference between "*know-how-to-do*" and "*know-how-to-act-alone*".

- A competency can be disciplinary, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary or downright general. Working only disciplinary skills would be without echo *outside* the class; to refer too exclusively to transversal or general skills would run the risk of serious scientific and cultural impoverishment.

- The skills approach worries families who fear a loss of content. We need to write our competency records in such a way that they are seen as an *added rigour to* the control of procurement.

- Skills only exist in situations, so we need to encourage students to identify them and then reinvest them on their own initiative in new contexts. This means giving strong credit to the *project approach* as well as to the fact that the student must be able to appreciate the enrichment of his acquired knowledge and to give them to see: this has long advocated in favour of the *digital portfolio trail*.

- The integration of a skill cannot be sustainable if it is not felt by the student as necessary in view of the world in which he is called to live. Any approach by competencies (and therefore any program writing) must be based on an examination of *contemporary reality* and based on relevant objectives. This relates to the legitimacy of our courses.

- The skills approach is an attempt in many countries to better prepare for adult life, social and vocational integration, so we need to keep this connection in mind in every assessment for students and families.

- Finally, we must work on the ergonomics of new assessment tools so as not to burden teachers. This concerns, on the one hand, the *self-assessment* of the achievements of each learning sequence, the task of which must be entrusted to the pupils themselves under our supervision; on the other hand, the form to be given to the documents of the annual report *in teaching version and version families*.

We know that many authors have castigated the "endless lists of skills" written here and there. Let's also beware of overestimating and be careful. For the record, C. Hadji and P.

Meirieu already denounced in 1989 "*evaluative frenzy*" and "*interpretative intoxication*", inviting teachers to avoid the three traps of evaluation: objectivist, technical, interpretative[19].

Undoubtedly, the "skills-based" approach (or CBA) is a school of rigor, requirement and responsibility because it obliges teachers to develop real "didactic hypotheses", to better define and better identify the achievements actually assimilated by the pupils in a more forward-looking perspective. It therefore guarantees or promotes a "better evaluation".

However, the CBA – in the visual arts – does not fail to reactivate several questions already raised in terms of evaluation (Gaillot, 1987) relating to subjectivity and even more to the difficulty of establishing and taking charge of sufficiently authentic situations of expression. Here again, the specificity of artistic teaching places them in an offbeat position: critical. Call for modesty, therefore. Only authentic resurgence, several times, on various occasions (practice; culture) and in a natural way, can lead to the thought that a real disposition is beginning to be internalized and that it deserves to be noted by the teacher. If, in certain fields, the evaluation of skills can be likened to a certification, the evaluation of skills in the visual arts, and even more so with regard to practice, is more about the order of the promise than of certainty.

there is still a lot of progress to be made regarding **the elucidation and capitalization of what has been learned** because – in my opinion – the "portfolio" type witnesses of appropriation are not taken seriously enough (verbalization in the visual arts evaporates in the spoken word, it is not enough if the student is not able to reformulate on his own what he has retained). To succeed in this ambition, two major necessities must prevail:

1) It is important that the competency-based approach not be a superficial dressing that hides a chronic learning deficit. If the reference to skills now seems acquired, we cannot remain indifferent to the risks of students falling in the PISA rankings[20], even if they can be criticized. Nor indifferent to the fact that any attempt to first ensure mastery in primary school of "reading-writing-counting" is not always as rigorous as in the past. Admittedly, today, some minds might say, there is no need for "competence": *Google* and

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[19] Hadji, C. (1989). *L'évaluation, règles du jeu*, Paris, ESF, p.13 and p.183.
[20] The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide study by the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) in member and non-member nations intended to evaluate educational systems by measuring 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic performance on mathematics, science, and reading. It was first performed in 2000 and then repeated every three years.

Wikipedia replace memory and the obligation to learn, the calculator calculates for us and avatars such as *ChatGPT* – invented by those who have learned to read-write-count – are already programmed to think well and express themselves for us!

With regard to the visual arts, note that if the effect of the CBA has probably reinforced the teachers in their teaching, a parallel can be drawn with the hopes placed in the contribution of the history of the arts (HDA) in France: in both cases, a positive momentum then a noticeable relaxation; in both cases, a lack of control of learning, observation has long been listed[21]. Because the truth on the ground, very often, is that our students, even if they aspire to find in the visual arts a different climate, less academic, where we discover differently, also realize that we sometimes learn very little. Thus this recent observation about the conclusion of sessions or sequences of visual arts in France:

> "Very frequently, the conversation about artists' works or student productions leads teachers or lecturers to mention other artists: "*you will be looking on the internet for next week*". Without precise content, without indicating the means of research or the expected forms of presentation of the results, these requests are only mentioned and never verified, renouncing to rely on the academic forms of obligation and work".[22]

In a more systemic way, it is clear that the HDA device reveals even more the flaw that has long weakened French prescriptions, so it is enough to reread them to be convinced:

> "Although naming and presenting itself as teaching, it never speaks of learning, nor of disciplinary knowledge, but of *contribution to the acquisition of a culture* and *participation in the acquisition of transversal skills* such as *mastery of the French language, social and civic skills, autonomy and initiative*. But in the expected achievements, no putting into practice is mentioned: the pupils are "informed of", "situate a work", "frequent" cultural places, have "attitudes" (which imply curiosity and open-mindedness - concentration and motivation - critical spirit), <u>without ever worrying about the way in which learning through experience takes place</u>". Thus, the teaching of the visual arts would join the particularities of "education for".[23]

Carelessness which will only be able – I am afraid, hoping to be wrong – to delegitimize in the more or less long term the teaching of the visual arts because the space is thin between the "inessential", recently updated by French government policy, and the "' useless ".

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[21] For a long time I have kept a poster collected with greed in the United Kingdom which displayed this magnificent slogan: « *If you think school work is too tiring, try ignorance* »...
[22] Sylvain Fabre, *La classe à l'épreuve des dispositifs : l'exemple des arts plastiques au collège*, Rennes, PUR, 2015, on line : http://journals.openedition.org/educationdidactique/2387 , p. 32.
[23] L. Espinassy, 2011, *op. cit* . p.7 (my emphasis).

To add a final element to the risks of a school disaster, this learning deficit suffers in addition to the presentation to parents of these assessments by skills. It seems essential to warn about the fact that the common presentation of the pupil's quarterly report in 3rd grade ("elements of the program worked on" then overall value) ultimately turns out to be more worrying and disappointing than really rigorous and enriching. Its sibylline formulation **may be only a screen masking an unchanged or even disastrous situation**, which would make a strong case, upstream, for *an intermediate teacher-document* sufficiently detailed to answer parents' questions about real school work.

Indeed, can we not imagine (for example, with a bad spirit !) that a French teacher in 9th grade could include in his "elements" "*express himself in a controlled way*" and refrain from dictating while that the dictation appears on the final exam? That a visual arts teacher can even include the title elements of the program by omitting the obligation of artistic culture to the point that his students leave secondary school ignorant of the history of the arts? We see here that the grievances formulated against the CBA (**loss of knowledge; re-dressing of content**) could unfortunately retain a great deal of legitimacy!

It is certain that many teachers (here: of visual arts) remain uneasy about the evaluation of prior learning. A study of the implementation of competency-based assessment in college "shows that the assessment systems and their use(s) are characterized by the massive use of external resources, the time-consuming construction of new tools, the valorization of behavioral and transversal skills **to the detriment of disciplinary knowledge**". The dilemmas and difficulties of teachers "have their origin in multiple tensions concerning the integration of tools into the organization of the class, their differentiated use according to the profiles of the pupils, their conformity with the school programs, their contribution to disciplinary or transversal learning and the meaning given to competency-based assessment".[24]

There is no teaching without rigorous control of learning; there are no skills to assess without prior knowledge. To think for a moment that a successful act in school time can be proof of "competency" is an *illusion*. Success in school and in life is necessarily based on **learning** and **effort**. To say that is to do an act of education.

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[24] F. Brière, L. Espinassy (2021), « De l'analyse de l'activité aux analyses didactiques : une recherche participative. Mise en œuvre de l'évaluation par compétences en cycle 3 en réseau d'éducation prioritaire », *Revue Phronesis*, 2021/1 (Vol. 10), p. 18-36, here p.33.

2) It is important that the competency-based approach assumes a real cultural ambition. For us, in the arts, this therefore means as much looking to the future as being committed to transmitting through works a memory, a heritage and the cultural values that have nourished us. The recent programs for the French college (2020) cite among the four families of skills worked on, that of "finding oneself in the fields related to the visual arts" and "being sensitive to questions of art": not only knowing, recognizing, analyzing, but also "questioning and situating works and artistic approaches from the point of view of the author and that of the spectator, taking part in the debate aroused by the artistic fact". This needs to be qualified, as we have seen, depending on the French-speaking countries studied.

The CBA encourages naming the issues. Thus, of course, in art, it is necessary to "associate practice and artistic culture", of course, the approach to questions of art in the lower grades can only be approached through the experience of doing... However, thinking in terms of constructed skills, in the field of artistic teaching, does it not also invite us to think in a broader way about *what will best contribute to the future of young people* by making them both informed and critical in the face of the societal upheavals that they are bound to encounter? In this respect, would it not be legitimate, on the occasion of the declination of the skills worked, to ask the question of the weighting of these, not that it can be a question of attenuating the importance of the instrumental practice and the aim of visual skills, but simply to recognize the intensity of the *cultural pressure* in the world of today, which pushes to consider as essential - not to say vital - the acquisition, as soon as the pupil is capable of it, of a humanist thought allowing to approach artistic manifestations of the present and the past, to situate and understand them with regard to their context in an approach that is both phenomenological and anthropological in order to structure one's relationship to the world.

The cultural issue has become an essential issue, it is a social issue. The 21st century is both the era of a veritable "diasporization" of forms across the entire planet, leading to an apparent cultural globalization (Bourriaud, 2009, p. 93-164), and that of the present moment, that of the immediacy of access to trivialized and standardized images of the world without ever the slightest thought of putting them in perspective. Only the visual arts teacher can try to stop this media transience, raise questions, re-establish links. What is incumbent on artistic teaching, based on the transversality of the arts, is certainly working in the comparison of *civilizations.* The *history of the arts* instituted in France in 2008 went in this direction, opening up to tolerance, aiming to "give everyone a common awareness, that of belonging to

the history of cultures and civilizations, to the history of the world"[25]. Having become optional in the context of the end-of-cycle oral exam, it is up to visual arts teachers to perpetuate the project and I am convinced that considering its teaching mission in terms of skills acquisition helps to better keep this ambition in mind.

Thus, there is no place for artistic teaching in secondary school if what is to be discovered, *learned*, is not discussed and linked to the issues of *culture* and *civilization*. These two requirements, as we wanted to show here, are inseparably linked. On the one hand, it is therefore this paradox, this quasi-oxymoron that we must play with, on the other hand, also admit that *there is no truth in art* or in the human sciences and that what is manifested there will always be of the order of the ellipsis, of the question, of the nuance, never of the unequivocal answer. And that is our strength.

But if our ambition is immense, the road is still long and uncertain. Despite the progress made in artistic education in thirty years, some observers outside the arts still present the visual arts as "a young and minor discipline". While they admit (Faure, 2015, already mentioned) that the arts effectively intend "to relate this practice to cultural references, by showing the complementarity between knowledge, values and works", they deplore a significant gap between the prescribing texts and the classroom environment where it appears that the students perceive playful activities rather than teaching. This should challenge us, push us to redefine and reinforce our priorities. Force us, urgently, to say and to act!

Skills-based approach, control of learning and cultural ambition are three major elements that underpin our action and ensure our legitimacy.

According to Bernard-André Gaillot, March 2009,
expanded version, references updated and translated in 2023.

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[25] To explore this subject further, see: Boudinet, G. (dir.), *Enseigner l'Histoire des arts : enjeux et perspectives*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2011 as well as Terrien, P. and J.-L Leroy, *L'enseignement de l'histoire des arts. Contribution à la réflexion et à l'action pédagogique*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2014.

APPENDICES

APPENDICES 1 and 2 : *Two lesson sheets*

APPENDIX 3 : *Quebec.The assessment of the skill to create*

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

APPENDICES 1 and 2

There is competence only in situation. Let us look at the level of the sequence and the development of the work plan by the teacher, that is to say at the level of what can be called his "didactic hypothesis": he must try to anticipate what could be the "knowledge and skills expected" at the end of this sequence.

Here are two competency specification sheets relating to two specific practice situations:

Concept worked on : the materiality of the material,
(France, collège, level 6th = aged 11)

Initial objective : what specific skills to develop ?
- Being sensitive to the materiality of the materials, to to the differences in texture
- Being able to choose them wisely in a job
- Be aware of the question of rich / poor materials

What practice situation should be established to encourage the student to make choices ?

Incentive : ***"Miss Ethereal and Mr Lead are two modern sculptures"***

Specification of skills :

In terms of plastic expression :
- Knowledge : discover new materials, their properties, new gestures, new tools…
- Able to collect, classify, compare, choose… (grab…)
- Able to produce or imitate (tools, gestures…)
- Able to work them and organize them in response to demand = light-airy / heavy-soft
- Able to produce coherent units with heteregeneous materials

In terms of verbal expression :
- Knowledge : the vocabulary corresponding to materials and materiality
- Able to recognize and designate the difference in materials and textures, to name the corresponding plastic operations
- Able to designate the material effects produced in an object or an image, a light or sound efffect…
- Able to describe or argue his choice of materials in relation to the instructions
- Able to discover the symbolic or expressive character of the material in a work shown by the teacher

On cultural level :
- Knowledge : *La danaïde* by Rodin, 1889 ; *Cardboard Guitars* by Picasso, 1912 ; Arte Povera (*untitled, copper and granite salad* by Anselmo, 1968)
- Able to understand the distinction between rich materials and poor materials (questioned in the 20th century)
- Able to that you have to choose materials adapted to your intertions but the essence of art is also to transcend the materials (Gothic architecture, Baroque or *Laocoon* sculpture) : try to address this question already.

THE WORK AND THE PLACE ; THE WORK AND THE BODY

(France, high school, speciality, final cycle = aged 18)

- <u>Objective</u> : to explore what is involved in animals in art (final class in art)

- <u>Didactic logic</u> : invent a proposal by which the student will be confronted with the choice of representing the animals or having it intervene more or less directly in his device.

"You are offered a "carte blanche" to intervene inside the London Zoo (documents provided). Show your project as you please : real work, iconic file, model, video, etc."

<u>Assessment</u> :
- The work fits into the space of the zoo and takes advantage of it ;
- It develops a relevant and interesting subject related to animals ;
- Mastery, ambition, uniqueness of your proposal.

Specification of skills :

<u>In terms of practice</u> :
- Enrich your formal vocabulary : draw animals better ; better visualize your intentions ;
- Develop know-how in the development of a project in conjunction with a place : be able to take advantage of the topography of a given space ;
- Be able to word from a large format or full-scale perspective.

<u>On a reflective level</u> :
- Build a meaningful relationship linking the work, the animal kingdom and the chosen place ;
- Argue by orally supporting his project ; assess in jury those of the other students ;
- Review the questions relating to the in situ ;
- Understand the implicit aspects of the work : the work car be decorative, it can represent or evoke by image or metaphor, it can directly use the animal or its trace, it can be made for the animals themselves, make them actors…

<u>On a cultural level</u>, enrich your knowledge of the place of animals in art :
- Support for thought (Egyptian or Hindu gods, myths, symbols and legends… ;
- Companions of man (Potter, Troyon, Delacroix….) ;
- Human metaphor (Gericault, G. Aillaud, W. Wegman, K. Fritsch…) ;
- Partner or actor of the work (J. Beuys, J. Kounellis, H. Duprat, Yukinori Yanagi…) ;
- Finally, a more detailed study of the *House for Men and Pigs* installed by K. Oller and R.M. Trockel at Documenta X in Kassel in 1997.
- Be able to make asssumptions about the status of the animal in works discovered during research ; be able to relate to the time and country concerned.

APPENDIX 3
The assessment of creative competency in the visual arts
In Quebec universities and colleges[26]

Pierre Gosselin, Elaine St-Denis, Sylvie Fortin, Sylvie Trudelle, Francine Gagnon-Bourget and Serge Murphy

Following the analysis by the authors of the interviews granted by expert teachers in the visual arts (research covering several years)[27]:

(Excerpts)

"At the time of the summative evaluation, the attention of the teacher focuses mainly on three objects: the artistic productions of the students, the process that made it possible to generate them and the discourse that the student holds about his process and his achievements. However, teachers also take into account the cohesion between these same objects of evaluation; that is to say that they pass judgment on the coherence between the approach, the artistic productions and the discourse of the student (…).

1. Criteria and indicators for the evaluation of artistic productions

The observation of the practices of visual arts teachers shows that they evaluate the artistic production of the student based on the following four criteria: the formal and conceptual quality of the production, the developmental quality of the production, the innovative quality of the production and the expressive quality of the production.

1. Examples of indicators of the formal and conceptual quality of artistic production
   - Mastery of visual language
   - Technicality at the service of the work
   - The effectiveness of the work
   - The autonomy of the work, etc.
2. Examples of indicators of the developmental quality of artistic production
   - The development of the work
   - Going beyond the literal of the proposal or the source of inspiration
   - The artistry of the work
   - Compliance with the proposal, constraints, parameters
   - The engagement of subjectivity, etc.
3. Examples of indicators of the innovative quality of artistic production
   - The originality of the work
   - News of the work, etc.
4. Examples of indicators of the expressive quality of artistic production
   - The sensitivity of the work
   - The strangeness of the work
   - The opening of the work, etc. (…)

2. Criteria and indicators for evaluating the creative process

The observation of the practices of visual arts teachers shows that they evaluate the approach of their students based on the following five criteria: the quality of presence, the quality of reflection and understanding, the quality of exploration, the quality of development and the quality of presentation.
 (…)

3. Criteria and indicators for the evaluation of discursive productions

Teachers evaluate the discursive productions of their students based on the following two criteria: reflective quality and formal quality. The discursive productions concern as much what the students say as what they write about their approach and their artistic productions."
(…)

Excerpts taken from the collective work directed by D. Leduc and S. Béland (2017),
***Regards sur l'évaluation des apprentissages en arts à l'enseignement supérieur*,**
Montréal, Presses de l'Université du Québec, part 12, p. 251- 271
Translation by B.A. Gaillot.

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[26] In Quebec, the college (CEGEP) is a specialized pre-university education, intermediate between secondary and higher education.

[27] Gosselin, P., Fortin, S., Murphy, S., St-Denis, E., Trudelle, S. and Gagnon-Bourget, F. (2014). *Référentiel pour le développement et l'évaluation de la compétence à créer en art au collège et à l'université.* On line : < http://www.competenceacreer.uqam.ca >

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