



## Notes on evaluation in visual arts workshops of the upper level.

Notes on evaluation in visual arts workshops of the superior level.

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### SUMMARY

Education for the training of artists, outside the format of academies of the nineteenth century, is an activity that from the second half of the twentieth century has been inserted into the curricula and formal study programs, since then, questions and concerns have been added about what are the best teaching and evaluation strategies on research processes. *ón/creación* addressed in art workshops (because, *diffícilmente*, the creation of art, is considered research), the above presents a challenge: to objectify with a critical sense, not only products and results, but also the practices and meanings to questions that, because of their constant evolution and nature, they can become subjective.



The present article, born from the observations made during the January-June 2019 semester in a visual arts program of the higher level in Mexico, is based on the exploration and analysis of previous studies on education or evaluation in artistic disciplines, to analyze information that provides ideas that clarify aspects that can be evaluated by observing processes of Research and Artistic Creation (CI) born in schooled programs; the possibilities and responsibilities involved in appointments, not only to students, but also to teachers and governing bodies, influencing through their practice, in the society that embraces and sustains them.

**Keywords:** Formative evaluation. Arts education. Visual arts. Investigación. Creación artística.

## ABSTRACT

Education for the training of artists, outside the format of academies of the 19th century, is an activity that from the second half of the 20th century has been inserted in the curricula and formal study programs, since then, questions and concerns about which are the best teaching and evaluation strategies regarding the research / creation processes approached in arts workshops (because artistic creation is hardly considered research), the above presents a challenge: to objectify with a critical sense, not only products and results, but also the practices and meanings of issues that, due to their constant evolution and nature, can become subjective.

This article is born from the observations made during the January-June 2019 semester in a visual arts program of the higher level in Mexico, is based on the exploration and analysis of previous studies on education and evaluation in artistic disciplines, to analyze information that provides ideas that clarify aspects that can be evaluated by observing processes of Research and Artistic Creation (CI) born in school programs; the implicit possibilities and responsibilities, not only to students, but also to teachers and governing bodies, influencing through their practice, the society that embraces and supports them.

**Keywords:** Formative assessment. Arts education. Visual arts. Research. Artistic creation.

## Introduction

The learning and practice of art outside Academies are relatively recent processes, product of the rupture that manifests itself in the early nineteenth century in the culture of the West, where the teaching of these so-called "major arts" (Painting, Sculpture, Literature and Architecture) begins to



leave the traditional structure inherited from the Renaissance (Storr, 2009), where the activities were developed within a studio-workshop, usually of the expert artist, structured around the instruction, understanding and mastery of techniques and skills, based on classical models (Greece and Rome), transmitted from master to his apprentices.

From this rupture, with the heyday of the universities during the twentieth century, a process begins to integrate techniques and practical skills, with cognitive domains based on theory, in order to assimilate and produce new knowledge, within the normativity of the curricula.

At present, formative evaluation in production workshops in visual arts faces challenges born in the very nature of the discipline, since it is a process that aims to know both skills, abilities and mastery of materials; as well as the evidence of knowledge, reflection, innovation and creativity, the balance tends to tip to the area of visual perception, exceeding the value of the conceptual load, especially in a world with a predilection of "powerful genes" (Bauman, 2005): advertisements, objects reproducible on a massive scale, fashion trends, and other media prepared for immediate consumption.

Michaud (2007) writes in this regard the existence of two large groups where the manifestation of art moves in the twenty-first century; one where worship is rendered, almost of adoration or devotion to the prefabricated beauty, the triumph of the profuse esthetic, to the experience esthetic transient and without supports, almost gaseous; and at the other extreme, but with the same result, the saturation and serial reproducibility of the artistic object, the transformation of museums and galleries into art supermarkets. With the monitoring of these lines, the evaluation of the artistic object can be skewed towards the standardization of aesthetic trends for consumption (real or abstract) of the spectators (Spentzas, 2017, p.218).

The evaluation carried out in such a way, or in the present case, of the artistic object, is usually influenced by the tastes or previous experiences of the teacher-spectator (Romero, 2011), or to the standardization of aesthetic trends for mass consumption. In the specific case of the educational system, the higher level, this responsibility falls primarily on the subject teacher, with the commitment that is assigned to him from the parameters established by the educational program, curricula and institutional



policies, in conjunction with the criterion, experience and personal tastes of the teacher responsible for the evaluation.

This article is born from the interest from the professional practice and the observations made in the field, in a search to know what are the indicators that are considered relevant when evaluating the production or art in workshops, of the students at the higher level, the challenges faced by teachers and possible alternatives to reduce the gap between theory, practice and appreciation of artistic expressions. It should not be forgotten that the aesthetic judgments correspond to contexts and realities nuanced by the culture and knowledge of the social group where it is carried out, therefore, the complexity can become greater.

## Development

To understand when talking about workshops in the field of study (higher level), reference is made to the joint and collaborative work between groups of students, with the supervision of a teacher, to carry out activities that promote learning through the execution or "The classroom workshop is a scenario to learn by doing" (De Vincenzi, 2009, p.42). This "learning by doing" also has the characteristic that is carried out in a collaborative way, where students exchange ideas, proposals, and concerns; the teacher in such a context is in charge of proposing a problem or situation to be addressed, supporting with proposals of technical or methodological aspects, as well as of bibliography to that of contributions for the construction or of the skills and / or knowledge sought.

In a complementary way from the thought of Liv Mjelde, it is possible to consider that it is in the workshops where "learning takes place in a community of social practice in which cooperation and the feeling that what is being produced is a collective work predominate." (Mjelde, 2015). It is in the workshops (classroom-workshop) where the dynamic that favors the procedural constructions through the action is propitiated, the use of the body in connection with the mind, is the opportunity then to involve all the senses, for the construction of ideas and learning.

To analyze what are the best teaching and evaluation strategies on the processes of research or / creation addressed in art workshops, we start from the principles of the Grounded Theory (hereinafter



TF); which seek that vision or epistémica, multidimensional of the creative process and its evaluation, and that emerges from the "data collected in a systematic way and analyzed through a process of investigation" (Strauss and Corbin, 2002).

The first step was to work with the observer participant in the workshops of the Department of Visual Arts of a university in the center of Mexico, where the data collection was carried out through a field diary, bitacora and interviews with experts, revealing the first variables of the study, leading the researcher to originate theoretical or rich propositions, based on observation for obtaining empirical data (Jiménez-Fontana, García-González, Azcárate, Navarrete and Cardeñoso, 2016), obtained directly in the natural environment.

The participant observation was developed at the time of the course/workshop, to understand and analyze the different interactions, dynamics, didactic strategies and tools for evaluation, and to collect data that demonstrate the criteria on whether a formative evaluation is given and what it is what the teacher takes into account: the knowledge, skills, creativity, among others, that are impeded in the CI processes.

Through the participant's observation, it was possible to recover: the type of evaluation, if it corresponds to the processes (formative), to the products (summary), and if there is any bias of the teacher, derived from interferences outside the educational process. For the analysis of results derived from observation, the Atlas.ti 8.4.4 program was used, which yields or the Observation Units (UO) from which the training of three groups was derived: Teachers, Students and Creative Process.

## **Creative Process**

Graham Wallas (1926) is credited with the first manual on the elements and steps that a creative process follows: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification, although it is the first reference, and has served as a basis for understanding the evolution of the creative process; Wallas' model is linear, and it translates into the partial understanding of a system that has become more complex, as a result of changes in the way of teaching, learning and evaluating, in the twenty-first century.



To clarify the concept Herrán (2014) mentions that to value creativity it is necessary to separate it from its results, because these can be relative. Therefore, we can argue that, "novelty, value, functionality can be indicators of creative product, if and only if the valued creativity is oriented or considered from the perspective of its tangible effect" (p.28), since there are creative manifestations that do not carry an added functionality or value, since they can be the result of new combinations or arrangements, with old elements, whether material or conceptual.

This last proposal is the one that is considered closest to the field of education or in visual arts; more important is the reference to a different field, in the case of Larrea, from the economic or social sciences; to confirm that the creative processes are relevant to other areas, different from the academic, which suggests the possibility of taking instruments and references that nourish from their model, to the process that interests in this case. In Larrea's perspective, although the creative process is presented as a linear sequence, it is also true that such a decision is supported by the structure it promotes: specific moments to evaluate and analyze the feasibility of a creative proposal, with the opportunity to detect failures or weaknesses in time, which allows us to avoid moving forward, dragging economic losses, expenditure of time and human and material resources.

In the publication "Lessons of class" (2018), Schwember affirms, based on a series of artistic productions made in different school scenarios in Chile, he affirms that "the creative process translates into a complex thought process where rationality is integrated together with approaches that welcome intuition and the senses as vehicles conducive to the production of knowledge" (p. 70).

To round off the construct about creativity, creative product and creative process, it is necessary to take them as independent terms, but intimately linked by the common thread called *energía* (González-Cubillán, 2008). Creativity is the action of the creative process and is represented in the creative product. The creative product is the visible, external part of the action of creating through the creative process. The product will be classified as creative and innovative, at the time of being finalized and agreed.



Only the definition of one of the three elements, product of decoding, will be done, considering that any description of the other two (Students and Teachers), could lead to a redundancy teórica.

### ***Preliminary results***

Next, some deductions resulting from the participant's observation are presented in the first place, specifically with the three professors involved during the case study (A, B and C).

- The dynamic that results in interaction between students is directly linked to the teacher they meet.
- The teacher's behaviour and character have a direct impact on the students' attitude and response.
- The understanding of the researcher is extended when involved not only in coexistence, but in the exercises proposed by the teacher, since it allows him to take the place of the student.
- Managers, teachers and students, process and accept the participation of the observer at different times and partially.
- All the laboratories and workshops observed are taught by artists with a verifiable track record.
- The technical or rich-pedagogical aspect has developed a posteriori, in most cases, to the insertion in the teaching staff.
- The evaluation of creative processes is still poorly understood and delimited, so that each teacher observed does not have a single método or specific tools, and the criterion tends to be reduced only to personal perception.
- Evaluation in workshops tends to be limited to meters and meters recommended by the study program.
- The creative process is observed and is relevant for feedback between teachers and students, but it does not directly affect the evaluation or summary, since there is resistance to evaluating creative aspects, considering that this limits the expressive capacity of the student.



- According to the degree or level of the course, teachers perceive greater freedom to involve conceptual aspects related to creativity, that is, at initial levels a close accompaniment is promoted for the obtaining of technical skills related to material handling, with the advancement during the career of Arts and Design, a tendency to value the formation of a discourse and the line of artistic production is increasing.
- The processes linked to production, if they are considered for the evaluation of learning, since they involve the application of techniques and development of skills that are susceptible to quantitative measurements, based on material qualities.

Based on the observations, it is contemplated the existence of a tendency to avoid the evaluation or evaluation of creative processes in the direct sense to grant value judgments with respect to the artistic works / works of the students, since for the most part they agree that any evaluation or critical to them, it becomes an arbitrary legitimacy and excludes those students who propose discourses other than those normally accepted by the artistic guild. Some partial conclusions are:

- The formative evaluation is revealed as an ideal way to attend to the creative process. This is because it contains the transverse and longitudinal elements necessary to give both structure and flexibility.
- Most of the participating teachers carry out assessments with different degrees of training.
- A tendency to avoid giving a rhythm with the elements present in the creative process, since it is considered, detracts from its freedom.
- It is considered as the main reason to avoid any type of rubric, the lack of a deep and clear consensus, regarding the elements that should contain an instrument to monitor the creative processes in visual arts.

The evaluation of the creative process, linked to research from the arts, does not have well-defined and consensual measurement tools to obtain instrumental information, which reflects in a general way, the



attributes, characteristics and competencies achieved within said process, as well as the corresponding evaluation or result to the student.

As a result of the previous analysis and discussion, we have the basis for proposing a list of actions that can be taken as a model for the exercise of evaluation or creative processes in Visual Arts programs, specifically in the practical workshops that are part of its curricular structure, which gives an answer, at least in the operational part, to the research question on how to evaluate the creative process.

The list is ordered in a line of successive temporal follow-up, but, as in any formative evaluation, its elements can change or order, overlap, repeat or be eliminated; according to the needs of each program and the criteria of the teacher in charge, following a little the notion of "travel diary" in the style of Julio Cortázar and Carol Dunlop (Dunlop and Cortázar, 1984), who, following a highway route, managed to find that you can, if you look closely, discover new things on every leg of the journey. Supported by travel notes, without discriminating details no matter how insignificant they seem at first glance. That said, the following are the recommendations of activities for structuring Formative Evaluation in contexts of Visual Arts workshops at the Higher Level in Mexico.

- Review of background and evaluation or diagnosis to know the degree of skills, intellectual, cognitive and motor, of the students.
- Dialogues individually with each student to have a frame of reference on the interests, expectations and specific skills that the student manifests.
- Promote a session at the beginning of the school year to delimit:
  - The theme and activities to be developed
  - Relevance of the skills and knowledge sought (rich, formal, symbolic and ludic)
  - Proposal and opening of communication channels to follow up on the creative process in a personal way, regardless of the stage within the creative process
- Proposal and presentation of the scheme of the rubric to be used as an instrument to support the evaluation, the format should be the result of the discussion and suggestions proposed by students and teacher.



- Observe and record elements inherent to the research processes, and whether they are evident or implicit within the school project that each student carries out; with the above the teacher will have tangible evidence for administrative purposes, but with evidence of the creative processes, both formal and subjective.
- Design an instrument to record errors or deficiencies observed when retrieving, analysing and categorising the information obtained from the heading used.
- Based on the information recorded, determine if it is necessary to redirect or modify the teaching strategies; which also transforms it into learning, both for the teacher and for the student.

The above list is presented below in a diagram to facilitate its understanding, where it also shows the characteristics of the process, in a constant cycle that nourishes itself; the model is based on the one described above in the chapter of the creative contact.



**Figure 1:** Model for evaluation of the creative process. Own elaboration

## DIAGRAMA PARA EVALUACIÓN DEL PROCESO CREATIVO



The model described is a flexible proposal, since it can be adapted according to the objectives of the specific program of each area of study, the steps it describes, are those that were revealed as ideal for the evaluation process of the creative process in visual arts workshops, however they can be adapted to other areas (architecture, While maintaining the central methodological structure, other specific objectives can be embedded, drafted in such a way that they can benefit from the proposed model.

Within its flexible character, the model is also an alternative to adapt to other areas and contexts (architecture, architecture, design and all those where there is a creative process), maintaining



the structure of the central structure, other specific objectives can be embedded, provided that the general scheme is respected to preserve the structure and to benefit from the proposed model

## Conclusions and recommendations

The closure for the present article revolves around the particularities revealed through contrasts between what has been observed and the position of the rich that underpin the research carried out. The path will be to start from the particularities of the case studies. The first, and perhaps the most forcefully revealed again and again, is the ingrained idea that evaluating is equivalent to qualifying and, therefore, if one seeks to make a judgment by means of a note, the result of an exam or final exercise; such an event can be transformed into Mazur's words: a "killer for creativity" (Mazur, 2020).

The next question that arises is, why is creativity and its products relevant within the context of study? One of the answers is that the value of creativity is implicit not only in the arts, but in practically all areas of life; creativity is required to devise new ways of thinking (creative thinking); the creative process is present when planning commercial strategies; research for new medicines; production of vehicles and the list can go on from every area in the world.

In the case of academic institutions, evaluation is part of the teaching and learning processes, where, in general (at least in the cases observed), it is only used as validation of the learning achieved, leaving aside its possible contributions also to the teaching process.

In order to integrate both processes and obtain benefits from the evaluation, the formative evaluation is revealed as the ideal tool, since from it both elements can be integrated, so that not only to help the student to achieve the objectives set in the course, but to learn from the mistakes, with which it is possible to nourish the one who learns and the one who teaches; the one who learns (the student), becomes aware, with the help of the teacher, of the failures and difficulties he faces; and the one who teaches (the teacher), learns from such an exchange, aided in his "travel diary", from where it can propose new didactic strategies.

The list proposed to help the evaluation of the creative process, is revealed as an incomplete tool, with the intention of opening the discussion or to possible modifications, annexes, corrections and



adaptations, according to the interests and needs of future researchers; but an assertion derived from the Thesis in conclusion, is that creative processes are susceptible to be evaluated; and in the educational context, they must be, if it is intended to take steps for the complete validation and integration of the study of the arts in educational programs, so that they can move from being considered only an area of artistic expression and emotional recreation, to an element with multiple applications practical and functional, with equivalent importance to studies of engineering, economics, medicine, among others, traditionally considered as careers of practical applications for life.

To give closure, the thought of Luis Camnitzer (2012) is left, "It can be said that the teaching of art is fundamentally dedicated to teaching how to make products and how to function as an artist, instead of how to reveal things." The core concept of the phrase leads us to reflect on the validity of learning and teaching from the rigor of science, in this case born in educational institutions, and once mastering two fundamental elements, encourage jumps into the void, using the "hat" of creativity (De Bono, 1988), to unexplored terrains, which is where infinite possibilities await and that allow new knowledge, skills and ways of being in the world, to be revealed.

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