

FINDING THE MISSING LINK: STUDENT-CENTERED ASSESSMENT IN ART AND DESIGN EDUCATION AS A CATALYST FOR EXPANDED COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND LIFELONG LEARNING

FIONA J. QUILL

Technological University
of the Shannon

fiona.quill@tus.ie

KEYWORDS

assessment for learning; constructivist education; hidden curriculum; communities of practice; lifelong learning.

DOI

[10.54916/rae.130054](https://doi.org/10.54916/rae.130054)

DATE OF PUBLICATION

19/12/2023

ABSTRACT

In art and design education, engaging students as partners in practice is a pedagogical necessity. Research shows that it is also an ethical necessity. However, art and design education are deeply entrenched in traditional modes of assessment that are sometimes counterintuitive to the landscape of progressive and innovative learning. There is evidence that assessments are based on subjective values in disciplines where objectivity is difficult to ascertain. Is there a link between the deceleration or arrest of the learner's participation in communities of practice and lifelong learning because of ambiguous assessment methods? Can these deficits be addressed by educational interventions?

Art and design education can be viewed as a very subjective area due to the nature of the process within the discipline. To counter this, learning outcomes have been developed to assist in measuring a student's performance. However, these can be manipulated or taken in varying contexts depending on the discipline, process, or the students' abilities measured against a very static scale. As there are limitless types of learners and profiles of students in education, we need to question and consider the type of evaluation and assessment models used in a 21st century context and the changing landscape of art and design education. By questioning and thus unpacking this fundamental aspect of a student's education, we can open the potential for greater communities of practice in education and a meaningful motivation for lifelong learning.

By attempting to put some context on these theories and the problematic issues in assessment which will be discussed throughout this text, I will exemplar a peer group student project delivered in the Limerick School of Art and Design during the students first year. This is an example of the many possible ways in which project-led interventions can begin to address the deficits between student learning and assessment, developing communities of practice and fostering lifelong learning.

A Curriculum Hybrid

The Limerick School of Art and Design (LSAD) is one of the largest institutions in the Republic of Ireland for creative education programs, however, it is still regarded as working with conservative models of assessment. In 2018, the Fine Art department in LSAD introduced rubrics to assist students understanding of their learning outcomes, and programs in other LSAD departments are yet to implement rubrics in assessment, which is the baseline of student engagement in reviews/assessment (Sendziul, 2010). A rubric alone in student self-assessment is not sufficient to promote good analysis and self-awareness of progress (Sendziul, 2010). Preferably, a structure where the curriculum incorporates the student as a main character, who is guided through the rigorous process of review/assessment is required for meaningful engagement in this procedure from both staff and students.

In LSAD, the curriculum across fine art and design departments has been crafted from more than one model throughout the evolution of the school. Aspects of the curriculum resemble the Bauhaus

systems of the early 20th century. The Bauhaus syllabus was a radical idea for art and design education at the time. The education of a Bauhaus student was holistic and eroded the boundaries between artist and artisan (The Getty Research Institute, 2019). Theory and practice were scaffolded to produce students who were multifaceted and pursued the mission to reform art, design, and society (The Getty Research Institute, 2019).

There has also been the addition of the expressive curriculum development from the mid-20th century in LSAD. This is based on personal expression and the principle that every student has something unique to express (Houghton, 2016), and this is seen as the epitome of student-centered learning. Students are expected to be involved in all aspects of the learning process. Despite this, some educators still assess work without the input of the student during assessment and/or feedback (Houghton, 2016).

In LSAD and many other institutions, we observe the presence of the professional, vocational curriculum developed in the mid to late 20th century, which pushes the employability agenda in the arts and safeguards the notion of learning within a sole discipline (Houghton, 2016). The development of artists and designers for markets and commercial pathways means that the student should understand their cultural and social capital, but if the assessment team does not bring the student into this process, the system is effectually undermining their confidence and potential for lifelong learning (Potts, 2007).

LSAD is not alone in this hybrid curriculum model of art school education, and we know, through institutional networks such as ELIA or EQ Arts that these models have begun to transform but more work in this area is essential.

The development of a framework for student-centered assessment and review processes is crucial. This is to enable the learner to become the central character of this procedure and the educator to become the facilitator through a scaffolded and supported durational program. The structure around self and peer assessment and the review process in art and design education is an area that requires students, staff, and industry stakeholders to be part of the process with a common lexicon (Harris, 2008).

Conversely, we must identify some of the inhibitors that are a factor in the progress of student-engaged assessment. One such barrier is the hidden curriculum.

The Hidden Curriculum

The hidden curriculum has been referenced as early as the 1960s in medical journals. In 1971, B.R. Snyder, a physician and psychotherapist, observed that students were negotiating the space between what was required of them from the learning outcomes and the tacit clues the students picked up on what the faculty required of them (Hafferty & Castellani, 2009). Students learn about the course through prompts from staff that rarely reference learning outcomes. Students become aware of certain ways to work to achieve higher grades that are not always in line with the learning outcomes. Students who do not use these prompts are often at a disadvantage. The assessor works from a feeling about the work rather than references that are tangible to the student, such as the learning outcomes (Cheng, 2015).

If we examine the system used to assess art and design, it employs the system of criterion-referenced assessment. This examines what learners know, understand, and can do, measured against learning outcomes, and students are not benchmarked against each other to regulate a grade (Cheng, 2015). Norm-referenced assessment is used for the assessment of learning. This operates on a system of standardization. Therefore, a curve is used to find the median point, and this means the highest and lowest marks are generally the same quantity (Cheng, 2015). Norm-referenced assessments in art and design education can happen when the assessors measure students against each other's performance to regulate a grade, thus ignoring the nuances of the specific learning outcomes that the individual student is attaining.

A student may start to produce work that is coached by the tutor and not constructed by the student (Adams et al., 2016). Concept development and research thus can be swayed. Although tutors must keep project-based learning on track, their role is to facilitate a structure where students can explore, fail, engage in problem solving, and generate a wide range of solutions (Yelmaz & Daly, 2016).

A part of the hidden curriculum dilemma may rest in the fact that even today arguments continue about what is the basis of artistic competence, should art education teach intellectual and manual skills or anything at all (Llewellyn, 2015)? Debates in art and design education still center around whether contemporary art can be taught or if it is a series of negotiations with students which transform

their thought process through teaching them to 'think' in a contemporary mindset (Newall, 2019). If this is the case, it is a highly subjective methodology in education which potentially stymies a student's capacity to think freely or without influence in the pursuit of original thought.

The formations of studio teaching today are steeped in the system that was developed by the London art schools from the mid-20th century. Llewellyn's book *The London Art School*, references the birth of the critique in the Sculpture department of St. Martins School of Art in the early 1960s and follows its route into most art schools today as a standard practice in art and design education (Llewellyn, 2015). What is surprising is the slow development of the practice of crit, which has remained fundamentally the same from its inception. Students engaged in the production of work concurrently with concept articulation, discussion, and public presentation on critical issues of their work. This has not only supported but actively promoted the hidden curriculum, for both advantageous and problematic modes of teaching and learning.

Lifelong Learning, Self-Regulation, and Assessment

In a post-war era, the reform of the art school hinged on the philosophy of the artist as a thinker and an intellectual (Crippa, 2015). When first implemented, the crit also supported agreement on shared criteria of assessment (Crippa, 2015). This aspect of the crit is perhaps the least evident part of the crit process today. However, Crippa attributes this aspect of the crit to supporting the transformation of "the artist as an assertive and self-defined individual" (Crippa, 2015, p. 150).

At the same time, in this post-war era, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) founded the Institute for Lifelong Learning. During the 1960s an emphasis was put on improving education for international understanding, which fostered international cooperation in school practice (Elfert, 2022).

Lifelong education was at the heart of 'learning societies', in which the focus was no longer on schooling, educational institutions and provision, but on the lifelong learning process of every individual that would enable the

formation of the ‘complete man’ who is an ‘agent of development and change’, ‘promoter of democracy’, ‘citizen of the world’ and ‘author of his own fulfilment’. (Elfert, 2015, p. 89)

Here Elfert is quoting language from the Faure report, “Learning to be” (Faure et al., 1972). During this period, the transformation of the art school and empowerment of the artist/intellectual was not occurring in isolation. Change was being affected across education to support the student to continue confidently in their learning after they had exited institutions.

Assessments can have an impact long after the student has graduated and left the formal system of education, both positive and negative. An effective, integrated, and inclusive assessment procedure creates not only confident and successful graduates but also lifelong learners (Boud, 2000). By developing the processes that encourage lifelong learning that go beyond a governmental initiative to have an educated society, the goal is to create learners to be agents of a learning society (Boud, 2000). Boud says that placing a focus on “how and why” students learn will determine the role of the assessment rather than assessment as the mechanism to drive learning.

As educators in the tertiary sector, we work with adult learners who are the central characters in this process, and while they have autonomy over every other part of their lives, by denying them these opportunities to engage with the seminal moments of their education, we must consider how formative and summative assessment can work against each other to provide a positive and negative experience for the student (Boud, 2000). Imperatively students must be self-assessors and to neglect this means that a student is ill-equipped to deal with change, which has a knock-on societal effect for a lifelong learning society (Boud, 2000).

If we begin to layer methodologies of assessments and reviews, incorporate peer evaluated appraisal with self-assessment using effective tools, modes and technologies that engage students, they will gain in confidence in their own education, and it will also support the idea of becoming a lifelong learner (Wood, 2009).

A key attribute to lifelong learning is to be able to evaluate one’s own learning and that of others (Panadero, Broadbent, Boud & Lodge, 2018). The foundational aspect for this skill is to acquire

self-regulated learning through peer and self-review processes.

Self-regulated learning is cited to be most effective during formative assessment as self-regulated learning enables the student to not only monitor their own learning but use it as an effective guide to push their learning in new directions. Therefore, giving the learner a central role in their education (Panadero et al., 2018).

The outcome of making the student focus on self-regulated learning and building this capacity in our adult learners through pedagogical interventions that enhance an understanding of assessment through the lens of the student means that they will develop the metacognitive and dispositional qualities needed to direct and monitor their learning in new and fast-changing situations throughout their lives (Panadero et al., 2018). To achieve this, Panadero et al. suggest that programs are to be designed effectively, especially on how assessment practices influence students’ regulation of learning processes (Panadero, Broadbent, Boud, & Lodge, 2018).

Methodology

In this discussion piece, I have included an exemplar of a project conducted by LSAD first-year lecturers for incoming Year One students. As Grounded Theory is a core research methodology, I have thus aligned Wenger’s theory on Communities of Practice to the exemplar and allowed the theory to emerge from the data itself (Sawyer, 2017). This seeks to employ Wenger’s theoretical approach, which includes references to lifelong learning and the development of a student’s continued interest in education and throughout the formation of communities of practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The team of educators in the LSAD Year One program collectively and regularly discuss pedagogical methodologies that seek to engage staff and students in a deeper engagement with their practice, through active engagement and learning. A qualitative survey for an ELIA presentation underpins the Descriptive Research of the exemplar project and two significant quotes are used within that presentation as a reference and contextualization (Koh & Owen, 2000).

Year One Peer Group Project

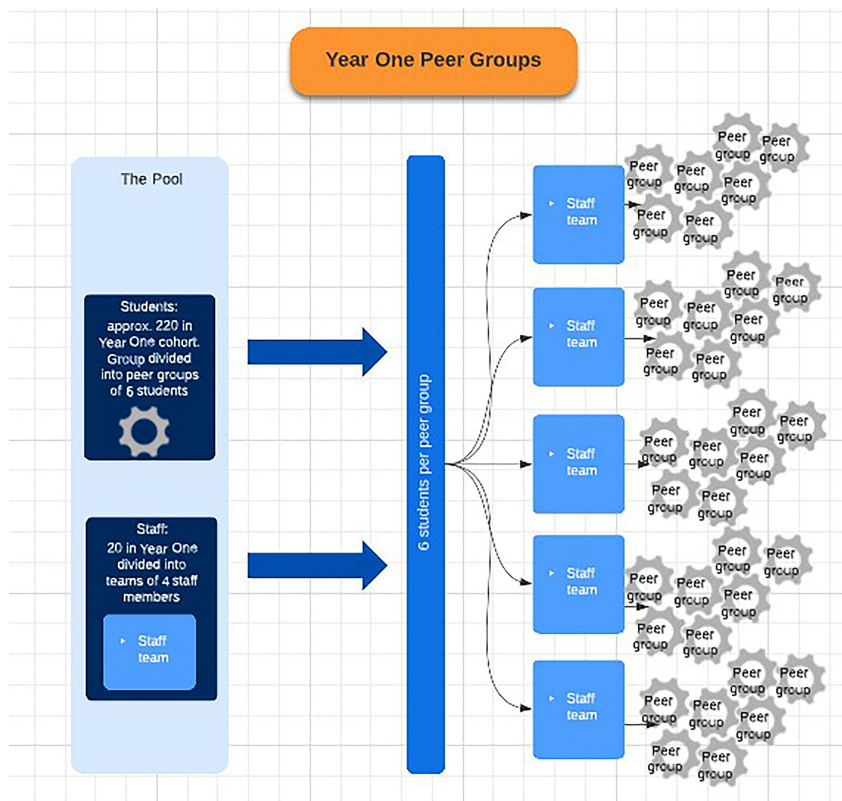
During the first year of a four-year BA program in LSAD, students spend two semesters working on three modules which introduce the core areas of fine art and design. Here, I will discuss a project that launches the first module in semester one.

This project has several purposes. Firstly, and most importantly, the students are assigned into peer groups of six students per group. This process initiates a community of practice (CoP), which Wenger describes as the fundamentals of belonging to a community where the individual learns, and the community gains knowledge and changes (Wenger, 1998). Although the philosophy of communities of practices has always existed, it was Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, while studying apprenticeships as a learning model, coined the term as it related to an approach for researchers and practitioners to knowing and learning (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). In education, the three dimensions to effect change and support CoP are:

- Internally. How to organize educational experiences that ground school learning in practice through participation in communities around subject matters?
- Externally. How to connect the experience of students to actual practice through peripheral forms of participation in broader communities beyond the walls of the school?
- Over the lifetime of students. How to serve the lifelong learning needs of students by organizing communities of practice focused on topics of continuing interest to students beyond the initial schooling period? (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015)

Once the students are introduced into their peer groups, they receive a collaborative peer group project, this is given on the first day of semester. The project is designed to be worked on for two weeks, the duration of orientation week and the following week. Group problem solving, discussion and implementation of prior knowledge and learning makes interacting groups potentially more creative

Figure 1. Diagram of Year One staff and student ratios and Peer Group Distribution Structure.



than individuals (Cooper & Jayatilaka, 2006). The project is called 'Radius' and it is designed as a collaborative endeavor and is informed by the city of Limerick, the location where the students will be living for the next four years, the requirement is to explore the city through any means they see effective.

The project emphasizes the role of primary research in building a cohesive body of work and the students must engage with this form of research through active learning before they move onto any secondary research. The project is not marked, it is peer-reviewed by the students and staff at the end of week two.

Observing the Peer Group formation in Year One, the introduction to a specifically designed group project and an informal peer review process, we begin to see the three tenets of CoP forming.

The peer groups connect the students with at least five other students on the first day of the semester. These peer groups are created in alphabetical order and as the profiles of the students and their backgrounds are not known, it means that each of the peer groups contains a range of ages, genders,

ethnicity, and backgrounds. The teaching team of the Year One program see this as an integral part of the students learning through peer exchange and laying the foundations of CoP.

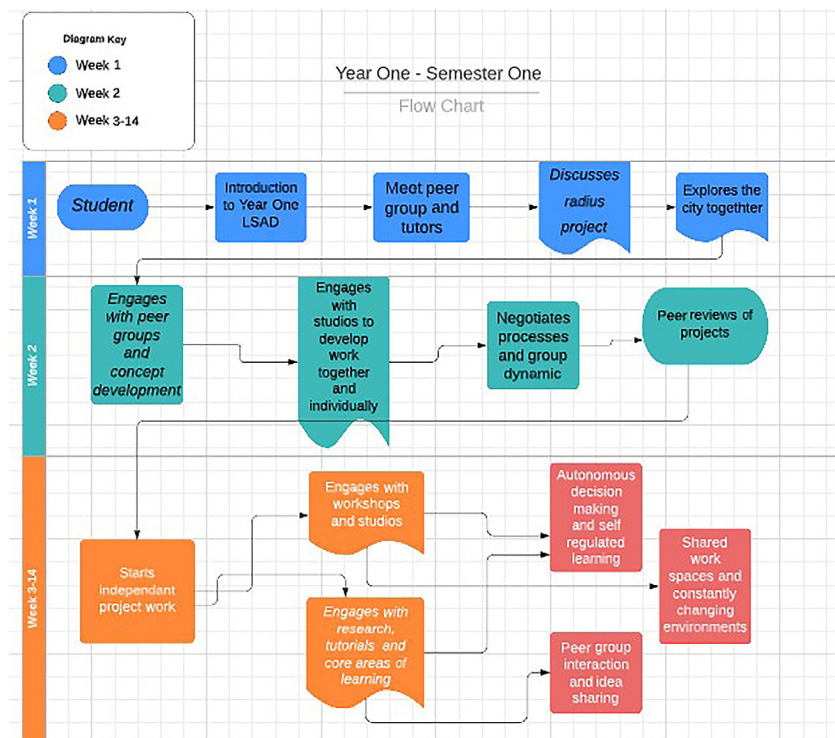
Des MacMahon, lecturer in Year One, says that:

Peer groups not only enhance inter-generational learning, but intercultural, societal and gender learning. They allow and encourage discussion between people who may never have communicated with each other, and they provide a space that has parameters where engagement with each other does not necessarily mean that you are adopting a new friend or are in some way obliged to someone. This allows members of the peer group to engage without social pressure and gives them time and freedom of choice to decide if the relationships made in the peer group have potential outside the group in a broader societal context.

Paul Gardiner, lecturer on the Year One team, takes this one step further, he says:

Beyond observation and individual discussion during peer reviews I have stated what I believe to be the key takeaway, students have said how

Figure 2. Flow Chart. Year One, semester one.



meeting and interacting with their peers of all ages are beneficial. It may be worth noting that they also created internal social groupings that exist outside of college created places, mainly using Discord servers.

The students build CoP from the initial stages of their third level education, and they are involved in peer review which is introduced without the caveat of formal assessment. This gives the student the opportunity to become aware of the assessment system they are about to embark into without the stress or pressure that grading imposes.

It also puts a different emphasis on the role of the teaching team at this point, whereas now the tutor is positioned as a co-participant or support structure for the project (Shreeve, 2007). The peer group may be identifying primary research on the 'Radius' project that the tutors might not be as knowledgeable about. The project is designed for the fast-changing and expansive nature of a city, meaning that the tutor may not be the institutional 'expert' during this time (Shreeve, 2007). The shift in power dynamics opens opportunities for engagement and dialogue by placing the students in a deliberately disturbed learning environment (Orr & Shreeve, 2017). The disruption of the stability of the teaching environment that the students have grown accustomed to over their previous years in education creates a space which fosters new ways to communicate (Shreeve et al., 2010). Although uncomfortable as these disruptions can be, the emphasis is on channeling the difficulties experienced by these situations and harnessing this discomfort to become more adapted at dealing with adversity in new and changing environments.

Once this project is complete the students move into a longer project which is focused on the individual development of the student, however the students still retain their peer groups for tutorials and crits

with the teaching team that they have been assigned previously.

The students are asked to self-assess during formative and summative stages in this module. This self-assessment involves the students reviewing their learning outcomes and measuring themselves against their process and practice, thus ensuring that they understand what the learning outcomes mean to their own development and the projects development. The students are also in attendance for the formative and summative assessment of their work which involves two staff members per student. This ensures that staff and students have a clear, open, and concise dialogue about their project and the learning outcomes contained within the brief.

Conclusion

A student developing their autonomy throughout their education, especially in areas of assessment, can have a substantial impact on their confidence, communities, and cultural shifts if we, as educators, allow ourselves to surrender some of the control and create new methods for lateral flow of communication. With each new cohort of students, we should be able to respond in real time to their social, cultural, and economic demands. Robust conversations with our students, discussion of assessment and their understanding of it, is part of an extensive process. This process can become an eco-system when we fully integrate students into it, which in turn, evolves into a larger, healthier, and more diverse community which is resilient, self-aware, and thus more capable of embedding lifelong learning and enhancing personal development and through that a societal change and to become a citizen, not only of a community, but of the world (Elfert, 2015).

References

- Adams, R. S., Forin, T., Chua, M., & Radcliffe, D. (2016). Characterizing the work of coaching during design reviews. *Design Studies, 45*, 30–67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2015.12.007>
- Boud, D. (2000). Sustainable assessment: Rethinking assessment for the learning society. *Studies in Continuing Education, 22*(2), 151–167. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713695728>
- Cheng, L.C. (2015). From subjectivity to objective evaluation: A techno-rationalist approach of assessment design for art and design education. In O. Hassan, S. Abidin, R. Legino, R. Anwar & M. Kamaruzaman (Eds.), *International Colloquium of Art and Design Education Research (i-CADER 2014)* (pp. 421–430). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-332-3_44
- Cooper, R., & Jayatilaka, B. (2006). Group creativity: The effects of extrinsic, intrinsic, and obligation motivations. *Creativity Research Journal, 18*(2), 153–172. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326934crj1802_3
- Crippa, E. (2015). From ‘Crit’ to ‘Lecture-Performance’. In N. Llewellyn (Ed.), *The London art schools: Reforming the art world, 1960 to now* (pp. 133–150). Tate Publishing.
- Elfert, M. (2015). UNESCO, the Faure Report, the Delors Report, and the political utopia of lifelong learning. *European Journal of Education, Research, Development, and Policy, 50*(1), 88–100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12104>
- Faure, E., Herrera, F., Kaddoura, A. R., Lopes, H., Petrovsky, A. V., Rahnama, M., & Champion Ward, F. (1972). *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Hafferty, F., & Castellani, B. (2009). The hidden curriculum: A theory of medical education. In C. Brosnan, & B. Turner (Eds.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Medical Education* (pp. 15–35). Routledge.
- Harris, J. (2008). Developing a language for assessing creativity: A taxonomy to support student learning and assessment. *Investigations in University Teaching and Learning, 5*(1), 80–86.
- Houghton, N. (2016). Six into one: The contradictory art school curriculum and how it came about. *International Journal of Art and Design Education, 35*(1), 107–120. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jade.12039>
- Koh, E.T., & Owen, W.L. (2000). Descriptive Research and Qualitative Research. In *Introduction to Nutrition and Health Research* (pp. 219–248). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-1401-5_12
- Llewellyn, N. (Ed.). (2015). *The London art schools: Reforming the art world, 1960 to now*. Tate Publishing.
- Newall, M. (2019). *The Philosophy of the Art School*. Routledge.
- Orr, S., & Shreeve, A. (2017). *Art and design pedagogy in higher education: Knowledge, values and ambiguity in the creative curriculum*. Routledge.
- Panadero, E., Broadbent, J., Boud, D., & Lodge, J. M. (2018). Using formative assessment to self- and co-regulate learning: The role of evaluative judgement. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 34*, 535–557. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-018-0407-8>
- Potts, J. (2007). Art & Innovation: An evolutionary economic view of the creative industries. *UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary eJournal in Arts, 1*(1), 1–18.
- Sawyer, R. K. (2017). Teaching creativity in art and design studio classes: A systematic literature review. *Educational Research Review, 22*, 99–113. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2017.07.002>
- Sendziul, P. (2010). Sink or Swim? Improving students learning through feedback and self assessment. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, 22*(3), 320–330.
- Shreeve, A., Sims, E., & Trowler, P. (2010). ‘A kind of exchange’: Learning from art and design teaching. *Higher Education Research and Development, 29*(2), 125–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360903384269>
- Shreeve, A. (2007). Learning development and study support - an embedded approach through communities of practice. *Art, Design & Education in Higher Education, 6*(1), 11–25. https://doi.org/10.1386/adch.6.1.11_1
- The Getty Research Institute (n.d.). *Principles and Curriculum*. Bauhaus: Building the new artist. https://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/exhibitions/bauhaus/new_artist/history/principles_curriculum/

- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2022). History of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/virtual-exhibition-power-lifelong-learning-history>
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger-Trayner, E., & Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015, June). *An introduction to communities of practice: A brief overview of the concept and its uses*. <https://www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice>
- Wood, D. (2009). A scaffolded approach to developing students' skills and confidence to participate in self and peer assessment. *ATN Assessment Conference 2009 : Assessment in Different Dimensions: Conference Proceedings*. (pp. 374–384). Learning and Teaching Unit, RMIT University.
- Yelmaz, S., & Daly, S. R. (2016). Feedback in concept development: Comparing design disciplines. *Design Studies*, 45, 137–158. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2015.12.008>

Endnotes

1 ELIA is the European League of Institutions of Arts [ELIA \(elia-art-schools.org\)](http://elia-art-schools.org) it is a globally connected European network that provides a platform for professional exchange and development in higher arts education. With over 280 members in 52 countries, it represents over 300.000 students in all arts disciplines.

2 EQ Arts [EQ-Arts supports European Higher Arts Education Area](http://EQ-Arts.org) it is a sector-specific, not-for-profit, Foundation that represents a wide range of disciplines within the broad remit of the creative and performing arts and design (CPAD). Its focus is on enhancement-led quality assurance (QA) for higher arts education across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and beyond.

3 In 1984 St. Martins School of Art and Central School of Art and Design merged their fine art and graphic design courses to become Central Saint Martins as it is known today.

4 Adapted from ELIA spotlight event - Arts Education, a vehicle for identity formation. The author presented a case study on 'Peer groups and mature students in the Limerick School of Art and Design, a case study'. This was delivered in 2021 with feedback from staff of the Year One teaching team in relation to peer groups and their impact on students with a focus on mature students. The feedback was gathered in an open survey to the staff team through MS Forms. Arts Education: A vehicle for identity formation (elia-art-schools.org)

5 See endnote 4.

6 See endnote 4.