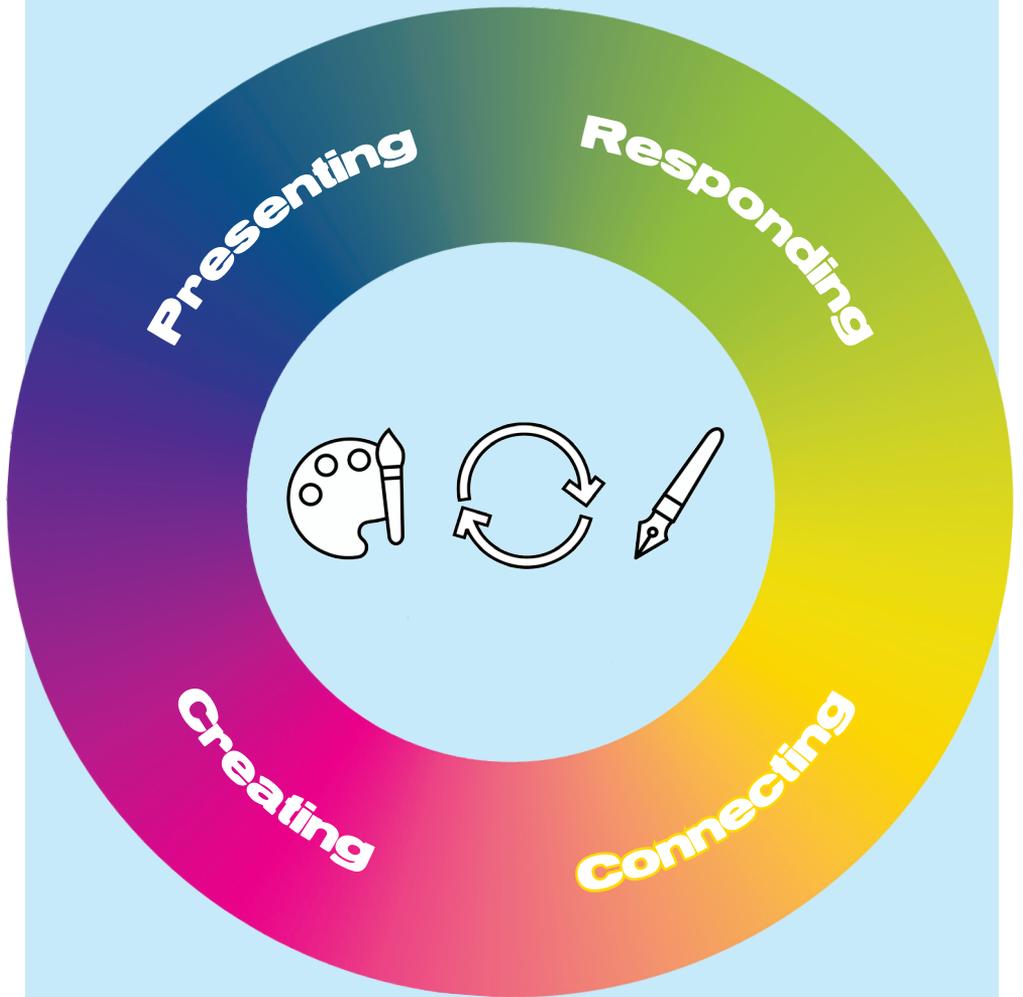


The Language of Visual Arts



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Abstract

The Language of Visual Arts is a graduation project focusing on process based learning at the intersection of visual arts and creative writing. This project strives to realize qualitative education in visual arts and creative writing, by focusing on the creative process. By alternating divergent- and convergent-thinking activities students are encouraged to expand their ideas and use critical thinking to make selections and develop their written- and visual artwork. Integrating moments of reflection and actively making selections throughout the process is vital for the quality of the work and the process.

Creative writing and visual arts are integrated to support and reinforce each other. By integrating both subjects students can grow and develop their skills and ideas in both subjects and educators can use their effective learning time more efficiently. In this project both subjects are seen as languages in which students can communicate and express themselves.

The theory about the creative process and the connection between visual arts and creative writing has led to the development of the activity card deck. Different educational models for the creative process have inspired the design of The Language of Visual Arts, or LoVA for short. The activity cards are divided in four different categories; responding, connecting, creating, and presenting. These four stages are based on the American National Core Arts Standards and the SLO Core Objectives.

Throughout this research project, the activity cards were implemented across various settings and with diverse audiences. The feedback, experiences, and reactions gathered from these testing rounds have contributed to the refinement and enhancement of the activity cards. The project strives to realize qualitative education in visual arts and creative writing by equipping educators with a tool to teach visual arts and creative writing in a manner that is focused on the students' personal creative process.

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Introduction

Over the past ten years I have been working in a variety of roles and settings in primary education. The common thread throughout my career has been my passion for visual arts. I have created a visual arts curriculum in Italy, made the transition to TAB, teaching for artistic behavior, in Vietnam, and currently I am looking at how I can empower homeroom teachers to teach process based learning in visual arts and creative writing in public schools in the Netherlands.



Working with students that are learning an additional language, I started noticing the similarities between learning a language and visual arts. Much like learning a language, the purpose of visual arts is to be able to express yourself. When you are learning a language, you cannot expect students to be able to use a language after copying a text, you have to go through a process and practice skills in different settings.

Visual arts is often approached with the attitude that students are expected to copy the teacher's example without much space for personal expression. In my opinion, visual arts lessons should be approached more like language arts classes, in which the process is the main focus.

The goal of my research project is to improve visual arts and creative writing education in elementary schools by focusing on process based learning. In this graduation project I created a set of activity cards as a tool for teachers to create lesson series following the creative process in which there is a constant interaction between visual arts and creative writing. The objective is to support teachers in the transition from product-led to process-based teaching and thereby allowing the students to have a more authentic artistic experience.

Within my research I try to answer the following questions:

How can I improve the quality of education in visual arts and creative writing by creating a tool to empower elementary school teachers in planning for process-based learning?

My main research question is supported by the following sub questions:

- What is the importance of process based learning?
- What do visual arts and creative writing have in common?
- How can I use the different steps in the creative process to plan a series of lessons?
- What prompts can we give teachers to support each step in the creative process?

Method

The research method of my graduation project can be broken down into three different categories. The backbone of my graduation project lies in my theoretical framework in which I look at the literature and pre-existing research done in the field of process based learning, particularly in the field of visual arts and creative writing. With this theory as the basis of my research I continued with design research in which I used the theory to develop my interpretation of the creative process and designed and selected activities for the design of the activity cards. This design is then put in practice in my action research in which I invite myself and others to test out the activity cards. After each of the three rounds of testing I conducted a questionnaire and used this input to revise and edit the cards. My research is documented in the form of images, prototypes and questionnaires. In the concluding chapter, I answer my research question by providing feedback and reflections from myself and other educators and our experiences using the cards.



The Importance of Creativity

The fundamentals of my research are based on the importance of creativity and the process of creation within education, so it would only make sense for me to start off my theoretical framework with a definition of creativity and why I believe it is important to educate young people in this field.

The word 'creativity' comes from the Latin word 'creare' which means to 'bring into being or create'. Creativity is a term used to describe the process of producing something new, whether it be an idea, product, or a solution to a problem. It is the ability to think outside the box and come up with something unexpected or original. Creativity is a complex concept and has been described in various ways. Some define creativity as the ability to combine existing ideas into something new. Others describe it as the ability to make something out of nothing, while still others see creativity as the ability to use existing knowledge in new ways.

In his book 'What If...' Ken Robinson talks about our unique power to imagine. He says that it is because of our ability to imagine that we don't live in the world as other creatures do, we create the worlds in which we live. *'Imagination is the ability to bring to mind things that are not immediately present to our senses. With our imaginations we can step out of the here and now, we can speculate, visualize, and suppose. We can revisit the past, anticipate the future, see as others see, and feel as others feel (Robinson, 2022)'*. Imagination alone, he mentions, is not enough to change the world around us, though. To fully utilize our imaginations, it is necessary to go beyond mere imagination and embrace creativity. It is the practical application of imagination. Imagination enables us to visualize alternative potentials, and creativity provides us with the means to transform them into reality. (Robinson, 2022)

According to Robinson, 'creativity' is a dynamic process characterized by the interaction between two fundamental elements: idea generation and idea evaluation. This form of creativity, often referred to as applied imagination, should be actively nurtured, celebrated, and promoted within our educational system. In my experience in

primary education there is often not enough time and space for this creative process. Projects are often quick, short and leave not much time for proper evaluation. I believe there should be more time and space for students to imagine, to generate ideas, to evaluate these ideas and go through this process guided, not led, by their teachers.

A lot has been written about creativity, what it is, what it is not, and about the importance of creativity in education. If I were to give my own definition I would describe creativity as a way of looking at the world not just for facts, but for questions, connections, and opportunities. It is a way of looking at the world not just to get the fastest, easiest, and most efficient answer, but for new possibilities, new experiences, and new stories.

I would describe creativity as a way of looking at the world not just for facts, but for questions, and opportunities

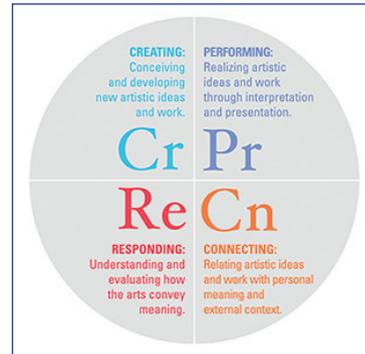
Improving the quality of arts education

The quality of arts education in primary education has been a topic of discussion for a while and in an attempt to improve this quality quite some research has been done (Haanstra et al., 2022). Het Lectoraat Kunsteducatie of the Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten has done a review study about factors that could influence learning in arts education in primary schools. They looked at different publications and formulated five clusters of influenceable factors; vision, process, expertise, conditions, collaborations. As I cannot influence all these factors I focus on the factor of the process within my research.

On a European level the European Network for Visual Literacy (ENCiL) has done a comparative study in curricula for visual arts education in primary schools (Haanstra et al., 2022). This research defined the following competencies for the productive aspect of visual arts education: being able to generate visual ideas, doing visual

research, creating visual work, presenting and evaluating the visual work and the process. For the receptive aspect they formulated the following competencies: viewing, researching, evaluating and reporting on existing visual artworks.

In the United States a similar research took place, and as a result four learning standards have been formulated; Creating, Presenting, Responding, Connecting (NCCAS, 2013 as cited by Haanstra et al., 2022). Creating can be described as generating and conceptualizing artistic ideas and work, organizing and developing artistic ideas, and refining and completing artistic work.



Presenting includes selecting, analyzing, and interpreting work for presentation, developing and refining artistic techniques and work for presentation and conveying meaning through the presentation of artistic work. For responding students will learn to perceive and analyze artistic work, interpret intent and meaning in a work and apply criteria to evaluate the work. Connecting includes synthesizing and relating knowledge and personal experiences to make art and relating artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding. These NCCAS standards show lots of similarities to the competency model of ENViL, both in the main- as subdivision.

These standards or competencies as described by ENViL and by the NCCAS are an important factor of quality visual arts education and will therefore be included in the development of my tool for teaching and learning in this research-creation project.

In terms of didactics, Hoogeveen (2017, as cited by Haanstra et al., 2022) describes a few didactical core elements to promote creativity; open ended activities, collaboration, idea generation, experimenting, feedback on product and process. Davies et al. (2013, as cited by Haanstra et al., 2022) explain that educators need to find a

balance between freedom and enough structure. Terms to describe this are 'disciplined improvisation' (Sawyer, 2017 as cited by Haanstra et al., 2022) and 'enabling constraints' (in Heijnen & Bremmer, 2020 as cited by Haanstra et al., 2022) Eddles-Hirsch et al. (2019, as cited by Haanstra et al., 2022) advice to explicitly teach students about characteristics associated with creativity by, for example, designing lessons that are explicitly based on the stages of the creative process.

Many research projects about stimulating creativity are about the educational process, like the pedagogical and didactic approach, the activities and the evaluation. Educators need to trust their students and give them space to experiment, to teach them to take risks and to deal with frustration and failure. Explicit instruction about the creative process increases students' metacognitive knowledge and promotes their creativity. (Haanstra et al., 2022)

To improve the quality of visual arts education I will therefore include the explicit instruction of the creative process, the use of the different competencies as described by ENViL and by NCCAS, and the didactical core elements as described by Hoogeveen in my research-creation project.

The role of process based learning in education

With my research project I am striving for a more balanced approach to arts education, one where there is a balance between offering students enough freedom to develop their own ideas and a structure in which they receive guidance and support by their teacher. Process based learning can play an important role in the realization of qualitative arts education.

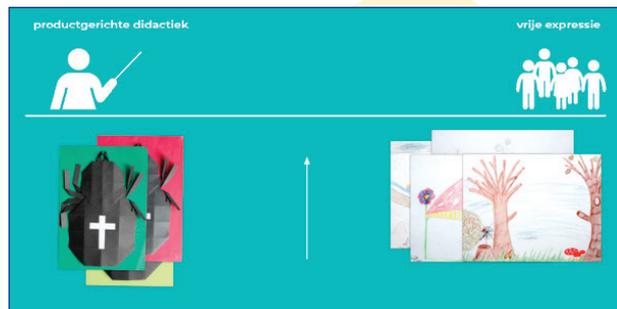
If you look at arts education in primary schools in the Netherlands you often see three forms of education. It is either product focused, free expression or process based (Benjaminsen & Stieltjes, 2021).

With product focused education, the educator knows what the end-product is going to look like and teaches the students the skills

and steps to get to this end-product. The main objectives are focused on mastering a specific skill, which often relates to the development of fine motor skills. Students learn how to work neatly and learn how to handle certain materials and tools. It is focused on the development of a specific craft. Even though they learn specific skills through this technique, there are also a lot of negative aspects to this form of visual arts education. There is no personal aspect to the work of the students, the internal frame of reference of the students is not stretched and students do not get any insights in the use of the elements of art or the principles of design and do not get the chance to explore and experiment.

Free expression is another form of arts education that you frequently encounter in elementary schools in the Netherlands (Benjaminsen & Stieltjes 2021). This is a form of education that you see both in creative writing and visual arts. In this form of education students are given a free assignment to draw or write about a specific topic, without getting any guidance, tools or support. Even though the personality of the students gets a lot of space in this form of education it does not necessarily mean that students can actually express themselves through this form of education. Students do not learn any specific skills and technical aspects are often not offered to the students. They also do not develop any research or experimental skills and are basically just offered the time and space to express themselves freely.

Both of these forms of arts education are on the opposite side of a scale, on the one side product focused education in which the



Benjaminsen & Stieltjes, 2021

end product is already given and teachers lead their students in the creation of the work, on the other side free expression in which students are free to create what they like without any guidance or interference of their teacher (Benjaminsen & Stieltjes 2021). With both of these forms of arts education, the growth and development of students can stagnate. With the first type of education all the thinking is done by the educator, so students do not develop the skills to create an artwork by themselves. With the latter form of education students do not develop any technical skills and knowledge, so they often don't progress.

These two types of arts education are two types I often encounter in my own school as well, either students are re-creating existing artwork from their teacher or they are given time for free expression. This often leads to having a few students that are considered 'talented' as they often take after school arts classes or practice a lot at home, but most students feel like they are just not 'good' at art. If I were to compare these forms of education to, for example, education in mathematics this would be considered absurd. If teachers are only giving mathematical assignments in which the answer is already given and students just need to copy the steps to get to the same answer we would receive a lot of negative feedback about our education. Same with free expression, if the teacher would only allow students time to work on their mathematics without any guidance, very few students would actually develop the skills to solve mathematical problems. If I compare these forms of arts education to mathematics it only makes sense that I would root for a different form of education in which students get the tools and practice the skills to develop artistically.

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A different form of art education can be found in the third ap-

proach as described by Benjaminsen & Stieltjes (2021), the process based approach. To stimulate qualitative arts education, teacher training institutes, pabo's, in the Netherlands the visual arts departments are teaching about process based learning in visual arts education. With books like 'Laat Maar Zien' and 'Creëren kun je Leren' they are trying to teach students about the importance of process based learning. As mentioned in the previous chapter one of the factors of qualitative good arts education is the explicit instruction of the creative process.

Through the analysis of what visual arts, design and creativity is, one can look at the various aspects of the process individually, deepening their understanding and practicing and playing with them. This way, an individual can go through their own creative process, as well as be aware of, stimulate, guide and evaluate it. Additionally, with such knowledge of the creative process, one can start the creative process of others, and similarly, provide stimulation and guidance. So offering process based learning can play a role in making visual arts and creativity learn- and teachable, instead of merely vague and mysterious subjects requiring innate talent (Benjaminsen & Stieltjes, 2021).

The creative process as described in 'Laat Maar Zien' and 'Creëren kun je Leren' show many similarities to the reflective approach as described by Liora Bresler (1994, as cited by Vermeersch & Elias, 2015) In this approach students are explicitly challenged by the critical-supportive art educator to think about what they see and do, this reflection is based on the knowledge offered by the educator, as well as on the students' own experiences and interpretations and those of their fellow students. Unfortunately this reflective approach to arts education is treated rather unfairly in education, which instead prefers approaches that mainly focus on lower order cognitive skills. (Vermeersch & Elias, 2015) Unfortunately these approaches often reduce art education to an activity with a merely decorative function. This is a strange trend, considering that art production itself has already abandoned this, decorative character quite some time ago and artists want to inspire their audience to think about and

reflect on art. Since the end of the fifties art educational theories have underlined that art is also a cognitive tool, for both the creator and the viewer. It is an excellent brain teaser, precisely because of its openness and contrariness.

Based on these theories I believe it is time for arts education that does not just focus on producing work, but that creates time and a place for the head, along with the hands and the heart (Vermeersch & Elias, 2015). Within my project, process based learning will be used as the foundation to realize qualitative arts education. Process based learning helps teachers and students look for a balance. It helps to give direction, to increase involvement and to lead to a deeper understanding of the subject without taking away students' ownership. Building in different moments for reflection within the process is essential for the quality of the work and the process. (SLO) One of the characteristics of process-based learning is the alternating use of divergent and convergent thinking. (Denkkader Cultuureducatie' by SLO) Divergent thinking can be viewed as the act of creating various possibilities, while convergent thinking is the process of reflecting on the many alternatives and making decisions on which solutions to pursue.

Divergent and Convergent thinking in process based learning

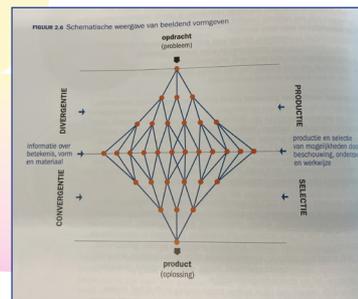
I believe divergent and convergent thinking are one of the most important aspects of process based learning. Learning how to generate ideas and how to make an informed selection of these ideas is the basis of developing an idea and taking it from just an idea to a refined work of art. SLO, the expertise center for curriculum in the Netherlands, considers divergent and convergent thinking as an important feature of process based learning, because it helps students generate ideas and make selections. Diverging literally means to

'it is time for arts education that creates time and a place for the head, along with the hands and the heart.'

radiate or to part in different directions. Converging is the opposite, it means going in one direction, to one point. Within the creative process you constantly alternate between the two and create and eliminate different ideas and solutions for your work. (SLO, n.d.) Divergent and convergent thinking are important components of the creative process. In stages of divergent thinking, the goal is to generate different ideas. Important in this stage of the process is that ideas can come freely, all ideas are good ideas, they do not need to be judged. In the stage of convergent thinking you judge the ideas and make a selection (Benjaminsen & Stieltjes, 2021).

By experimenting you can discover different possibilities, therefore experimenting is always a divergent activity. Brainstorming leads to different possibilities as well, just as sketching, free writing or drawing, testing out and improvising, which are all divergent activities. With divergent thinking you can collect a lot of ideas, but this does not automatically lead to a personal artistic result. Reflecting on these experiments and experiences is what helps students to make choices within their own process. Making these choices, or convergent thinking is therefore important and necessary at different steps within the creative process. (SLO, n.d.)

Divergent and convergent thinking in creative processes can be visualized by a diamond shape, see image. The process starts with a problem or an inquiry. The problem will be assessed from different angles. After looking at all aspects ideas can start flowing, free associations can be made and possible solutions can be explored. These can be completely irrelevant ideas, but they can also be very useful. This first stage of generating possibilities is what we call the divergent phase. The stage of reduction of possibilities by making choices is what we call the convergent stage. During this stage selections are made which can lead to a final solution. This description of the creative process is an



Onna & Jacobse, 2021

abstraction. In reality the process can be very diverse and stages of divergent and convergent thinking can be repeated multiple times in a creative process. The time in which this process takes place can also vary from a few minutes to multiple weeks. The principle, however is still applicable, whether it is a visual artist that paints a realistic self portrait or to an architect that by drawing and building models eventually realizes a concrete building. Both explore, go back and forth to different stages, try things out, try alternatives, judge and make choices. This process of going back and forth is what we call iterative, different iterations of the work are made, explored and selected, (Van Onna & Jacobse, 2021).

During the creative process you can repeat these stages of convergent and divergent thinking (Kotte, 2017 as cited in Benjaminsen & Stieltjes, 2021). Important here is to remember that divergent thinking doesn't only happen in the student's head, but more importantly through experimenting with a medium (Robinson as cited in Benjaminsen & Stieltjes, 2021). A visual artist thinks in images, a musician thinks in sounds, a dancer thinks in movement. Within their process they sketch, they move, they make sounds, but there is no clear idea of where they are going, throughout these experiments they expect a solution to arrive. These creative actions have an exploratory or heuristic nature (Van Onna & Jacobse, 2021). To generate new ideas it is also important to keep in mind that students need knowledge and skills. Knowledge and skills can be very specific to a medium, but knowledge and skills from other disciplines can also add value to the generation of new ideas. (Benjaminsen & Stieltjes, 2021) This concept of connecting disciplines will be further explored, as I believe valuable and useful connections can be made.

Interdisciplinary learning in visual arts and creative writing

In this chapter I will look more into interdisciplinary learning and how creative writing and visual arts can be connected. I choose to focus on these two disciplines because I believe the two are very similar in a way and because I believe these two disciplines are undervalued and overlooked in primary education in the Netherlands.

If I look at my own creative process I often find myself combining the two disciplines. My visual work is often inspired by what I read or write and my writing is often inspired by what I see and what I create. To me the two disciplines are both languages in which I can express myself. Some people can express themselves better through visuals, others through spoken word, written words, sounds or movement. My dominant languages of expression are visual and written, so the decision to combine creative writing and visual arts is a choice based on my own personal preference.

SLO, center for curriculum, suggests that where possible, we use topics that are related to those of other subject areas to the three core objectives for arts education (Haanstra, 2022). Education would then become more coherent and more meaningful to students. But in the first place the focus of arts education should be on an authentic contribution to the development of children. According to the Monitor cultuureducatie (Van Essen et al. as cited by Haanstra, 2022) cohesion is mostly found between arts education and subjects like geography, history and science. Subjects like language arts and mathematics are rarely connected to arts education. In this research I will use interdisciplinary learning in language arts and arts education. As I am confident that this could be very valuable and I believe they can even enhance and aid each other in the growth and development of children.

Interdisciplinary learning is based on the theory and process of interdisciplinary research (Repko as cited by Universiteit Utrecht, n.d.). Repko proposed a 10-step-process for interdisciplinary researchers and suggested strategies or guidelines for each step. In essence it is looking at a problem or situation from different perspectives and disciplines. In education interdisciplinary learning is often used to look at a learning problem from different disciplines or subjects and connect them.

In real life subjects are not separated neatly in different blocks or segments, mathematics is connected to nature and reading is connected to geography and so on. Oftentimes subjects are taught

separately in elementary schools, one hour of mathematics, one hour of language arts, one hour of biology and so on. With interdisciplinary learning the different subjects are connected and problems are viewed from different perspectives.

One pedagogical approach that is rooted in the connection between visual arts and creative writing is ekphrastic poetry. In ekphrastic poetry a visual artwork is used to inspire the artist to write a poem. Ekphrastic poetry has come to be defined as poems written about works of art; however in ancient Greece the term ekphrasis was applied to the skill of describing a thing with vivid detail. In my graduation project I do not only use ekphrasis in the original sense as in using a visual artwork as inspiration for a poem but in a more liberal way where there is constant interaction between the visual and the written work of students. Written work can inspire the students to create a visual work and vice versa.

The objectives for the arts by SLO, expertise center for curriculum in the Netherlands, are divided in three core objectives; students learn to use visuals, language, music, play and movement to express feelings and experiences to communicate, students learn to reflect on their own and others' work, and students acquire some knowledge and appreciation for aspects of cultural heritage (SLO, n.d.). If I translate these loosely you can say that the focus is on expression, reflection and appreciation of cultural heritage. By using ekphrasis, using both existing artworks, both written and visual, and creating original work you can already address these three core objectives as an educator. You can use existing artworks to acquire knowledge on cultural heritage, reflect on this work by creating a visual or written reaction and use this as inspiration to express and communicate your own feelings and experiences with or inspired by the original

“ My visual work is often inspired by what I read or write and my writing is often inspired by what I see and what I create ”

work. Using the example above it clearly shows the process you go through when you are using ekphrasis. There is a starting point where there is input from an existing artwork and then by using divergent and convergent thinking you eventually create an original artwork yourself.

Within my research-creation project I am focusing on interdisciplinary learning between visual arts and creative writing, not only because they are my two preferred languages of communication, but also because in my practice as an educator I have seen that they could be used as a tool to reinforce the development of both subjects. More importantly they empower students to use their voice and be able to communicate.

Art as a language for communication

Throughout my career as an educator I have worked with many students who were learning an additional language. While teaching students an additional language I started noticing the similarities between visual arts and language development. Oftentimes when students came into my classroom, they were already fluent in at least one language. When asked to express themselves they either referred back to their mother tongue language or became frustrated as they know what they want to say, but don't have the words to communicate it to me or their classmates. When starting visual arts class you could see them become more relaxed and the frustration fades away. Finally they could make themselves understood as they could communicate through their visual language.

“ finally they could make themselves understood as they could communicate through their visual language. ”

“Is art a language?” (Eubank, 1997)

In her paper 'Art is a Visual Language' Eubanks (1997) explains that art is often referred to as a language. Accepting art as a language means that art can be useful in fostering verbal development. To decide whether we can accept art as a language we must first define what a language is. Lois Bloom, scholar in language development, defines language as “a code whereby ideas about the world are expressed through a conventional system of arbitrary signals for communication” (Lahey, 1988). Nelson Goodman, philosopher, defines language as a symbol system that conveys complex ideas (Goodman, 1976). Some of the common elements in these definitions are: signals or symbols with conventional meanings; a code or system that organizes the set of symbols; and the use of this system for communication.

When comparing visual language and verbal or written languages you can see that there are a lot of commonalities; the symbols with conventional meanings are phonemes in verbal language, or the elements of art in visual language (Feldman, 1976; Cromer, 1966 as cited in Eubank, 1997). These are organized by a code, syntax in verbal language, or the principles of design in visual language. The symbols and the code together create meaning, semantics in verbal language, or the meaning interpreted by the viewer in visual language.

Another commonality is the language development, both verbal and visual language have two components, *receptive* and *expressive* (Bzoch & League, 1971 as cited in Eubanks, 1997). Receptive language refers to the understanding of words used by others, the decoding of verbal symbols. In the visual language viewers read and interpret the visual symbols encoded in works of art. Expressive language refers to communicating ideas by speaking or writing, in effect, the creation of coded verbal symbols. The expressive component of the visual language is the creation of visual symbol systems, the making of marks or objects that communicate ideas. And of course the content in written language is similar to meaning in visual arts.

The differences in visual and verbal language mostly come down to the extent to which they are codified (Eubank, 1997). Broudy (Broudy, 1972 as cited by Eubank, 1997) views visual language as less codified than verbal language and Wolf (1977 as cited by Eubank, 1997) points out that the codification of verbal language may change over the centuries but, compared to the visual language, is relatively stable. The codification of visual language has changed dramatically in 300 years while verbal language has remained relatively stable.

When looking at these similarities you could say that art is a language, or a system of symbols used for communication (Eubank, 1997). Accepting that art is indeed a language, also means accepting that art could play an important role in the development of verbal language. Drawings, for example, could provide a visual representation of the students' ideas onto which language can be mapped and an opportunity for students to request new vocabulary relevant to their interests may arise.

Many artists even consider visual language to be superior to words (Eubank, 1997). Kepes (1944) describes visual languages as more holistic than spoken language and more efficient as a disseminator of knowledge than most other means of communication. Arnheim (1969) considers the visual language superior because it comes closer to the original stimulus, verbal language being linear, sequential, and one dimensional, by comparison.

Art educators describe art as the first language of children (Heberholz & Hansen, 1994; NAEA, 1988 as cited by Eubank, 1997). Developmentally understanding images precedes understanding verbal processes. We learn to read visual language, without formal instruction, earlier and more

children who
haven't yet developed
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visual images

spontaneously than verbal language. And children who haven't yet developed verbal reading abilities can already read complex visual images.

When looking back on my own experiences as an educator while reading Eubank's article, I cannot say anything other than that I consider visual art indeed a language. As mentioned by Eubank (1997), this perspective can lead to an understanding that art can become a valuable partner in language development. "Art can move from the fringes of the curriculum toward the core of learning for all young children, especially those for whom language acquisition is difficult." (Eubank, 1997). And this is indeed the intention of this research project, by combining visual arts to creative writing we can grow and develop our communication skills in both languages. We can become more fluent in both languages and we can code-switch, shifting between two languages, to communicate with our environment.

To summarize my theoretical framework I believe creativity is a very important topic and a skill we should all teach our students. To improve the quality of arts education and education in creativity I propose to focus on explicitly teaching the stages of the creative process, including offering activities to support divergent and convergent thinking. To further enhance the quality of arts education I suggest using interdisciplinary learning, focusing on visual arts and creative writing, as I believe they share many commonalities and could play an important role in the development of both subjects.



Design Research

The theory must be brought into practice to realize qualitative education in visual arts and creative writing. Creating a tool for other educators to assist them in planning process based learning activities in visual arts and creative writing would expand the reach and influence more students. Due to the heavy workload in education the tool has to be user friendly, be flexible to students' needs, and help educators save planning time. The use of a card deck is one possible way to bring the theory into practice. It is compact, doesn't require you to read a whole curriculum and offers options to mix and match activities.

In my own cupboard behind my desk I have tons of books about teaching and learning, but I rarely pick them up and read them. The items I do actively reach for and are laying on my desk or around the classroom are playing cards. I have flashcards to practice additions and subtractions, check-in cards to see how students are feeling, and activity cards for brain breaks and collaborative learning activities. These are the educational tools I reach for when I am planning my day, not the books in the cupboard. This is why I decided to create activity cards.

To create the Language of Visual Arts, or LoVA, card deck I set out a few criteria that I would like LoVA to meet. The creative process needs to be addressed explicitly, the activities in the card deck need to encourage both divergent- and convergent thinking, and the activities need to be interdisciplinary combining visual arts and creative writing.

Models for the Creative Process

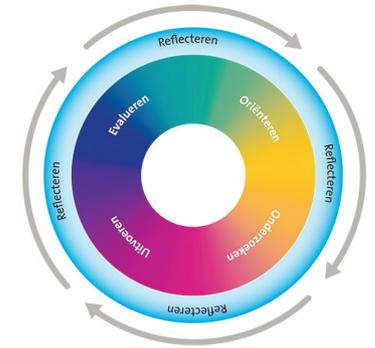
As mentioned in my theoretical framework one of the factors that can improve the quality of arts education is the explicit use of the creative process. Throughout my research I came across many different models for the creative process, models explicitly for design, models made for visual arts education and models for creative writing. The majority of the models follow a similar process and the stages are comparable. The differences between the models



NCCAS + SLO = LOVA

is mostly in the language used. After experimenting with different models and trying out a seven step model, I eventually decided on a four step model (see image). In an attempt to reach educators, I decided it was important to speak a language teachers are familiar with and use a model that they might already know. My intended public are mostly educators working within the Dutch educational system or with an American curriculum. Therefore I decided to use the standards and the language they are already familiar with and use the models by SLO and by the NAEA.

SLO, expertise center for curriculum in the Netherlands, has developed three core objective for arts education in Dutch primary schools; students learn to use images, music, language, play and movement to express feelings and experiences and to communicate with them, learn to reflect on their own work and that of others, and acquire some knowledge about and an appreciation for aspects of cultural heritage (SLO, 2016). SLO also has created its own model for the creative process. The didactics of process based learning has roughly four stages. The stages are not strictly separated, but cross over and run into each other. The four different stages are; orientation, research, execute, and evaluate. With at the core of the circle reflection.



SLO Model

In the first phase, it should become clear to students what the creative process will look like. It is the phase in which the external frame of reference is established by the teacher and at the same time an appeal is made to the internal frame of reference of students. In this

phase, the subject, the meaning and the content are discussed. It's about wondering, and curiosity. It is also about imagining: what could something mean. Children's prior knowledge is activated, but their personal experiences and views are also called upon.

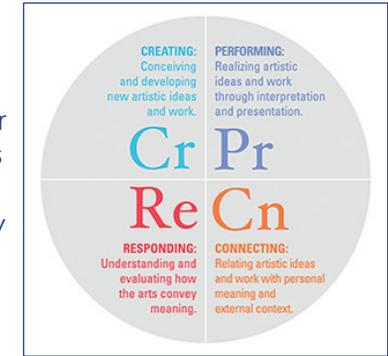
In the phase of research, ideas are conceived and tested. This can be done by collecting material, brainstorming, sketching, experimenting, trying out, learning techniques and skills, playing with the material or practicing a working method. This is the phase in which divergent and convergent thinking are essential. It is important that children feel the freedom to come up with anything during divergent thinking so that they come up with all kinds of solutions and possibilities.

In the third phase of execution, an idea is further developed. The practiced skills and techniques are applied. Sometimes you need to let go, adjust or re-examine a plan. As a teacher you are a sounding board in this phase. You view the work in progress and place it against the bar of the external frame of reference. At the same time, you guide them to make their own choices within the framework of the learning problem.

In the final phase of evaluation, you look back at the product and process in relation to the visual problem definition. It is the moment that children experience how their image communicates. What do classmates think? What do they see in it? In other words, how do others view the product from their own frame of reference? In this phase there is also explicitly room for reflection on the process.

Students make choices at all stages of the process. They constantly move back and forth between their own frame of reference and the frame of the learning problem. They make discoveries, gain new insights and learn skills that they can use in the creative process. As a teacher, you are there to make students aware of their choices. Reflection is therefore part of all four teaching phases. With the didactics of process based learning you have all the tools to help students develop as a person and to meet the goals for arts education (Benjaminsen & Stieltjes, 2021).

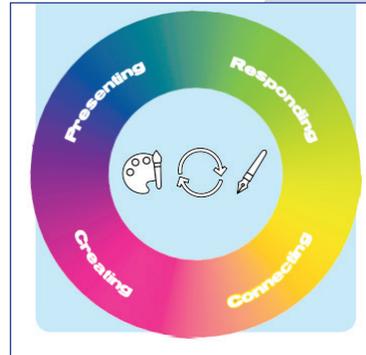
NAEA, the American National Arts Education Association, has defined four American National Core Arts Standards (see image) that show many similarities to the creative process as described by SLO. The standards are broken down in four different categories; responding, connecting, creating, and performing (NCAS). Responding is all about understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning. Connecting is about relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context. Creating is about conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work. And presenting is about interpreting and sharing artistic work. As you can see these standards are very similar to the different stages of the model for the creative process by SLO.



Description		
topic is introduced, oftentimes by looking at existing works of art and understanding and evaluating how an artwork conveys meaning.	Responding	Orienteren
ideas are conceived and tested, it is about relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.	Connecting	Onderzoeken
developing and executing an idea	Creating	Uitvoeren
looking back at the product and process and trying to interpret and share the artistic work.	Presenting	Evalueren

NCAS and SLO similarities

To connect as much as possible to the frame of reference of educators and to speak their 'language' I decided to create two versions of the activity cards, a Dutch and an English version. For the English version I decided on using the language used by NAEA; responding, connecting, creating, and presenting. For the Dutch version I decided on using the language used by SLO; oriënteren, onderzoeken, uitvoeren, en evalueren. For the graphic design I decided on using a circle (see image...) to resemble the creative process, as the creative process is an ongoing process that could be repeated multiple times to create different iterations of an idea.



If you are interested in reading more about the different models for the creative process you can look at the following models; Experiential Learning Cycle by Kolb, The Universal Creative Process by New & Improved, LLC, Het Creatieve Proces van Cultuurhelden, Delft, The Writing Process by Hayes and Flowers, Het Cirkel Model by van Onna & Jacobse, and Het Kubus Model by Creeer + Leer.

Activities

As mentioned before I decided to create two versions of LoVA, one in Dutch, and one in English. The titles of the four different stages are different, but the activities in each step are the same. A more detailed description of the activities and the didactical reasoning behind them can be found in the appendix. The activities have been selected based on different criteria; they need to fit the stage of the process and they need to be interdisciplinary combining visual arts and creative writing.

Oriënteren or responding is the stage in which students are introduced to a topic, oftentimes by looking at existing works of art and understanding and evaluating how an artwork conveys meaning. In this phase the external frame of reference is established and an

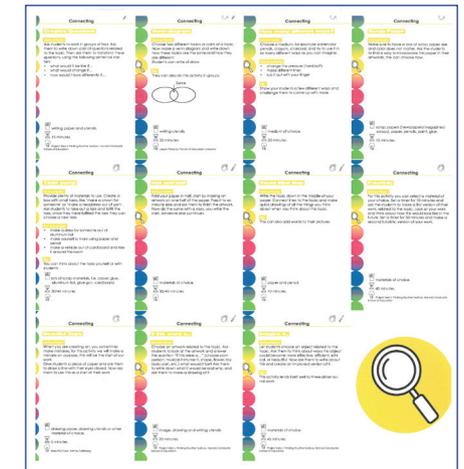


Oriënteren or responding

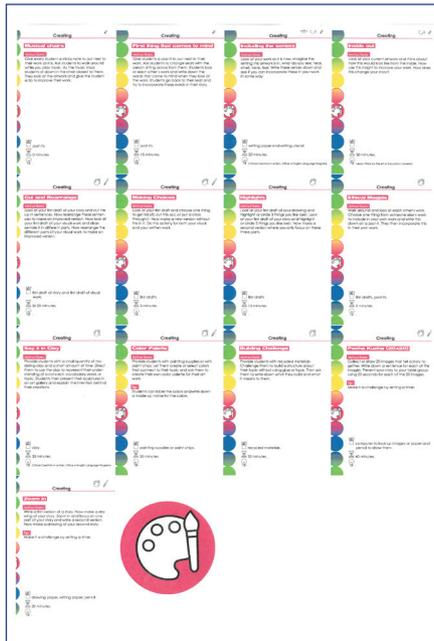
Onderzoeken or Connecting is the phase in which ideas are conceived and tested, it is about relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context. This can be done by collecting material, brainstorming, sketching, experimenting, trying out, learning techniques and skills, playing with the material or practicing a working method. The activities I created and selected for this stage of the process, are focused on making connections, trying things out, and using imagination. Divergent thinking is still prevalent, and students are encouraged to think 'outside of the box'.

Uitvoeren or Creating is the phase of developing, and execu-

appeal is made to the internal frame of reference of students. It's about wondering, and curiosity. It is also about imagining: what could something mean. Children's prior knowledge is activated, but their personal experiences and views are also called upon. The activities I created and selected for this stage of the process, are focused on familiarizing themselves with the topic, expanding their frame of reference and divergent thinking.



Onderzoeken or Connecting



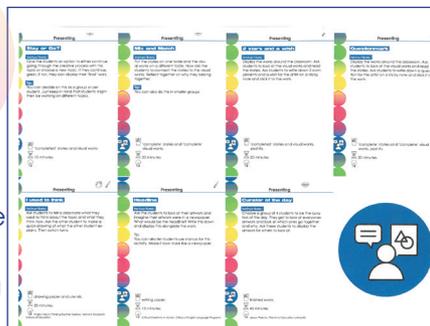
Uitvoeren or Creating

these activities.

Evalueren or Presenting is the final phase of the process, you look back at the product and process and try to interpret and share the artistic work. It is the moment that children experience how their image communicates. What do classmates think? What do they see in it? In other words, how do others view the product from their own frame of reference? In this phase there is also explicitly room for reflection on the process. The activities I created and selected for this stage of the process, see image..., are focused on reflecting on the student's own and others' work and sharing it with the public.

Activities have both been inspired by activities I have done before and by activities sourced from educational platforms. The Thinking Routine Toolbox (Project Zero, n.d.)

ting an idea. The practiced skills and techniques are applied. Sometimes you need to let go, adjust or re-examine a plan. As a teacher you are a sounding board in this phase. You view the work in progress and place it against the bar of the external frame of reference. At the same time, you guide them to make their own choices within the framework of the learning problem. The activities I created and selected for this stage of the process, see image..., are focused on creating a visual and textual work of art and making choices. Convergent thinking plays an important role in



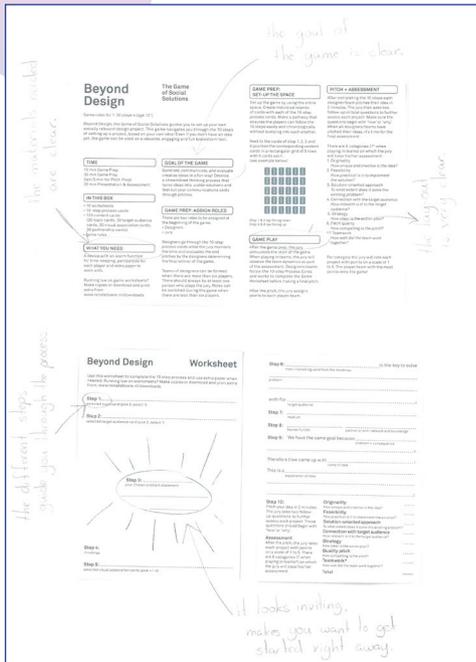
Evalueren or Presenting

has been an inspiring platform. Beginning-Middle-End, for example, is one of the activities that has been inspired by Project Zero, it uses the power of narrative to help students make observations and encourages them to use their imagination to elaborate on and extend their ideas. Where PZ only asks students to think about this topic, I decided to add another layer and add a visual and textual element to this activity. Students are invited to write the remaining parts of the story and are prompted to make a visual reaction to the story. Another source has been the Critical Creativity in Action cards (American English, 2022). Quotes and Articles is one of the adopted activities from them. Just like before I added some elements to make sure it fits my criteria. In the original activity students are invited to select a quote or article related to the topic. In my activity I then asked students to respond to this quote or article in a visual way by creating an illustration to go along with it. The Association Game is an activity that came from my own 'toolbox' of educational resources. Often-times I do this activity to get creative ideas flowing, this time I added a visual aspect to the activity by having to 'translate' the words from the game to a visual work. The sources of the activities can be found on the cards, but most have been adapted to match my intentions.

Manual for Teachers

To support teachers as much as possible in the planning process a manual is created to go along with the activity cards. The criteria for the manual are; it has to be clear and to the point, it has to be short enough that it doesn't take much time to read, and it has to explain the purpose of process based learning. In the design of the manual I was inspired by the Beyond Design game by Studio Renate Boere (Studio Renate Boere, 2020). The Beyond Design game has a very clear manual and an accompanying worksheet to assist in the planning of the process. I tried to combine both aspects in the design of my manual. I particularly like the clear step-by-step process and the explicit

Just like the rest of the design, the manual also went through a transformation in the process of creation. Initially I tried to make it as compact as possible, so I only included the purpose of the activity cards, explained briefly why I chose to combine visual arts and crea-



Scan of inspiration from Beyond Design

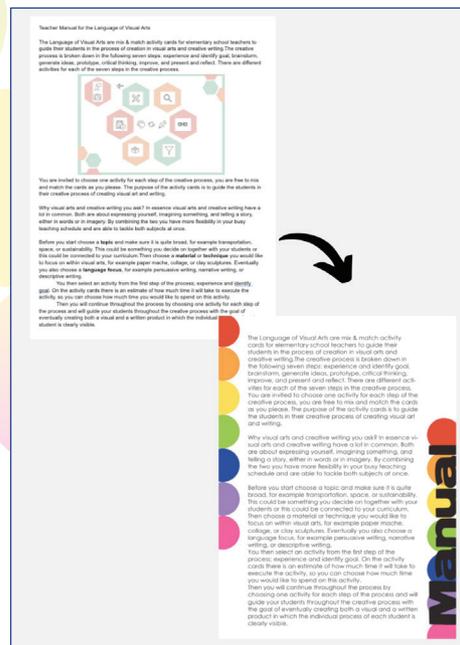
see best fit their students, I did feel like I needed to be a little more clear with my instructions. Therefore I decided to expand my instructions some more and include a clear step-by-step instruction.

Graphic Design Developments

The first step of the development of the card set was defining the stages of the creative process. I looked at different models for approaches in creative writing and visual arts. I found a lot of overlap between the various techniques; most differences were in the terms

tive writing, and how to prepare a lesson series.

After receiving responses from the participants of my research, I realized that the instructions weren't always very clear. Some teachers did not follow the whole process and only tried out some of the activities, others did multiple activities from one step of the process, and some only did the writing aspect of the activities and not the visual side of it or vice versa. Even though I want to give teachers the freedom to use the activities as they



First development manual



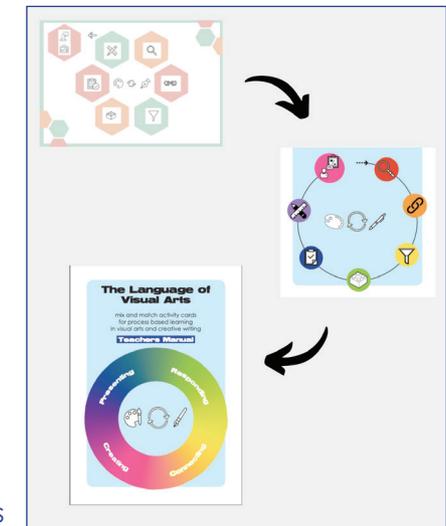
Manual

activity cards I looked at the designs of a few different games and activity cards.

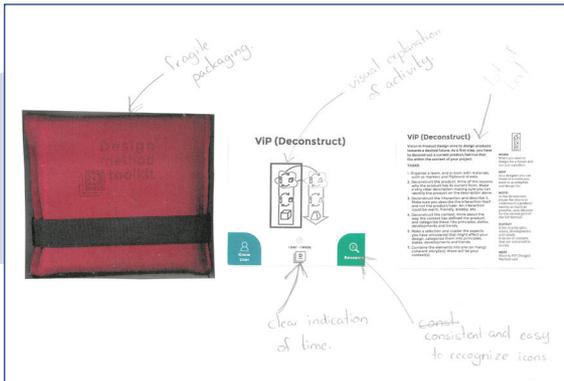
The first design I looked at was the Design Method Toolkit by the Amsterdam Creative Industries Network (MediaLAB Amsterdam, n.d.). One of the things I liked about this design was the use of simple icons and clear symbols for the time the activity will take. There is a lot of information on the cards, but it is clearly laid out and easy to read for an outsider. Something I also really liked was the clear explanation of why to use this particular activity. The activities

and names used to describe the steps in the process. I initially decided on seven different steps in my version of the creative process, but later changed this to four steps to make a better connection to models teachers are already familiar with. To make the process more visible I created a poster that could be referred to in class. The purpose of this poster is to make the process visual for both educators and students, and see the correlation between the different activities in the process. I decided on a circle model, as I believe the creative process is really an ongoing process that keeps circling.

In the process of creating the



Development proces poster



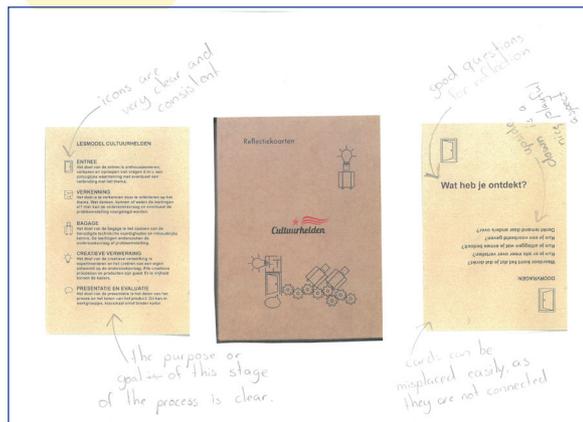
Design method toolkit

were clearly divided in two categories; create and research. The cards are double sided where one side has a clear title and a visual of the activity and the other side has the instructions, which makes it quite easy to make a selection of what to use. A few

things that could be improved were the sturdiness and as there are a lot of loose cards it is easy to lose or damage one. The soft cover of the design looks pretty, but could get damaged easily.

The next design I looked at were the Reflection Cards by Cultuurhelden. The cards are divided by the different steps of the creative process, which is easily noticeable by the different colors of the cards. For each step of the creative process there is one clear icon, which clearly comes back in all the cards related to that step of the process. The use of recycled paper is quite appealing, but it makes the box quite fragile. The loose cards are not my favorite as it is quite easy to misplace one. There are minimal instructions for the teacher and it needs to be used in combination with other activities.

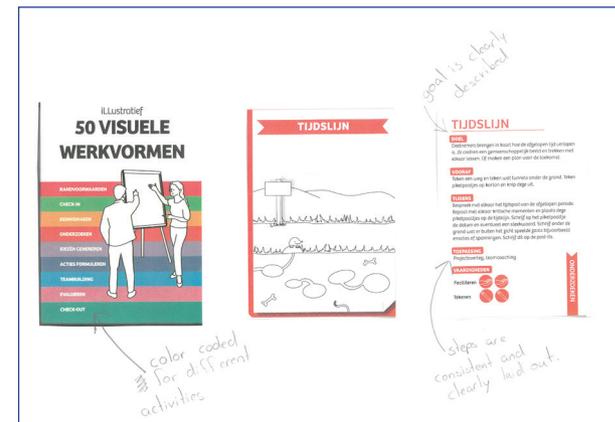
I then looked at Beyond Design, a game of social solutions by Studio Renate Boere which was a game that inspired me to start with the activity cards in the first place. The different steps of the process are clearly marked with a number. Users



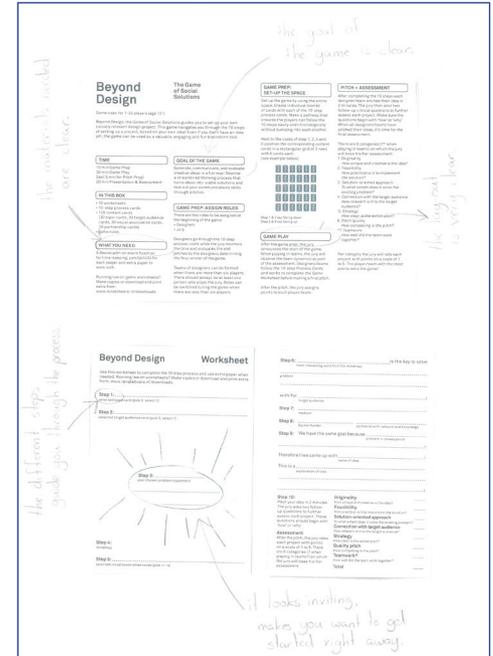
Reflection Cards

are asked to fill out a form in which the process becomes very clear, unfortunately there is a minimal amount of these forms in the box, which is solved by either making copies or by printing more from the website. The font is not always easy to read, so this is something I really need to keep in mind. Before starting you need to take some time to sort the cards, as there are different cards that go with the different steps of the process.

The next one on the list is 50 Visuele Werkvormen by Illustratief.org. There are different cards for each step in the process and are color coded by these steps. The manual is quite big and it is not very clear where to start reading. On the cards themselves the instructions are very clear and laid out in an organized manner. Some activities are sourced from somewhere else and the reference is small and clear.



50 visuele werkvormen

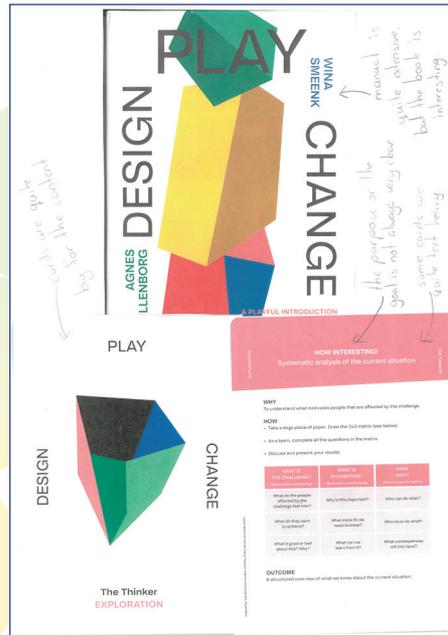


Scan of inspiration from Beyond Design

Then I looked at the Design Play Change cards by Agnes Willenborg and Wina Smeenk. This game consists of both a book and

cards, the book is almost like a thesis. The book is clearly laid out and inspiring, this is a nice way of presenting a whole project, so something I would definitely take into consideration for the design of my graduation project. The instructions to use the cards are not very clear, you really have to search for it. The cards are very text heavy, which makes it difficult for the user to get started.

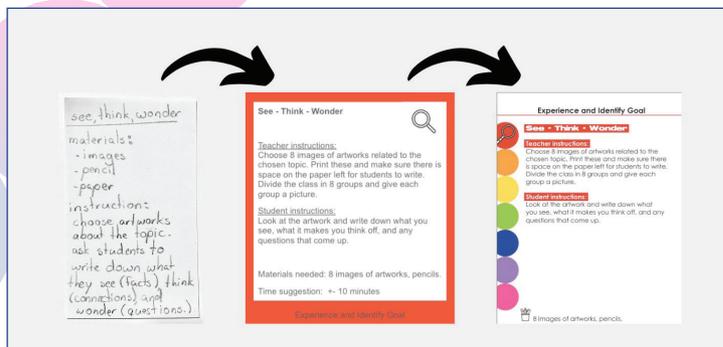
The last set of cards I looked at were the Critical Creativity in Action Cards by American English.



Design Play Change

ter this version was printed I connected the cards with a binder ring to ensure they all stay together. For the final version I reorganized the activities into four steps. I also used icons that were more consistent in the design and used the icons to create more consistency in the design, by including icons for the materials that are needed, for the time the activities will take and for the references used for the activities.

Inspired by these card decks I made a few design decisions for the development of the activity cards. Initially I hand wrote the activities on little cards to organize them and to select activities for each step. I ensured that the instructions were clear and compact and that it wasn't too text heavy. I then created a digital version in which I made sure that all the cards were color coded, so it is easy to see to what step they belong. My colleague then designed a more graphically appealing version in which I included the use of more icons and an easy to read font. Af-



Development of the activity cards



including the senses



half and half



color palette



beginning-middle-end



how many different ways?



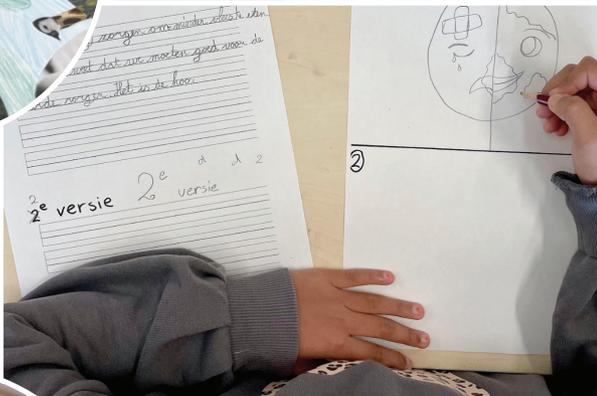
scrap paper



color palette



cut and rearrange



zoom in



cut and rearrange



scrap paper



cut and rearrange



visual mindmap



cut and rearrange



visual mindmap

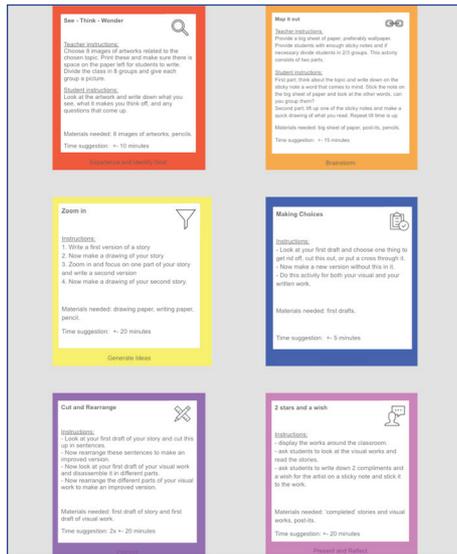
Action Research



To bring the activity cards into practice I did different rounds of testing; pilot study with my own students, reaching out to educators in training, and reaching out to experienced educators both near and far. The purpose of the action research was to check if the activity cards matched my intentions and improve the content, quality and design of LoVA.

Try out round 1: Pilot Study

To try out LoVA in practice I started with trying out the activities myself, I used the first draft version with seven steps in the process. The objective of this pilot study was to collect information about the students' experience with the creative process and my own experience. These experiences informed the development of LoVA.



Activity Cards used for my Pilot Study

My pilot study took place in groups 5, 5/6 and 6 (8-10 year olds) at IKC de Eglantier, a public primary school in Delft. IKC de Eglantier is a bilingual primary school with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The school works with the International Primary Curriculum, a curriculum in which students work on different subjects around a specific theme. During my pilot study, I incorporated the current theme, 'Save the Planet', in my lesson series.

For my pilot study I chose an activity card for each step of the process to guide the students through the creative process. And I followed the planning process:

- Topic: Saving the Planet
- Material/Technique: Paper Collage
- Language Goal: Persuasive Writing

Lesson 1:

In the first lesson of the lesson series, I focused on the first two steps of the creative process, and used *See-Think-Wonder* and *Map it Out*. The goal of this activity was for my students to start thinking about the topic and call upon prior knowledge to start making connections to their own and others' ideas in both words and visuals.



See-Think-Wonder



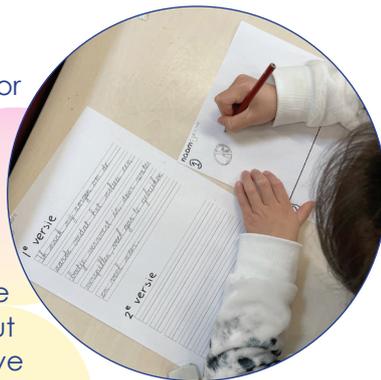
Map it out

Students were involved in the activities and got excited about working on this topic. The activities were well received, and students were able to execute the instructions. Regarding the development of the activity cards, some questions came up. One of the topics I started thinking about was the preconditions of executing these activities well, like classroom management, and how I can assist in this through the activity cards. Students already knew a lot about this topic, but I wonder if these activities work out if students are not familiar with the topic yet.

Lesson 2:

During lesson two we did the next two steps of the process with the activity *Zoom in* and work time for the building of the first prototype. *Zoom in* aimed to filter our ideas and focus on a more minor, particular part of the story/image, so we could enlarge it and capture more details. For the next step of 'Building a First Prototype', I did not use a specific activity card. I gave the students time and the resources to start collecting images they would like to use for their collage. I did provide them with specific instructions about how to write a persuasive text and different techniques for creating a collage.

This second lesson felt rushed, both for me and the students. I planned quite a few activities in one hour. This made me think about expectations, order of activities and making choices as a teacher. The activity I chose for 'generating ideas' was well received, and the students were very involved. I had to cut this activity short, as I also wanted to give them time to work on the rest. Maybe I could propose it as a challenge to get something on paper within a set amount of time. Or I could change the activities around and let them do the 'messy' part first and then the writing and drawing.



Zoom in

The questions that came up during this lesson were:

- Should I create a handout for teachers with tips/tricks for classroom management?
- What is the 'best' order in which you offer activities?
- How do we deal with time constraints? Do we see it as a game/challenge or as a burden?
- How much time do we offer for each activity?

Lesson 3:

During lesson 3 we did the activities *Making Choices* and *Cut and Rearrange*. The goals were thinking critically and making choices, as to select and prioritize parts of your work and giving students the opportunity to rearrange and reassess their choices critically and to give them a chance to make changes.

The main question that came up in my reflection was 'what are the preconditions to be able to do these activities?' Some children had a hard time understanding what a sentence was, so they just cut up words or parts of sentences. For the



Cut and Rearrange

educator it is important to understand the needs of their students and feel the freedom to adapt activities where they see necessary, this I need to include in the manual.

Lesson 4:

For the last lesson, I gave students a 30 minute challenge to finish both their visual and written work as best as they could. We then did the activity *Two Stars and a Wish*. The goal of the activity is to look at other peoples' work critically and look for specific things you like and things that could be improved.



Two Stars and a Wish

The musical chair activity and the compliments and wish activity worked well.

Some questions that came up were:

- How can we spread out the activities evenly over the weeks, so students get enough input for their activities and enough time to work on their own?
- When is an artwork 'finished'?
- When is a written text 'finished'?
- Should I include some guidelines/assessment criteria for the activities so that students understand better what is expected?

Results:

During my pilot study I included interviews with students to get a better understanding of how they experience visual arts and creative writing classes in school, how their personal creative processes look like in a non-school environment, and how they experienced the lesson series using the card set 'The Language of Visual Arts'. One of the things I found interesting was them explaining their creative process when they create at home. Many students get their inspiration from either Youtube or Pinterest. This made me wonder if they are doing this because this is something they are used to from school or

if this is really their preferred way of creation. It also made me realize the relevance of authentic creative processes even more. They expressed how much they liked the amount of time they had to create and especially the time they had to reassess and improve their work and were allowed to make changes.

The most important changes I will make in the activity cards based on this pilot study are inclusion of a guided text/manual for teachers, and inclusion of the purpose/goal of the activities.

Try out round 2: Colleagues

I invited my colleagues for a presentation and feedback session. I introduced the activity cards and my ideas behind it and gave my colleagues some time to have a look at the cards before asking them more specific questions. One of the questions that came up frequently was how creative writing and visual arts are related and connected and how this comes back in the activities. This needs to be clarified in the teacher manual. My colleagues were positive about how compact and concrete the activity cards are. Without much effort they can see what they need to prepare, what materials they need and how much time it will consume. I noticed my colleagues trying to connect it right away to their own teaching practice and they noticed that some topics/themes are more suited for specific activities. They liked the fact that they have the freedom to choose an activity that works best for their particular group, topic and setting. My colleagues liked the intersubjective nature of the activity cards; they expressed that this can help them in creating more time for the creative process, as it can also be scheduled during language arts time slots. In my initial design of the creative process I left the possibility to continue circling the creative process, as I believe this is the natural development of the creative process. My colleagues expressed some concerns about this with regards to time and practical constraints within their schedules, therefore their personal preference would go to a closed process and a closed circle, so that all students can continue at the same time. Another thing they pointed out was how some activities are more focused on visual arts and some activities are more focused on creative writing,

they suggested making this more clear in the design of the cards by for example adding a symbol for creative writing or for visual arts or both depending on the activity. This way teachers have the freedom to balance the activities, where some activities are more focused on the writing aspect and others more on the visual aspect.

After introducing the activity cards and having a general feedback session with my colleagues, I then gave my colleagues the improved version of LoVA and asked them to test it with their students. My colleagues were excited about the looks of the cards and were honored they received a printed version. I created a manual and an instruction video for them to look at and a questionnaire to collect their feedback and experiences.

Teacher Manual



Instruction video Dutch



Instruction video English



Questionnaire Dutch



Questionnaire English

Unfortunately it was a challenge to receive feedback from my colleagues. In the rush of everyday life their schedules were filled with textbooks that needed finishing, holidays that needed celebrating and other day to day activities that took priority over testing the activity cards. In hindsight I should have probably given them an earlier version of the activity cards, so they had more time to try them out. It felt quite vulnerable to give earlier versions of the activity cards. Some of the feedback I did receive was that the seven steps were quite intimidating, as they thought this would take up quite a bit of time. This made me decide to make the creative process shorter and connected to what teachers are already familiar with. I, therefore, decided to reduce the process to four steps like described by SLO and by NCCAS.

Try out round 3: Student teachers

In order to test out the activity cards with teachers in training I have been in contact with my colleagues at the teacher training institute, PABO Hogeschool Rotterdam. Students in their third year of the program have to choose a specialization. The students that have chosen the specialization of visual arts got the chance to work with me to try out the activity cards. I created an instruction video and printed out a copy of the activity cards to accompany the instruction video. Students had to write a lesson series for visual arts for their specialization, so it would be a great experiment for me if they can use the activity cards for the planning of their lesson series. I shared the questionnaire with them to collect feedback. In addition to the instruction video and the activity cards I also offered to mentor the students that chose to work with the activity cards, so I could help and guide them in the development of their lesson series and get a better understanding of their experience using the activity cards and what needs to be changed or adapted in order to make the cards more user friendly.

Unfortunately this did not go as planned. Only three students showed initial interest, but did not respond to further communication. After being in contact with my colleague at the teacher training institute, he explained that many of these students received nega-

tive study advice in year two, so many of them are still working on catching up with the work from last year. For visual arts there are no mandatory class hours, so many students choose this specialization, because it is considered 'easy'. Due to the minimal responses, I had to look for other opportunities to test out the activity cards. I decided on doing another round of testing by reaching out to my former colleagues.

Try out round 4: International Educators

Throughout the years I have worked with educators from different backgrounds and nationalities. I reached out to about a hundred of my former colleagues to also invite them to test LoVA. I received 14 responses on my questionnaire and some written responses. Unfortunately many former colleagues reached out to let me know they are no longer teaching.

The majority of the participants were already familiar with the creative process, 71,4% responded that their visual arts lessons are already focused on the process and 85,7% said their creative writing lessons are focused on the process. These responses tell me that these educators are already familiar with process based learning. In the future I would like to reach out to more educators who are less familiar with PBL.

The following activities cards were used; *See-Think-Wonder*, *Step in-Step out- Step back*, *Visual Mindmap*, *Futuristic*, *Pecha Kucha*, *Zoom In*, *First Thing That Comes To Mind*, *Questionmark*, *association game*, *quotes and articles*, *my compass*, *venn-diagram*, *building challenge*, *2 stars and a wish*, *Show and tell*, *creative questions*, *futuristic*, *first thing that comes to mind*, *I used to think*, *Same Same Different*, *Foursquare*, *Half and Half*, *Beautiful Oops*, *Say it in Clay*, *Ethical Magpie*, *Musical Chairs*, *Mix and Match*. I could say that the majority of the activities were tested. Some activities that were used by multiple teachers were *See-Think-Wonder* and *Questionmark*, these seem to be the more popular activities.

The participants provided positive feedback about the activity cards. They value the variety and flexibility offered by the cards,

allowing them to mix and match activities according to their preferences. Educators liked the clarity and simplicity of the instructions. The creativity and readiness of the product were mentioned, with the cards effectively promoting English language learning through visual arts. Students' creativity is encouraged through the activities, as there are no right or wrong answers, allowing for free expression of opinions. The variety of activities are appreciated, catering to different learning styles and preferences. The color coding of the cards assists in tracking the creative process. According to the participants the activity cards simplify the planning process, support interdisciplinary approaches, and encourage original content generation. The educators saw LoVA as a valuable tool for promoting engagement, critical thinking, and collaboration.

The respondents also gave suggestions for improving LoVA. They proposed the inclusion of short videos or visual aids with examples to enhance comprehension and execution of the activities. Additionally, the respondents highlighted that the cards assume teachers understand the value of process based learning. They recommended explicitly stating the importance of teaching process based learning and providing clear explanations of the reasons and benefits for this approach. Some respondents expressed the need for additional instructions for specific activities to ensure proper implementation. This would provide the necessary support for teachers to effectively guide their students through each step.

The feedback and responses I did receive were positive. Teachers felt empowered to teach process based creation lessons, found the cards user friendly, and said they would use the cards again. Many teachers mentioned they could see these activities being used for other subjects, which could be an addition to the use of the cards. Before drawing a conclusion I do have to consider that all these teachers are former colleagues and know me personally, so their responses might be positively affected. For the next steps I will have to find a way to also receive feedback from educators that do not know me personally.

Try out round 5: Group 3

Due to the minimum responses I received, I decided to test out some more activities with my own students. My students are in group 3 and are 6-7 years old. They just learned how to read and write, so I had to adjust some activities to make sure they were suited for this age group.

Lesson plan 1:

- Topic: petting zoo
- Material: watercolor paint
- Language focus: narrative writing
- Activity 1: beginning, middle, end
- Activity 2: creative questions
- Activity 3: scrap paper
- Activity 4: color palette
- Activity 5: highlights
- Activity 6: use your senses
- Activity 7: newspaper headline



Activity Cards used for lesson-plan 1

Reflections in preparation of the lesson:

As a teacher you need to think about the feasibility of the activities and how they relate to each other. The order of some activities need to be switched up. I chose scrap paper for activity 3, but then you kind of need to switch to a different paper to do activity 4, so it is easier to switch this around. While preparing the activities, I notice that I am adding/adapting things myself. It is nice if teachers also feel this freedom in their work, but at the same time I wonder if it is clear enough to do the activity for a less experienced teacher that just follows the directions. While preparing the lesson I notice that the writing comes in minimally during the activities I chose. The feedback from my colleagues before when they said add an icon for writing or creative activities is definitely something I need to adapt. As a teacher you need to help students make connections between the different stages of the process. Some activities can easily have a writing aspect added to the activity, so I need to look critically at this and add where possible. When preparing the lesson I keep noticing myself adapting activities, I should make it

clear in the manual that this is allowed and encouraged. I need to make the writing part more explicit, the activities I chose don't include very specific instruction on the writing aspect, if I want to make this useful for beginning teachers I need to make this more explicit.

Reflections on activities:

Beginning-middle-end was well received by the students, the images quickly inspired a story and most students started writing enthusiastically. This activity helped the students look closely at the image and understand the meaning of it. These images all had people in them, I wonder how this activity would work with more abstract art.



Beginning-middle-end

Students came up with really great responses for Creative-Questions. The activity did encourage them to question the topic without the need to answer them. I did notice that the questions became more interesting the longer they were doing the activity, so giving them time is essential in this activity.



Scrap paper provided some interesting results, one piece of scrap paper inspired a student to create a bird, others were merely a stripe in the corner and others used it more as a collage material.

Scrap paper

As we actually went to the petting zoo, the activity Color-Palette functioned as a way of capturing the colors seen at the zoo. Students recreated the color of the animals, the grass and even the animals' poop.



Color-Palette

We then continued with the activity highlights which helped the students to make a selection of their favorite aspect of their textual and visual work. I expected students to have a hard time deciding on what to keep or not, but they were pretty content making choices.



Impression of the petting zoo

Working through this process the work developed from a basic drawing about the petting zoo to a more refined artwork including text and images. By going through all the activities you saw that the results were getting more varied and some students even ended up with some more abstract work only using the colors they saw. All students ended up with a personal and unique artwork, and this I believe, is the power of going through this process.

Lesson plan 2:

- Topic: emotions
- Material: watercolors;
- Language focus: poetry; rhyming
- Activity 1: Same-Same-Different
- Activity 2: Half and Half
- Activity 3: Cut and Rearrange
- Activity 4: Headline



Activity Cards Lessonplan 2



Same-Same-Different

Reflections:

Same-Same-Different lead to a lot of interaction between students, they looked for similarities between the works of art, which helped them look more critically at the works and understand them better. As the students are quite young the conversations stayed on a

surface level, like looking for colors or people in the image. I wonder if you do this activity with older students if you get a deeper layer of understanding.

Students worked collaboratively on Half-and-Half, one student starting with the textual and the other with the visual work. I noticed most students having conversations about what they were creating and making sure the textual and visual work matched each other. The students who did not communicate much had a harder time. I wonder if I have to include more specific guidelines to support these conversations in the manual or if students should only use the visual and textual work to 'communicate' with each other.



Half-and-Half

with these younger students I noticed that they were not comparing their own work as much to others' work, and felt more free to have an authentic and unique work of art. I hope to celebrate and instill this quality in my students, as I believe this can help them develop and grow not only as artists but as people.



Cut-and-Rearrange helped students make selections, and again they knew quickly what to include and what not, so they intuitively know what's worth keeping or not. As a teacher you can of course include some more guidelines or criteria to this step.

The last activity, headline, was a little challenging

for most students. They struggled to bring the content down to one headline and needed some more time to narrow it down. I do notice that for the majority of these activities time is essential to increase the quality of the work. Working



Headline

Results



To analyze the results of this research project, I first like to go back to my intention. The intention was to realize qualitative education in visual arts and creative writing, by focusing on the creative process. To have a bigger impact and reach more students I decided to focus on empowering educators to teach process based creation lessons. In this process I developed a tool, the Language of Visual Arts or LoVA, to facilitate process based learning in visual arts and creative writing.

The results of the research can be broken down into different categories. First I will take a look at the results from the students' experience with the activities. Then I look at my own experience using the activity cards, and the experiences of other educators. Eventually I will look at how these experiences influenced the development and design of the activity cards.

Throughout my research project I have tried out the activity cards with students multiple times. For my pilot I worked with students between the age of 8-10 years old, my intended age group. Later in the process I also used the activity cards to guide my 6-7 year old students through their creative process in visual arts and creative writing. To measure the quality of the lesson series I set out a few criteria;



engagement, authenticity of the work, developments and growth during the process, and the connection between the visual and the written aspect of the work.

In terms of the engagement, the majority of the students were actively engaged in their own work and the activities. I could see that they were committed to improving and developing their work, they often tried out different possibilities and continued with the ones they liked best. They were open to the activities and expressed to have spent even more time on their work. All students were able to create a unique and authentic visual and textual work of art, the works of the students all looked different from each other and students were able to express what the work meant to them. The criteria for the quantity or the quality of the work was not one of my criteria for this project, but could be something that can be researched further. Regarding the growth and development of the students throughout the process I can say that both the textual and visual works of art developed significantly from the start to the end of the lesson series in both age groups. Students started with a small idea, expanded their ideas through the activities and then developed their work further. When looking at the works, you could see that ideas got more refined and concentrated and students were able to explain the choices they made. One student, for example, really enjoyed the Color-Palette activity, and developed and refined this to create his interpretation of his experience at the zoo.

The activities that were focused on divergent thinking, like the visual mind map, expanded their frame of reference and opened up new ideas. The more convergent thinking stimulating activities, like making choices, helped students to be critical and make choices to develop their work further. In the final iteration of the activity cards some activities were taken out, as they did not work well for my objective. My Compass, for example, has been taken out as it was quite a challenging activity for this age group. Plan-Your-Story has also been taken out, as it required templates and other resources from the teacher, which not everyone has access to.

Throughout the lesson series I was constantly looking for a connection between visual arts and creative writing. Sometimes this came naturally and sometimes the transition could feel a little forced. For the older students writing often came easier than the visual aspect, they were quite self-conscious when it came to their visual work. For the younger students, writing was a little more challenging as they just learned writing. Their visual work, on the other hand, came a lot more naturally and intuitively. I noticed the students actively using their writing to inform their visual work and vice versa. Recently I overheard a conversation between my students about how much they love art, and this, I believe, is the most beautiful result I could ask for.

In order to expand the reach of this project I focused on empowering teachers by creating a tool for them to teach qualitative visual arts and creative writing lessons where they focus on the process instead of the product. I used my own experience to reflect on this aspect and I reached out to educators in the field. I asked my direct colleagues, the teacher training institute, and former colleagues of mine in international schools to test the cards. The criteria I looked at were:

How would you describe the user friendliness of the activity cards?

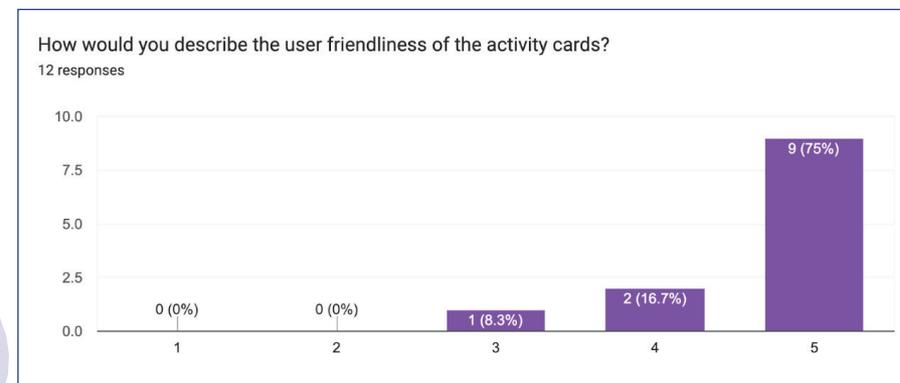
- To what extent do the activity cards help you to make your lessons more process based?
- To what extent does this card set empower you to teach process based creation lessons?
- Would you use the activity cards again?

Other than the questions above I also had some more open questions, in which educators could share their general feedback.

Unfortunately the response rate was significantly lower than expected. From the teachers in training at the teacher training institute I did not receive any feedback. A possible explanation came from one of the professors, who explained that many of these students received negative study advice in their last study year, so they have lots of work to do to catch up and don't have the time or energy at

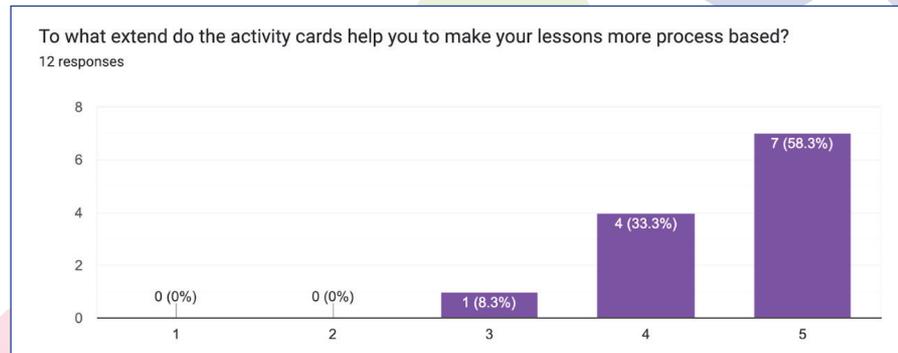
the moment to invest time in something new. From my direct colleagues I received a 20% response rate. I had a conversation with some of the colleagues who did not get to try out the activity cards, and some of the explanations they gave were not having enough time, overflowing curriculum, and busy with their own studies. Unfortunately these are things outside my control, but worth investigating further, as my intention is to create a tool to support educators and help them save time, not to add to their workload. From my former colleagues in international schools I received about a 10% response rate. Many of my former colleagues are no longer teaching, which is concerning in and of itself, but this explains some of the minimal responses. Another reason many people gave is not having enough time or being busy with mandatory testing. This lack of time and busy schedule, I am all too familiar with, and unfortunately is not a problem I can fix with activity cards, but hopefully after having some time to look at it they might realize that this tool could actually help them save time and work.

The responses that I did receive were positive and the feedback gave me valuable insights into the usability and effectiveness of the activity cards in realizing qualitative process based education.

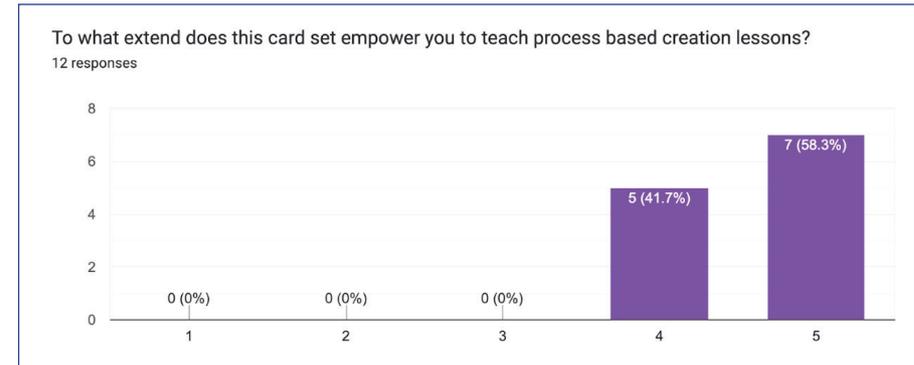


The majority of the participants rated the user friendliness a five out of five. Some of the feedback mentioned the ease of use, the clear instructions, and the clarity. The participants appreciated the

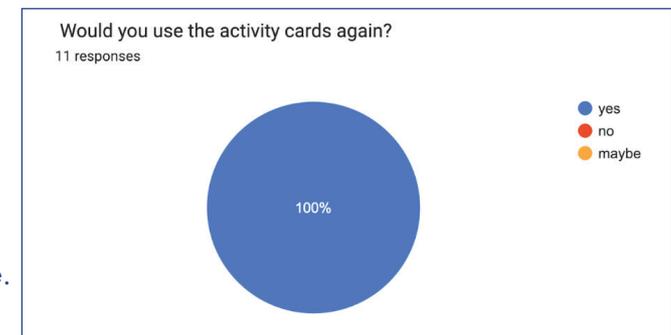
variety of choice and the ability to mix and match activities. Some of the educators also saw opportunities to incorporate the activities in other subjects, like science. According to the participants the activity cards' format is easy to use, has clear instructions, and the color coded design helps in the planning and organization of the lessons. Teachers also mentioned the time efficiency, the instructions are short and to the point and easy to implement.



Most of the participants responded with a four or five out of five when asked if the cards help them to make their lessons more process based. The written responses mentioned the breakdown of the process in manageable steps, this helped generate different ideas and ways to demonstrate that step of the process. The participants mentioned that LoVA could help simplify the planning process, focus on the process and could be useful for generating more original content from students. If I look at these results I could say that teachers are more aware of the process their students are going through and are guiding their students through their creative process with more intent. The responses do not tell much about the quality of the students' work or the inclusion of visual arts and creative writing, but it does tell me that the educators were more focused on the process instead of the product. These results are matching my intention to realize process based education.



All participants felt empowered by LoVA to teach process based creation lessons, which I think is a beautiful result from this research. Participants mentioned they felt empowered by the choice and freedom they have when choosing the activities. The teachers thought that the cards were open to interpretation, so they were able to customize and reword things to make the activities more suitable to their students' language level and culture. Teachers felt that they could reach all learners with the variety of options and felt that there were plenty of opportunities for scaffolding. One of the participants even mentioned that they had the students choose the activities, which doesn't only empower the educator, but also the learner. Some of the participants mentioned that they would have liked to have access to additional information, instructional videos, or examples when planning their lessons. This could be an interesting follow up project. Most of the participants in my research are very experienced educators, so many of them feel the freedom to adapt and scaffold where they see necessary. For a follow up research it would be interesting to try to reach out to teachers in training again, to see if they also feel empowered by LoVA or if they need additional tools or guidance.



I was happy to see that all participants would use LoVA again. Participants were positive about the engaging nature of the activities, and how they encourage and promote students' creativity and point of view. There is no right or wrong answer and students are free to give their opinions. This result makes me hopeful that educators might share their enthusiasm, and this might encourage other teachers to give LoVA a try.

The participants gave feedback on how to improve LoVA. Many participants mentioned they would love to see some examples of student work, worked out lesson series, and ideas and suggestions as to how to combine it with different subjects. Sharing students' examples and worked out lesson series is something I am hesitant about, as I believe having a thorough understanding of the process and the steps is what empowers and encourages.

One of the participants mentioned the development of a website or app on which you can select the activities with the option to auto generate follow up activities. As much as I like the idea of the development of an app or website to make it accessible to more educators, I still believe a card set is a more useful tool, as it is literally within hands' reach when planning your lessons.

Throughout my research project I tried to incorporate the results and insights from the action research into the development of the design of LoVA. Details about the developments and refinements of the manual and the design of the activity cards can be found in the chapter 'Design'. The biggest development is not directly connected to the feedback I received from fellow educators, but based on my own reflections. The majority of the educators I try to reach either work within the Dutch or the American educational system. Most educators in the Dutch education system are familiar with the creative process as described by SLO; Oriënteren (orientate), Onderzoeken (research), Uitvoeren (execute), Evalueren (evaluate). Teachers working with the American National Core Standards are familiar with the process as described by the NAEA; Responding, Connecting, Creating, and Presenting. In an attempt to relate to more educators I adapted the process to make a better connection with the

standards or objectives teachers are familiar with. As a result of this I decided to reduce the steps in the process from seven to four different steps. I have only been able to try out the lesson series with the four step model myself, which has been a promising experience. To further develop LoVA I would have to do another experiment inviting educators to test out the four step model.

Conclusion

The main objective of this research project was empowering educators in realizing qualitative process based education in visual arts and creative writing. Due to the minimum response rate I have to be careful to draw final conclusions, but with the responses from the educators that partook in the research I will try to draw some preliminary conclusions.



In conclusion, multiple factors play a role in the improvement of the quality of art education. Two of them are explicit instruction of the creative process and interdisciplinary learning. This is why I created LoVA, Language of Visual Arts. The activities focus on supporting students in the different steps of the creative process and on interdisciplinary learning. The activities are suited to each stage of the creative process and have proven to help students develop their own unique work. Visual art is also a language and therefore plays an important role in the development of verbal and written language in children. LoVA fulfills this important role not only for my own students, but for many students. For each educator that uses LoVA, about thirty students are given the chance to improve the quality of their education. Based on the responses on the questionnaire I could carefully conclude that the Language of Visual Arts could be a valuable tool to empower educators to teach process based creation lessons at the intersection of visual arts and creative writing.

The most important factor in improving the quality of art education, however, is actually making time for art education. Throughout this research I have noticed that visual arts and creative writing are still not a priority within our schools. With an easy to use tool like LoVA, many educators still don't manage to teach visual arts and creative writing. So, in order to improve the quality of art education for our students and to empower educators I believe something more might be necessary. I believe visual arts and creative writing should get a more prominent role in our schedules. I think this starts with an understanding and awareness of the importance of visual arts and creative writing, not only from educators, but more so from a more managerial point of view.

With all this in mind I do believe that the Language of Visual Arts could empower teachers to realize qualitative process based education in visual arts and creative writing, provided that the school and their educators understand and prioritize these subjects in their learning.

Next Steps

As mentioned before, the number of participants in the project were minimal, so it is a little too early to draw any final conclusions, further research is necessary to get a better understanding if LoVA could be used as a tool in different classroom settings. Further research could be done to get a better understanding of how to reach educators and how to persuade them to actually use and implement LoVA as a tool. Further research can also be done on a more governmental or managerial level to see what educators need to improve the quality of art education. In the future I would like to reach out to a publisher and look at the possibility of publishing LoVA so it might reach more educators. I believe LoVA has the potential to help educators to make their visual arts and creative writing lessons more process based, but further iterations and refinements can be made.

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Appendix

Responding - Oriënteren

The activities I created and selected for this stage of the process are focused on familiarizing themselves with the topic, expanding their frame of reference and divergent thinking.



Different Perspectives invites students to write down a statement about the topic and then respond to this statement from other people's viewpoint and experience. It is intended to expand their thinking and is focused mainly on writing.

Quotes and Articles introduces students to the topic by reading quotes and news articles about it, they are then asked to translate this text into a visual illustration. Students are encouraged to think about the meaning of the text and imagine what this might look like.

Color, Shape, Icon invites students to expand their thinking about the topic and

make it more abstract by thinking of a color, a shape, and an icon that could represent the topic.

Questionmark invites students to collaborate and use divergent thinking to come up with as many questions about the topic as possible. All questions are accepted and encouraged, as this will expand their frame of reference. This activity can be done with just the topic, but teachers can also choose to use an image as a prompt to encourage questions.

See, Think, Wonder prompts students to look at an image of an artwork and notice what they see, what it makes them think of and what questions come to mind when looking at the artwork. This activity helps students 'read' an artwork and understand what it tries to communicate.

Association Game is an activity in which students are encouraged to respond to the topic by writing down the first word that comes to mind. Students are prompted to collaborate, so they do not only use their own frame of reference, but also that of their peers.

Step in, Step out, Step back prompts students to 'read' an artwork and place themselves 'in' the artwork, by thinking about how the person in the artwork might feel. Students are then invited to think about what they want to know about this person and write a letter to the person in the artwork. This activity helps students expand their frame of reference and understand an artwork better.

Foursquare is a collaborative activity in which students respond to each other's writing or image. The first student draws an image about the topic, the second writes down what they see, the third then makes a drawing of this text, and the last student then 'translates' this in text again. Students are prompted to use code-shifting to shift between visual and textual language and expand their frame of reference.

Show and Tell prompts students to find an image that is connected to the topic. They are then invited to present this image to their classmates and explain why they chose this image for this topic. Students are encouraged to understand how the artwork conveys meaning and share this with others.

3-2-1 asks students to write down three words, two questions, and one metaphor that explains the topic best in their opinion. It encourages students to critically think about the topic. This activity can also be done with an image of an artwork as a starting point.

Beginning, Middle, End helps students to look at an artwork as a story and prompts students to decide if the image could be the beginning, the middle or the end of a story. It helps students understand and evaluate the meaning of an artwork.

Same-Same-Different encourages students to look critically at two works of art and look for similarities and differences. This helps students 'read' the artwork and understand it better.

Values, Identities, Actions prompts students to 'read' an artwork and understand what values they see represented in the artwork. It also asks them to think about the intended audience of the artwork

and what actions the artwork provokes the audience to take. It helps students understand the artwork better and to expand their frame of reference.

Map it Out prompts students to think about the topic and write down all words that come to mind. Collaboratively students will then move these words around to create a map with clusters of words and add drawings to them. This activity encourages students to familiarize themselves with the topic and expand their frame of reference collaboratively.

Connecting - Onderzoeken

The activities I created and selected for this stage of the process are focused on making connections, trying things out, and using imagination. Divergent thinking is still prevalent, and students are encouraged to think 'outside of the box'.



Creative Questions prompts students to work collaboratively and come up and rephrase questions in the following format: what would it be like if... what would change if... how would it look differently if... This activity encourages students to use their imagination to reimagine the questions and the topic.

TASK party! is a great activity to invite students to use their hands to explore ideas and concepts. Students all get a prompt to create something

small related to the topic, when the task is fulfilled they will choose a new task until the time is up.

Beautiful Oops is an activity based on the book Beautiful Oops (Saltzberg, 2010). It encourages students to deal with mistakes and prompts them to purposefully make a mistake and use this as the start of their work of art.

Venn-Diagram is an activity in which students will look at two different aspects of the topic and look for similarities and differences and make these visual.

Half and Half is an activity in which students will work collaboratively. One student will start with the first draft of a story and the other student will then finish this story. The same is done for the visual aspect, one student starts with the first half of a drawing and the other student will then finish it. This activity encourages students to try out ideas and expand on others' ideas.

If this were a... prompts students to reimagine an exciting work of

art in a new way. Prompts that can be used are if this artwork was an instrument or if this were a plant or if this were a color, what would it look like. This challenges students to imagine a work of art in a new way.

How many different ways? encourages students to explore the possibilities of a medium or material. It helps to develop skills and invites students to look for other techniques than they are already familiar with.

Visual Mind Map invites students to explore the topic in drawings and images. Students are encouraged to 'translate' their ideas and knowledge about the topic into drawings and images.

Imagine if... lets students reinvent an object to make it more efficient, more effective, more ethical or just prettier. It invites the students to think critically and reimagine a work of art.

Scrap Paper is an activity in which a scrap piece of paper functions as a prompt to start an artwork. Students are encouraged to use their imagination to incorporate the scrap piece of paper into their work.

Futuristic invites students to look at their first draft and reimagine it as if it were made in the future. This encourages students to expand their frame of reference and use their imagination.

Creating - Uitvoeren

The activities I created and selected for this stage of the process are focused on creating a visual and textual work of art and making choices. Convergent thinking plays an important role in these activities.



Musical Chairs is an activity to help look critically at each other's work and provide feedback, so that it can be improved.

Cut and Rearrange prompts students to rearrange their work and evaluate their choices made and look for options to change or adjust their work.

Say it in Clay helps students to make a first draft of their three dimensional work, it is a challenge in which students are invited to transform their ideas in clay.

Zoom in invites students to create focus in their visual and textual work and helps to put the spotlight on what is really

important to them in their work.

First thing that comes to mind asks students to evaluate and understand each other's work to get a better understanding if the work is conveying the message the artist is trying to communicate.

Making Choices helps the student to critically look at their work and decide what to include and what to exclude, this helps them to further develop their work.

Color Palette prompts students to create a color scheme for their visual work, it invites them to think about what colors best convey their message.

Including the Senses asks students to check in with their sense of sight, touch, smell, taste, and sound and try to incorporate it in their

visual and textual work, it helps students to create more details in their work.

Highlights invites students to look critically at their work and make a selection of three aspects they like best about their work and make an improved version of their work focusing on these aspects.

Building Challenge is an invitation to transform an idea into a sculpture and then translate this to a textual work, it helps students to make their thinking visual.

Inside Out prompts students to imagine the inside of their visual work and use this insight to improve their work. It helps students to get a deeper understanding of their work and create more detail.

Ethical Magpie invites students to get inspiration from their classmates' work and use this to improve their own work.

Pecha Kucha prompts students to convey their message or story through 20 images. It helps them to see their work as a story conveying a message.

Presenting - Evalueren

The activities I created and selected for this stage of the process are focused on reflecting on the student's own and others' work and sharing it with the public.



Stay or go? Invites students to decide whether they are ready to share their work or if they would like to continue with it and go through the different stages of the process again. This gives students the option to refine and improve their ideas and is an important part of the circular aspect of the creative process.

I used to think prompts students to reflect on their work and the topic in general and evaluate whether their work has altered or influenced their thoughts and opinions on the topic.

Mix and Match asks students to look at both the

textual and visual works of arts of themselves and others and try to match these. This activity helps students to understand the message communicated through the work.

Headline prompts students to come up with a headline or title for their work. This helps them consolidate the message in a short headline.

2 stars and a wish is an activity in which students look critically at each other's work and give two compliments and a tip for improvement.

Curator of the day invites a small group of students to curate the artworks of their classmates. This helps them look critically at the work and look for similarities and differences.

Questionmark prompts students to look at the visual and textual artworks and think of a question to ask the artist. This helps students to look at the work critically and understand the message in the work.