

## Students' Artistic Creation as an Alternative Assessment Task in a Non-artistic Course Within Higher Education

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### Abstract

The paper investigates the potential of utilizing artistic creation as an alternative task for assessing students in a non-artistic course within higher education. Eighteen postgraduate students of the Department of Pedagogy and Primary Education of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, after attending a six-hour course in the subject of Psychopedagogy, were assessed by creating a drawing in which they depicted the concept of empathy as they understood it through the lesson. Then, they composed a reflective text about the creation of their artwork. Both the drawings and the reflective texts produced by the students were analyzed using the method of content analysis with criteria based on Gale and Bond's Assessment Framework (2007). The results of the study showed that the creation of artistic work by the students offers rich data about their knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and reveals aspects of learning that would not be highlighted with conventional assessment techniques. Furthermore, it promotes the critical transfer of learning to real-life contexts. The study proposes the implementation of artistic creation as an alternative assessment technique in non-art courses in higher education.

## **Introduction**

The study investigates the potential of utilizing artistic creation as an alternative task for assessing students in a non-artistic course within higher education. It is premised with the observation that traditional student assessment methods in higher education, mainly through written and oral exams, do not adequately address current educational needs (Hansen & Ringdal, 2018; Havnes & McDowell, 2008; Lauvås, 2007). Contemporary pedagogical approaches refer to learning environments which promote differentiated classroom assessment, a combination of individual and group assessment, consideration of learning outcomes across cognitive, emotional, and social domains, encouraging learners' autonomy and self-regulation in the learning process (McLean, 2018). In this light, assessment should help promote learning by giving the learner ownership of learning in an environment of increased interaction (Brown & Harris, 2013; Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013). However, the established techniques of student assessment in higher education, mainly in the form of the written and oral examination, cannot meet these expectations because they focus mainly on grading, control almost exclusively the cognitive domain, and make the student a passive participant in the process. Despite the continuing modernization of assessment techniques in higher education in recent years, there remains a consistent need to revise assessment methods so as to align them with recurrently evolving educational objectives (Fook et al., 2016; Gavotto-Nogales et al., 2015; Wininger, 2005).

By surveying the field of assessment practices, we can identify techniques that align with modern learning environments and that address contemporary educational requirements. The creation of artistic work by students can be used as a contemporary assessment task that fulfills the requirements of contemporary classroom assessment. Research findings indicate that involving learners in various art forms, such as music, dance, drama, poetry, and literature, enhances their acquisition of knowledge, skills, critical thinking, and work habits (DeMoss & Morris, 2005; Kosky, 2008; Lenakakis, 2004; Nderu-Boddington, 2008; Peterson, 2006; Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). The use of artistic creation for teaching and assessment purposes has been studied particularly in the context of art courses. In contrast, the exploitation of artistic creation to assess students in non-artistic educational settings has been much less explored (Burton et al., 2000; Catterall, 2009; Eisner, 2003). Research on student assessment in non-art courses is called upon to answer numerous questions. Can assessment through the creation of artistic projects demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes students have acquired in the course? Which criteria will be employed to assess a student's artwork? The current study is motivated by these questions and attempts to provide some answers by focusing on the field of student assessment in higher education.

### **Towards an Assessment Framework of Students' Artistic Work**

For the assessment of students' artwork, it is necessary to define the assessment framework, to outline the criteria, and to establish the corresponding indicators for each criterion. Proficiency indicators specify the scope of each criterion by detailing the expected behavior, knowledge, and skills students should exhibit. Establishing the assessment framework before engaging in artistic creation aids students in understanding what to focus on and how to avoid essential omissions. It also enables teachers to form their teaching strategies and to guide learners toward the goals they are expected to achieve. The examination of relevant literature has highlighted various frameworks of criteria for evaluating students' artistic work, chiefly within the field of art courses (Davies, 2003; Gates, 2017; McCollister, 2002). Some of the best-known and most widely used assessment frameworks come from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, such as Assessment Framework for Arts Education (National Assessment Governing Board, 2016). These frameworks acknowledge that learning and assessing in the arts encompass competencies in the realms of creation, performance, and critical analysis within the specific historical context (Holdren, 2012; Persky et al., 1999; Pistone, 2002). To assess the artwork created by the students in this study, we choose the four-part Assessment Framework suggested by Gale and Bond (2007) which embraces the following areas of competencies: Knowledge Creation, Creative Production, Integrated Contextual and Critical Communication. These four areas of competence of the suggested framework are suitable for assessing students' artistic creation in non-art programs and courses and are transferable to multiple disciplines or practically any content.

#### ***Knowledge Building***

The initial expectation is to evaluate the acquisition of knowledge and skills related to the subject that was taught. This first set of criteria involves the reproduction of core knowledge in the field taught, the clarification of related concepts, and the appropriate use of terminology. It also extends to highlighting the dimensions, distinctions, and correlations of the examined content. Moreover, the learner is expected to demonstrate higher-level cognitive skills, such as the ability to transfer learning to new situations, drawing on prior experience to construct new knowledge, deepening and personalizing knowledge, and applying learning to discover imaginative and creative solutions to real-world problems (Denford, 2013; Mestre, 2006).

#### ***Creative Production***

The second set of criteria for assessing students' artistic work refers to their capacity to creatively employ the expressive means of the chosen artform to convey meanings and ideas relevant to the objectives of the course. Assessment based on this set of criteria aims to determine the extent to which the learner has successfully managed to represent essential and appropriate aspects of the subject being examined through the arts, in an original and creative

manner. For example, in the case of assessing a learner-produced drawing, the criteria will inspect art elements and design principles such as forms, colors, shapes, symbols, compositions, and the overall expression of the learner's personal style. Within this area of competence students are not expected to apply specific art techniques or demonstrate particular skills or use art terminology, since the assessment does not refer to an art lesson. They intuitively utilize the expressive means of art which will enable them to express the understanding they have achieved in the course. Additionally, insights assembled from the process of creating the artwork are also of interest as they can contribute to a deeper understanding of the drawing for both the instructor and the individual or group. Assessing students' creative ability is particularly challenging in art classes (Barbot, 2011; Gates, 2017). But when it comes to assessment in a non-art course, students' artistic creation could not be negatively assessed, as it reflects their perspective and captures elements of their personality and character. Indications of individual style are encouraged in their assessment, as they unveil aspects of the learners' identity which may not be expressed in any other manner (Gale & Bond, 2007).

### ***Integrative Contextualization***

The third set of assessment criteria refers to the students' ability to realize that artistic creation is not an isolated event but is integrated into the wider intellectual context of its time. In this sense, the first competence that is assessed is the students' ability to connect their artistic work with other creations from various art forms of their culture (Gale & Bond, 2007). This set also examines students' ability to integrate current reality into their artistic work and to demonstrate interest and sensitivity to critical issues of the modern world. Therefore, the third set of assessment criteria also examines students' ability to create artistic work which reflect the demands of the broader social environment. These criteria reveal whether and to what extent the work of art is inspired by the personal concerns of its creator and whether it incorporates the characteristics and social demands of the present age. The criteria also consider whether and to what extent students, through their artistic creation, succeed in answering contemporary questions or raising new and controversial inquiries. Since artistic production is also intertwined with the skills of personal identity construction, students' artwork is expected to exhibit evidence of critical reflection, signs of critical self-awareness, and even in some instances, indications of critically transforming dysfunctional assumptions (Franklin & Chapple, 2017; Patton, 2017).

### ***Critical Communication***

The final set of criteria refers to assessing students' ability to critically communicate their work to others. The composition of reflective texts, the presentation of artwork, and the reflective plenary discussion provide a reliable and valid account of the knowledge, skills and thought processes that the learner has developed. This area includes skills that extend well beyond verbal

and non-verbal communication, as well as writing skills. This encompasses higher-level skills, such as empathy, critical thinking, cooperation, supporting one's viewpoint with arguments, openness to revision, willingness for self-improvement and reassessment of one's personal value system (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Haanstra & Schönau, 2007; Link, 2022). Consequently, a vital element of an artwork assessment framework in a non-art course is fostering the development of students as critical thinkers. The assessment of this fourth set of criteria establishes a link between art and other academic subjects within the curriculum.

### **The Research**

The paper investigates the potential of utilizing artistic creation, particularly drawing, as an alternative assessment task for assessing students in a non-artistic course within higher education. The study examines how students' paintings and drawings can be used for the purposes of their assessment. Additionally, it delves into the criteria used to assess student-created painting and drawing and explores the diverse learning outcomes generated through this alternative assessment technique.

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Can the creation of artistic work function as a form of student assessment in non-artistic subjects within higher education?
2. How can the creation of artistic work be a means of assessing the level of knowledge and skills acquired by students in the course?
3. How does assessment through the production of artistic work contribute to fostering students' critical self-awareness and awareness of critical current issues?

### ***Procedures***

The research was carried out in the context of a six-hour course in the subject of Psychopedagogy offered in the postgraduate studies program of the Department of Pedagogy and Primary Education of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. At the end of the course, each student was asked to create a drawing on A4 paper in which they would depict the concept of empathy as they perceived it during the lesson. The students were given the freedom to create their drawings without any guidance from the educator, and no specifications regarding content, colors, and no materials were provided. After finishing their drawings, the students composed a reflective text of 10–15 lines. In this written reflection, they analyzed the thoughts and emotions that inspired their artwork. Additionally, they explained the concepts and symbols incorporated into their creations. The assessment process was concluded with a plenary presentation of the drawings. Each student explained their work, covering aspects such as composition, figures, colors, symbols, etc. and fielded questions from their classmates.

Paintings and drawings in the findings section are displayed with the consent of their authors. The identification of the authors was done only for those who gave their permission.

### ***The Teaching of Empathy***

The six-hour course centered on the concept of empathy, both as a subject taught within the curriculum and as a skill applicable in everyday relationships within an educational institution. In the present study, empathy was taught as a multidimensional concept encompassing both cognitive and affective-communicative aspects. The instruction also involved distinguishing empathy from related concepts such as identification, compassion, and sympathy. The instruction specifically focused on the four aspects of empathy as outlined and measured by M. H. Davis (1980). Regarding the cognitive dimension, empathy includes "Perspective taking," which in essence is an inclination to spontaneously adopt the psychological perspective of others. Additionally, it includes "Fantasy," as the tendency to be imaginatively transported into the emotions and actions of fictional characters. In the affective-communicative dimension, empathy encompasses "Empathic concern," characterized by an emotional approach to others, and "Personal distress," in the form of offering support to others (Davis, 1983; Rogers, 1975; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019). The teaching approach also incorporated instances of empathy from the syllabus and school textbooks, as well as from the teacher's attitude within the school community (Babalís & Lazarakou, 2021; Lazarakou, 2008).

### ***Participants***

Eighteen postgraduate students from the Department of Pedagogy and Primary Education of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens participated in the research, of which 14 (77.8%) were women and 4 (22.2%) were men. In terms of age distribution, 6 (33.3%) participants were between 20-29 years old, 9 (50%) were in the 30-39 age group, and 3 (16.7%) were aged 40-55 years. Regarding their professional status, 6 (33.3%) were employed in the private sector, 5 (27.8%) were teachers, 4 (22.2%) held public servant positions, and 3 (16.7%) were either underemployed or unemployed.

### ***Methods***

Content analysis was used as a methodological approach (Berelson, 1952; Mason, 2011). After carefully studying both the reflection texts and the students' artistic works, the presence of specific themes as well as their frequency of occurrence within the qualitative data were sought. In this way the content was coded, and the criteria assigned according to the framework of the four areas of competence described by Gale and Bond (2007). We tried to make the criteria clear, exhaustive, and mutually exclusive, in that they cannot overlap (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017).

The criteria resulting from the content analysis, constitute the assessment framework of the study and are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Assessment Criteria Framework*

<b>Areas of competence</b>	<b>Criteria</b>
<b>Knowledge Building</b>	Conceptual clarification Knowledge acquisition Appropriate use of terminology Critical understanding of the subject being taught Personal perception of the subject being taught
<b>Creative Production</b>	Using artistic means to express ideas in an original and creative way Using art to highlight specific aspects of the lesson Integration of elements of the production process into the artistic work
<b>Integrative Contextualization</b>	Connection of the students' artistic work with other works of art within the wider cultural context Connection of the students' artistic work with the students' personal or/and professional life Connection of the artistic work with the controversial issues of the modern world
<b>Critical Communication</b>	Presentation of the artistic work in plenary Reflective analysis of the artistic work and delving into the meanings and ideas it contains Self-assessment and peer-assessment

(Gale and Bond, 2007, adapted)

Alongside the content analysis of the students' artwork and reflective texts, data was also collected from the reflective discussion that took place in the plenary after the artistic creation. Seated in a circle, students presented their work to their classmates, delving into the content of their drawings, explaining their intentions, and the expressive means they employed. Additionally, they provided justifications for the choices they made, aiming to illuminate the unseen latent ideas incorporated into their creation. They also engaged in self-assessment regarding the attainment of the goals they had set before carrying out their projects. The remaining students posed questions and offered comments on their classmates' artwork,

demonstrating a disposition to contribute to a deeper comprehension of the subject. The researcher was moderating the process, recording the discussion, and noting the main topics and positions. Evidence from the plenary discussion was used to supplement and deepen the content analysis data. Plenary reflection provided better access to the ways in which participants thought and felt when producing their artwork and the different perspectives, emotions and experiences that influenced their artistic creation.

### **Findings**

In this section, the results of the content analysis of the students' artwork and reflective texts are provided according to the criteria set out in the Assessment Criteria Framework (Table 1) as enriched by the elements that emerged in the plenary reflection discussion.

#### ***Knowledge Building***

The students' drawings and reflection texts demonstrate a satisfactory comprehension of the concept of empathy. They effectively performed key dimensions of the concept under examination, as pointed out in the course's bibliographic sources (Davis, 1980; Rogers, 1975). A majority of students (61%) began their reflection texts by either providing a definition of the concept of empathy or describing its conceptual content as in the following excerpts.

*Empathy is defined as the ability to put yourself in another person's shoes, and understand how they think and feel, however, without identifying with them.*

*The process of empathy is multidimensional as it involves critical thinking, emotional perception, and effective communication.*

A significant majority of students (83.3%) recognized empathy as being both a cognitive and affective capacity. In the drawings and reflective texts, these students referenced the cognitive dimensions of empathy, specifically citing perspective-taking and the imaginative reconstruction of the feelings and actions of others. Furthermore, they linked the ability to empathize with critical thinking.

*The mind symbolizes the cognitive process essential for identifying and comprehending things from the perspective of the interlocutor, involving critical thinking. The heart, on the other hand, symbolizes the entire emotional aspect of the empathy process. Lastly, the circles within the drawing symbolize the communication that takes place, with the incomplete circles signifying the effort exerted to stimulate the thoughts and emotions of another person (refer to Figure 1).*



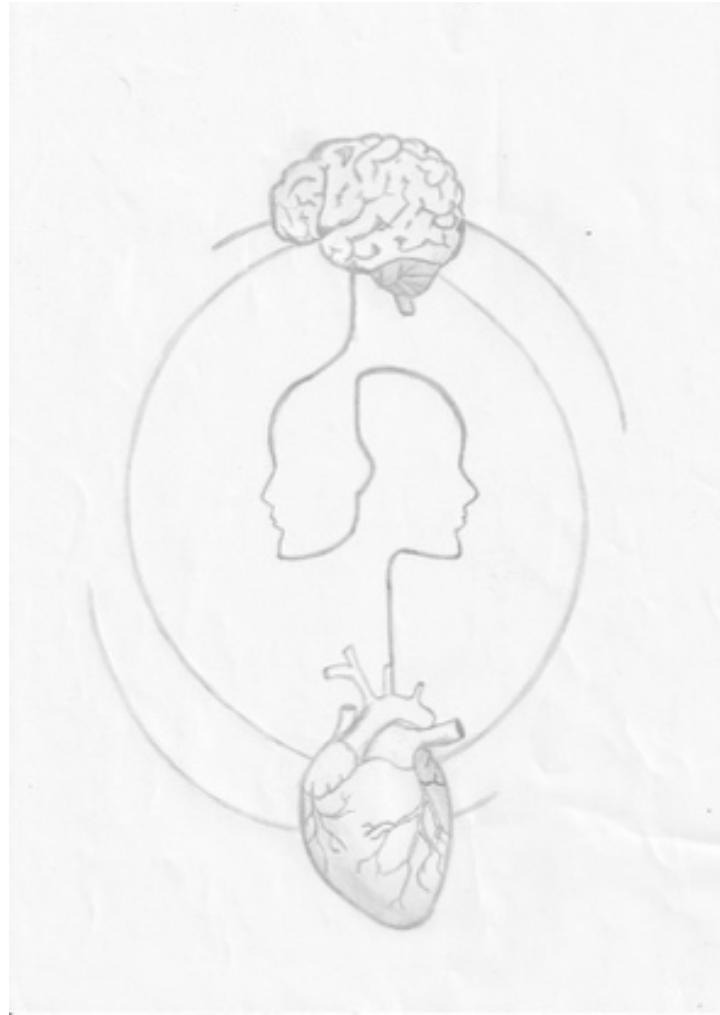
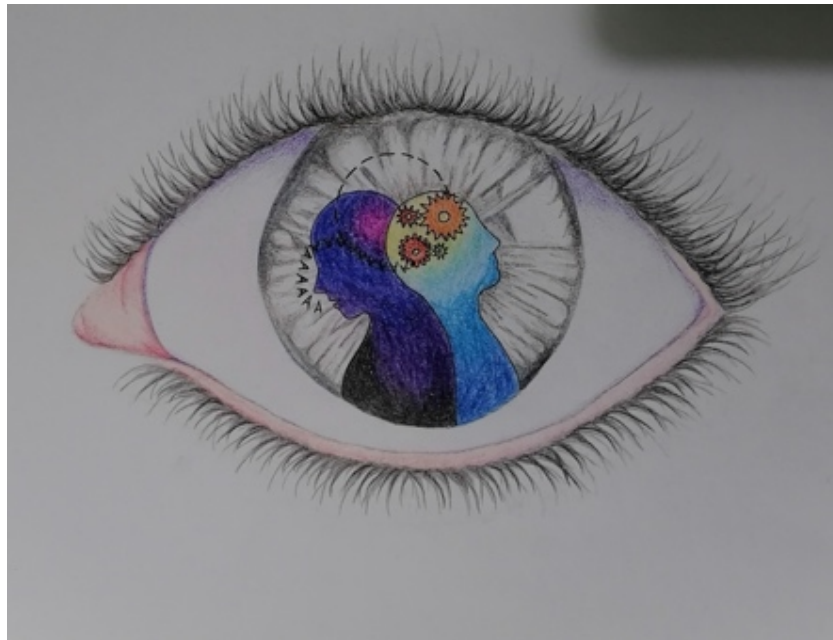


Figure 1. Drawing by Sevasti Katerinopoulou.

*Empathy involves adopting another perspective, seeing 'as if' you were the other. The transition of perspective is symbolized by the eye that surrounds the main image in the drawing. Upon careful observation of the drawing, one notices that this image is reflected in the pupil of the eye, signifying that the person sees and empathizes but does not completely identify with the individual before them. The two bodies touch each other, their heads coming together, symbolizing the emotional bond that has formed between them. One person is depicted with an open mouth, expressing their feelings through a shout (AAAAAAA), while the other patiently listens, observes, and processes the information conveyed in order to comprehend it. The gears in the drawing symbolize both the affective and cognitive processes. They represent the individual's critical and emotional understanding of others, while at the same time also imaginatively filling in the gaps of understanding (refer to Figure 2).*



*Figure 2. Drawing by Ioanna Panou.*

In contrast, 50% of the students highlighted the affective-communicative dimensions of empathy. They specifically referred to personal distress, signifying feelings of anxiety and worry about the negative state of others, as well as the aspect associated with the willingness to assist others.

*Offering a flower is purely symbolic, a gesture conveying my acceptance and willingness to provide them with what they need.*

In both of the drawings and, more prominently, the reflection texts, 38.9% of the students differentiated the concept of empathy from related concepts such as identification, compassion, and sympathy. This differentiation refers to the bibliographic sources studied in the course.

*I consciously step into the other person's shoes to assist them. However, without fully identifying, I maintain a separate identity, something which enables me to genuinely provide support and help.*

A significant number of students (61.1%) attempted to capture their personal perception of the studied concept within their artistic creations. They approached empathy through their personal experiences, constructing a critical-personal artistic representation of the concept.

*Personally, I perceive empathy as a source of relief, redemption, a sense of 'belonging,' a state of harmony, and a feeling of security.*

*For me, empathy is a journey into the psyche of another, into their emotional state, navigating through the chaos and vastness of their soul.*

A smaller percentage of students (33.3%) expressed the concept in an imaginative and creative manner, such as contrasting it with a puzzle, a technological device or two flourishing hands, as exemplified in Figures 3 and 4.

*The drawing depicts a customer in a technology store. In the showcase on the left, one can observe available 'eyes' symbolizing the diverse perspectives of people. By selecting one of these 'eyes,' users of augmented reality glasses can virtually 'see through the eyes of others.' In fact, each pair terminates in two wires, one connected to the heart and the other to the mind of the user.*

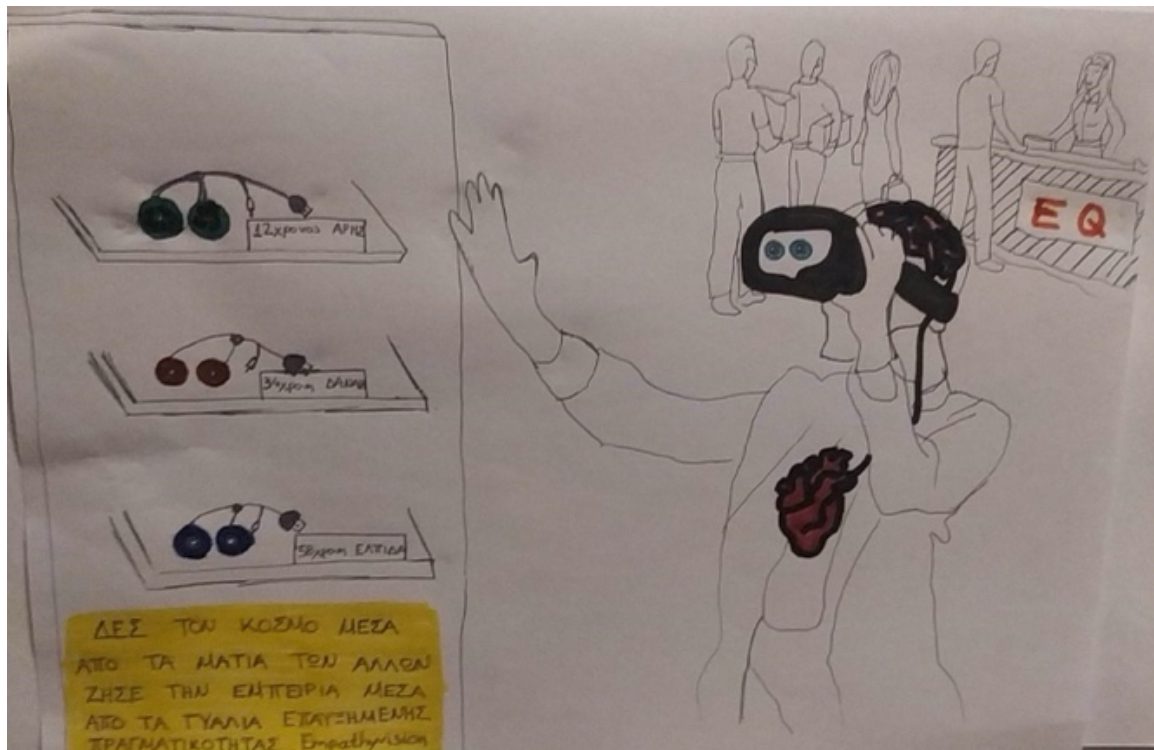


Figure 3. Drawing by Maria Tsakiri.

*The hand of the other, someone in whom empathy has been cultivated, assists us in blossoming together once more. They lift us up (the reason why one hand is on top), and we sense the strength of a soul that can bear the weight of our leaning, regardless of the burdens we carry. For me, empathy is like extending branches which have been put forward to uplift someone else who is struggling to blossom.*



*Figure 4. Drawing by Maria Gaitani.*

Proficiency indicators related to Knowledge building are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2***Proficiency indicators to Knowledge building*

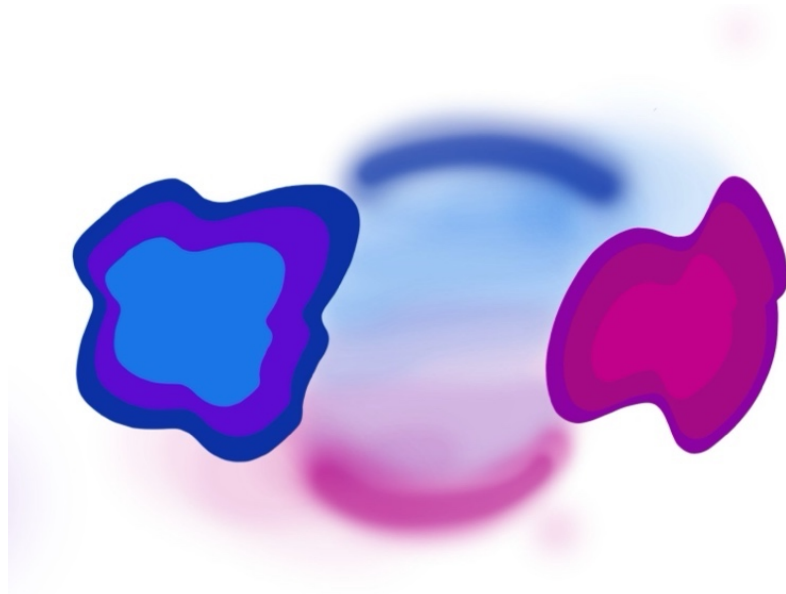
<b>Knowledge building</b>	<b>Indicators of proficiency</b>	<b>Frequencies Percentages (N %)</b>
<b>Clarifying the concept of empathy, discriminating cognitive from affective dimension, critical approach to the taught concept, building personal meaning</b>	Reference to the definition of empathy, conceptual delineation	11 (61 %)
	Defining empathy both as a cognitive and affective process	15 (83.3 %)
	Reference to the cognitive dimensions of empathy	15 (83.3 %)
	Reference to the affective-communicative dimensions of empathy	9 (50 %)
	Distinguishing empathy from related concepts (identification, sympathy, compassion)	7 (38.9 %)
	Deepening, personal-critical intake of the studied concept	11 (61.1 %)
	Approach the concept of empathy in an imaginative and creative way	6 (33.3 %)

(Gale and Bond, 2007, adapted)

***Creative Production***

Students tried to use the expressive means of drawing and painting to convey their thoughts and emotions in a personal and creative way. Since it was a non-art course, students freely and intuitively used figures, colors, lines, shapes, and symbols to express the knowledge and personal meaning they gained from the lesson. In the reflection texts written by the majority of the students (72.2%), they offered justifications for the expressive means they used in their artistic creations (e.g., why they chose a certain color or symbol, what a certain composition meant to them etc.).

*The blue shape on the left side of the drawing symbolizes an individual employing empathy, whether cognitive or emotional, to facilitate the evolution of the fuchsia shape. The fuchsia shape on the right side of the painting signifies an individual who is in a position requiring assistance, either in practicing empathy themselves or in addressing a personal challenge. (See Figure 5)*



*Figure 5. Painting 1.*

The expressive elements of painting/drawing proved instrumental for a considerable number of students (55.6%), enabling them to penetrate deeper into the concept of empathy and to extend its understanding of aspects which are not readily discerned through the initial approach. For 61.1% of the students, painting and drawing facilitated capturing and expressing the personal meaning that empathy held for them. During the plenary reflection discussion, some students highlighted the potential that art provided in this regard.

*The figures gaze to the left, towards the heart, while the vertical, branch-like lines may represent the initial obstacles they encounter when endeavoring to accurately comprehend each other's feelings (see Figure 6).*



Figure 6. Drawing by Electra Dimoula.

In the reflection texts, 33.3% of the students, took the initiative, providing some information about the process of creation in addition to describing and analyzing their artistic work. By sharing insights into the process of creation, these students further enriched and gave meaning to the analysis of their artistic work. This process also strengthened the personal significance they attributed to the concept of empathy.

*Approaching empathy from the perspective of the creator of a drawing, posed significant challenges for me. I struggled with finding inspiration, with capturing the essence and with finding the right occasion which would serve as the trigger for expressing the meaningful concept of empathy on paper. I revisited literature, studying well-known artwork from a fresh perspective, and even attempted to create my own drawing. However, all these endeavors were met with failure. Only upon reflection did I identify the problem. I had undertaken all the aforementioned efforts alone. However, empathy inherently involves at least two individuals.*

Proficiency indicators related to Creative production are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3***Proficiency indicators to Creative production*

<b>Creative production</b>	<b>Indicators of proficiency</b>	<b>Frequencies Percentages (N %)</b>
<b>Using the expressive means of art for the symbolic representation of ideas and meanings in an original and creative manner</b>	Utilization of the expressive means of painting to represent the concept taught	13 (72.2 %)
	Highlighting through drawing particular aspects of the concept taught	10 (55.6 %)
	References to the process of creating the drawing	6 (33.3 %)
	Representation through the expressive means of painting of the personal perception of the concept taught	11 (61.1 %)

(Gale and Bond, 2007, adapted)

***Integrative Contextualization***

Some students (22.2%) drew inspiration from other works of art, such as "The Little Prince" by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry while other students established connections between the concept of empathy and other art forms, such as popular songs, dances, and poems. In the pieces of artwork and especially in the reflection texts, some students (38.9%) applied the knowledge acquired about the concept taught to real-life professional situations. This transfer occurred spontaneously, initiated by the students themselves, without being requested by the assessment task.

*Every day in my class, I try to delve into the mindset of pupils who are grappling with various challenges. These may range from cognitive issues, such as misconceptions about mathematical concepts (e.g., fractions), to emotional difficulties, from the seemingly trivial (e.g., misplacing a favorite eraser), to the more complex ones.*

A considerable number of students (61.1%) established connections between the artwork they created and situations in their personal lives. Through the portrayal of empathy, they interpreted events in their lives, showcasing a disposition of critical self-awareness.

*This creation springs from a recent personal experience where I find myself dealing with the difficulties of standing by a grieving loved one. I believe that cultivating empathy for individuals*



*undergoing loss is a key skill. Through this empathetic understanding, we can ease the burden of their grief, offering support that allows them to somehow share the weight of their loss.*

*Perhaps empathy involves our capacity to step back from our own perspectives, enabling us to actively listen to our inner selves, in this way gaining a deeper understanding of our feelings and understanding them better.*

A notable percentage of students (38.9%) incorporated concerns from the broader social environment into their artistic creations, demonstrating in this way, an awareness of issues that concern human relations in general.

*In this work, I aim to convey the challenge of embracing empathy in our lives, as only a few people incorporate it into their interpersonal relationships. On the contrary, most people tend to distance themselves, either through conscious self-centeredness or unconsciously as they have not cultivated empathy within themselves.*

Proficiency indicators related to Integrative contextualization are listed in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Proficiency indicators to Integrative contextualization*

<b>Integrative contextualization</b>	<b>Indicators of proficiency</b>	<b>Frequencies Percentages (N %)</b>
	Drawing inspiration from other works of art within their culture	4 (22.2 %)
<b>Connection to the wider intellectual and social context, to students' personal and professional lives, reflection on contemporary issues</b>	Expression of reflections in the work of art which are drawn from one's own professional life	7 (38.9 %)
	Expression of personal experiences and concerns, evidence of critical self-awareness	11 (61.1 %)
	Awareness of contemporary problems, critical self-reflection	7 (38.9 %)

(Gale and Bond, 2007, adapted)

## **Discussion**

The study's findings indicated that generating artistic work in the context of non-artistic courses provides valuable data that can be utilized for student assessment purposes. Therefore, artistic activities can be employed as assessment tasks to capture the numerous learning outcomes generated throughout a learning process.

In the current study, the drawings yielded various data regarding the students' acquisition of knowledge and skills, as well as their level of understanding of the concepts taught in the course. Nearly all students incorporated into their artwork, with satisfactory accuracy and completeness, key points of the cognitive content on which they were assessed, as reported in the literature, and elaborated upon in the course (Davis, 1980; Rogers, 1975). Both in the drawings/paintings and reflection texts the students exhibited a very satisfactory level of understanding of the concept under consideration. They effectively defined the concept, presented both its cognitive and affective dimensions, and employed the terminology appropriately. Moreover, they successfully distinguished empathy from other related concepts, such as identification, compassion, and sympathy. By engaging in artistic creation, they had the opportunity to approach the subject from multiple perspectives, fostering a personal and meaningful understanding applicable to their lives.

In addition to clarifying the concept of empathy, students demonstrated advancement in several higher-level skills, such as critical thinking, perspective-taking, transfer of learning, creative thinking, decision-making, goal setting, communication, and contribution to team efforts (Haanstra & Schönau, 2007). Several students, in the process of creating and presenting their drawings, found it necessary to review the course material and revisit specific sections. It can be argued therefore, that the creation of artistic work as an assessment task, constitutes a learning experience, since it contributes to the further advancement of learning (Boughton, 2013). Furthermore, the artistic creation facilitated students' deeper understanding of the concept of empathy being taught. As evident in the artwork and reflection texts, the expressive medium of iconography assisted students in delving deeper into the concept of empathy, enabling them to express aspects that they might not have captured through conventional assessment methods. Therefore, even drawings that were considered weak as artistic creations gained importance as assessment tools, contributing further to the promotion of learning (Gale & Bond, 2007). In the reflection texts, a number of students, in addition to analyzing the composition, forms, and colors, took the initiative to describe the process of creating their drawings. By associating their artwork with its production process, they attributed personal meaning to the depicted content, thereby deepening their comprehension of the main concept. They promoted a level of self-understanding and self-awareness which is a prerequisite for both artistic creation and a contemporary form of alternative assessment, such as the creation of artistic work.

Some students drew inspiration from other artwork to create their own. Moreover, the majority associated their drawings with aspects of their professional life, and some with situations in their personal life. Indeed, during the creation of artwork and the writing of reflection texts they effectively demonstrated the transfer of learning from the educational context to real-life situations. Assessment through the creation of artistic work facilitated students in understanding and interpreting aspects of their personal lives, thereby contributing to their critical awareness as individuals (Patton, 2017). Art, particularly drawing, and painting appear to have the power to facilitate connections of learning achieved in the educational context to students' lives and to contribute to the development of life skills (Catterall, 2009; Haanstra & Schönau, 2007). Beyond the disposition of self-control, the research findings attest to the manifestation of critical reflection on matters concerning social relations. However, in the students' art projects and reflective statements, there was no evidence found of the transformation of students' dysfunctional behaviors and attitudes (Franklin & Chapple 2017). It is possible that the relatively short duration of a six-hour course, the nature of the content taught, or the teaching methodology employed did not allow sufficient opportunity for the realization of this goal.

Based on the study's findings, we can argue that the creation of paintings and drawings by students offers rich information and multifaceted feedback to the learner, the instructor, and the educational team, thereby enhancing learning outcomes according to defined educational goals. We could therefore claim that this assessment technique stimulates learning and fosters students' personal progress.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

One limitation of the present study was the small number of participants attending the postgraduate program, as well as the fact that only one subject was taught by only one lecturer. The outcomes of the study may not be indicative of results in the case of extended implementation involving more students, different subjects, and by different instructors. Another point worth noting is that the participants in the research group were able to express themselves without reservation as they had already attended the postgraduate program for two semesters and had developed a sense of familiarity both among themselves and with their instructor. This dynamic most probably facilitated an easier expression of their thoughts and feelings, promoting open communication within the group. Students' emotional safety was not compromised by disclosure of personal events in this study, but when this becomes apparent, the instructor needs to intervene to protect students from overexposure. Moreover, the concept of empathy was possibly an appropriate and engaging topic that inspired the students. It is also important to note that the data were collected in a linguistically, ethnically, and culturally homogeneous educational environment. Certainly, repeating the research in another educational setting, with a different learning subject and involving a larger number of students would further validate and enhance the credibility of the research findings. It would also be interesting to

explore correlations between the learning outcomes and the methodological approaches applied during the teaching process. Additionally, it could be worth the while to employ observation sheets for a more systematic investigation of the interaction that occurred during reflective discussion that took place in the plenary.

### Conclusion

Assessing students through drawing in a non-artistic course highlighted the benefits of integrating art into every stage of the learning process. Clearly, the assessment method under consideration is not proposed to replace established forms of assessment in higher education. Instead, it is considered that the creation of artistic work can serve as a valuable complement to the established methods of assessment, forming an integral part of a student's assessment portfolio. The current study focuses on the present data to which it was applied. Expanding the implementation of alternative assessment across various curriculum subjects will require a thorough reexamination of the technique, considering diverse groups, courses, and educational institutions.

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