



# enki

ARTE CULTURA SALUD



El impacto de la crisis en los niños  
UNICEF España

Carolina Cerezuela  
Realización personal: cuestión de prioridades



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## An integrated fine arts education awakens **THE SPIRIT** of life-long-learning

An integrated fine arts education awakens the spirit of life-long-learning. A desire to encourage students to become professional artists cannot be the chief motivation of an art educator. How can we make the most of what is learned by the rest of the students in art class who don't continue on to art college? In too many schools, the emphasis on creativity in the classroom wanes as the child gets older, and art education becomes continually isolated.

Art taught in isolation positions creativity as an exception to the rule, a divergence. What takes place in individual art classrooms may be wonderful, but it's insufficient if the benefits are taught in a vacuum, ignoring the complex interdisciplinary connections to other fields of study.

Incorporating arts into the school-wide curriculum can have a significantly longer-lasting effect on student growth and ultimately enriches whole communities. This effect depends on an educational vision rooted in the belief that all children can become whole learners and discover their own strengths through a variety of experiences. Teaching art is a vital component of this vision.

The pedagogical benefits of an art education include a range of cognitive, motor, language, and socio-emotional skill development. Holistic teaching methods maximize the retention of these capacities for all students.

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### Methodology: Process and Product

The relationship of process and product in curricular planning has been a controversial subject in art education. Some say that the ends justify the means, and others feel that a pure experience of self-expression is contaminated by the pressure to create a definitive product. However, the two are not mutually exclusive.

On the contrary, unifying the concepts of process and product embodies the definition of holism: the interdependence of the parts to the whole. Essentially, if the process is comprehensive, a strong product will result. Not every process must have a conclusive product – the result can remain in the realm of uncertainty,

an experiment which informs the next steps. On the other hand, bringing certain projects to fruition is necessary to fully demonstrate what one has learned.

How a teacher designs the process of creation is as important as how they guide the process of reflection during, and at the culmination of an activity. This

reflection, or critique, is the tie that binds the process to the product. A constructive critique fosters cognitive competencies like sensory memory engagement, discernment, and the capacity for goal-setting, all seeds of life-long learning.

## Teachable Moments in Plaster Casting

An art lesson using plaster relief casting is rich with options in an interdisciplinary curriculum and demonstrates the power of sensory memory. The storehouse of sensory experiences in the student's mind is activated while making connections to new experiences, stimulating curiosity.

Imagine a unit about archeology that includes plaster casting as an activity. While making their own fossil, students are exposed to design principles in a historical and scientific context. The retention of links to math, science, history, and aesthetics is deepened by tactile and visual memory awakened during the technical process. Some students will remember the numerical ratio of water to dry plaster, and others will remember that the adequate amount of powder added to the bucket of water looks like an island. Most students will remember the big mess made when the plaster overflowed from the mixing bucket, or when it began to harden too fast.

The sensory memory preserves the lessons about water displacement and how heat accelerates a change of the physical state of the compound.

The plaster casting project is a prime example of teaching children to live with uncertainty while learning. After the arduous process of preparing the mold and casting the plaster, the relief panel may still break. Accepting the discomfort of disappointments in the process gets easier over time. Eventually students look forward to seeing the surprises that emerge, and to testing out their creative problem-solving skills.

The ability to reserve judgement about a presumed outcome is the mark of an open-minded thinker. Learning by doing has lasting educational benefits, but thinking and talking about what has been done takes the process further.



## The Critique: Reflection and Discernment

The creative process must also incorporate an on-going reflection of the activity as it relates to purpose, the methods, materials, and unexpected results. The critique is the bridge to the next phase of action in the learning continuum. Persistent what, how, and why questions allow the student to identify, describe and hypothesize. A constructive review adheres to objective terminology that removes value-judgement from observing one's own work and that of others.

If a personal or emotional response enters into the dialogue, it's more fruitful to talk about why a certain technical process was frustrating, or how exciting it felt to meet the criteria or to discover something surprising.

Reflection on the creative process and its outcomes teaches discernment at an early age. The ability to describe their perceptions, give advice, and make decisions is fundamental to the emotional and intellectual maturation of the child. While articulating informed opinions about their own work and that of their classmates, children also develop competency in the areas of mutual respect, self confidence, and teamwork.

Moments of closure and reflection create fallow ground for new lessons. After a critique is the perfect time to refine projects and prepare an exhibition or demonstration of the work done by the class. Opportunities for the child to share their results with family and community perpetuate the learning dynamic as they teach others about what they learned. Art education is part of the timeless wisdom of life-long learning. In conjunction with a holistic education, it cultivates the inherent ability of each person to explore and maximize their human potential.

We need more teachers in all specialties who know the merits of experiential learning. Yet, we don't need to channel children in any one direction to fill a perceived void. Given the opportunity of a creative, holistic education, they will find a direction themselves. Once again, if the process is comprehensive, a strong product will result. Children who become life-long learners exploring a particular field of interest will surely return the gift of knowledge in a variety of ways as adults, refining the process as they go.

