



Central practical examinations in the visual arts in lower vocational education – an example from 2015

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The central practical exam (CPE) for lower vocational education (VMBO) (age ± 16 years) is part of the central final examinations during which students have to take nationwide exams in Dutch, English and one of the arts (dance, drama, music, visual arts), and a minimum of four other subjects. Students can choose one of the visual arts (if offered by the school): audio-visual art, drawing, handicraft, or textile art. The visual arts exams consist of two parts, a practical (the CPE) and a written exam. The practical one starts in January and ends by the end of April. The written exam is taken in May and takes 2 hours to complete. For the CPE students have 720 minutes available, divided in working lesson hours over a period of six weeks.

The CPE is based on a theme. In 2015 the theme was: 'It can be different!' ('Het kan anders!'). The theme of CPE is introduced in January to the students by means of a magazine (8 pages in colour) with an introductory text, a few dozens of words or concepts that can be related to the central theme (like 'change', 'surprise', 'variety', 'criticism', 'improvement', etc..), and visual examples of some 20 visual art works and products. One artwork – often by a Dutch contemporary artist - is introduced in more detail, with sketches and explanatory comments by the artist. The assignment paper itself consists of 16 pages with detailed instructions and white space where students can fill in their explanation for each step or choice. The work is assessed according to an assessment scheme that is known to the student beforehand.

The VMBO exam is a relevant example for competency-based assignments, as it fosters a process-oriented approach to developing and making a product, and in this way addresses sub-competencies like *analyzing, drafting, creating, using, presenting*, among others. It is also closely connected to a situation (theme) students have to *analyse, interpret* and *research*. In this way students are challenged to combine their knowledge, skills and attitudes to arrive at a personal interpretation of the given situation. At the level of final examinations it is even possible, in the Dutch context, to use the same theme for the selection of art works to be analysed and discussed in central written exam.

The following text is a condensed version of the assignment paper. This text is identical for each of the four visual art subjects.¹

The example VMBO central practical exam from 2016

“This exam consists of the parts A, B, C, D, E and F. You have to execute all parts.

Theme: It can be different!

¹ For a more detailed example the reader is referred to Schönau (2013).



Assignment: Design and create a piece of work in which you visualize a change in meaning or function of an object, situation, place or notion. Make use of the information and input given in the magazine.

Attention! In this exam you have to work in a process-oriented way.

Include all your (intermediary) products and give them a number referring to phase and order. The maximum score for this exam is 50 points. The maximum score for each phase is:

Part A: Orientation: 4 points;

Part B: Artistic research: 9 points;

Part C: Decision on the design: 2 points;

Part D: Execution of your piece of work: 25 points;

Part E: Analysis of your own work and of one of your fellow students: 7 points;

Part F: Presentation: 3 points.²

Part A:

On this part you will be assessed to what degree you orientated yourself as broadly as possible with regard to the theme. Be inspired by the magazine and the examples below. Which object, situation, place or notion will you focus on? Choose at least two concepts from the following list: a portrait of ..., crockery, chair, outfit, my life, my image, friendship, loss, park, alley, toilet, roundabout, power, environment, threat, freedom, or add one of your own choice. Indicate why you have chosen these concepts.

Choose at least two of the following reasons or formulate your own reason why you have chosen these concepts and then relate your reasons to one another:

I choose these concept because I wish to comment it, improve it, make it more sustainable, update it, criticise it, make it more lively, put it to discussion, explain it, ridicule it, simplify if, soften it, safeguard it.

Make a (digital) mood board. This mood board has to demonstrate that you have orientated yourself on the objects, situations, places or notions that you would like to change and the reasons for this change.

Part B: Artistic research:

On this part you will be assessed to what degree you have made a deep and coherent artistic research. Investigate some of the possibilities from part A more in-depth. Make sketches or studies, do small experiments, save them and give them a serial number. You have to show what you have investigated and what results have come forward.

² The cut-off score to pass the exam is 31 points (our of 50 points).



Do this artistic (visual) research by means of the following questions:

- What objects, situations, places or notions are you going to investigate?
- Why do you want to change the meaning or function of these objects, situations, places or notions?
- What aspects of the representation do you want to investigate because of their importance to visualise the change? Explain why you want to investigate these aspects in particular to change the meaning or function.
- What aspects of the artistic composition (like format, colour, order, form, texture, line, decoration, material, technique) are you going to investigate to visualize the change? Explain why you want to investigate these aspects in particular. Include the meaning or function of the objects, situations, places or notions you want to change.

Part C: Decision on the design: On this part you are assessed to what degree you have processed the results of your research at point B into your final design. In part B you have researched a series of possibilities. Now decide what sketches, studies and/or experiments will be the final starting point. Describe what aspects of your research you are going to use, and explain why. Indicate what aspects of the representation and aspects of the composition you are going to change. Give your piece of work a preliminary and appropriate title.

Part D: Execution of the work:

On this part you will be assessed on the extent to which you have succeeded in visualizing the theme 'change'.

Make your piece of work and give it a permanent title. When you have made changes in your work with regard to the design as decided upon in part C, write down what changes you have made with regard to representation and/or visualization and what reasons you had to do so.

Part E: Analysing, evaluating and assessing:

On this part you will be assessed on the way you have analysed, evaluated and assessed your own work and working process and the work of another fellow final examination candidate. Analyse, evaluate and assess your own work by completing the following questions.

Title of my work:

I made a drawing/ painting / assemblage / sculpture / photo / (animation)film / tapestry/
something else: ...

I have visualised a change in meaning or function of a ..., because.... To achieve this I changed the following aspects regarding the representation, because... and the following aspects of the visualisation ... , because....

What aspects of your final work make you enthusiastic and what aspects make you less enthusiastic?



Do you think you have been successful in visualizing your starting point?

What aspects of your working process make you enthusiastic and what aspects make you less enthusiastic?

Give your judgment by encircling the qualification that best fits your final work and your working process:

Final work: good - sufficient - indifferent - insufficient - bad

Working process: good - sufficient - indifferent - insufficient - bad

Part F: Presentation:

On this part you are assessed whether your work is shown to its full advantage in your presentation, what starting points you have used, and to what extent your presentation gives insight into your working process.”

Reference:

Schönau, D.W. (2013) Developmental self-assessment in art education. In Kárpáti, A and Emil Gaul: *From Child Art to Visual Language of Youth. New Models and Tools for Assessment of Learning and Creation in Art Education* (pp. 143-174). Bristol/Chicago: Intellect.