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ABSTRACT

Teaching complex art, thinking and making, processes require methods beyond linear step-by-step instruction, student relevant methodologies and strategies consistent with authentic studio practices. Professors must be able to deconstruct their own decision-making processes and practices, that might have become somewhat spontaneous through experience, and then use this insight to anticipate how less experienced artists might respond when presented with a similar creative challenge. This paper will explore Higher Education Art teaching strategies departing from the author's own experiences of more than two decades teaching art practices and artistic research in Higher Education in Portugal. By exploring the concept of creativity (Boden), contextualized through the writing of Gert Biesta and some of the artistic strategies developed to promote disruption and novelty in Higher Education such as: Bauhaus Educational Strategies, Beuys Pedagogical Conception of Art, Ascott Ground course for Art, Schmidt and Eno Oblique Strategies Cards or Paul Thek's Teaching Notes on 4-Dimensional Design, the authors concur in considering interdisciplinary art pedagogy as a dialogical extension of their own art practices. The authors conclude that the studio-based teaching provides a hospitable setting for a practical pedagogy in/through art.

Keywords: *art, creativity, pedagogy, dialogue, higher education*

Introduction

From Art Classroom to Art Studio to Art Classroom

The authors are both artists and art teachers and believe that it is important to find strategies that allow them to maintain creativity and enthusiasm through making possible (whether in the art studio or in the art teaching studio). Its teaching philosophy is based on artistic practice. This point of view is not a claim of their superpowers in maintaining a dual career, but of a collaborative practice that integrates the artistic experience in the classroom and the experience of learning together with our students in the art studio. Scholars such as Daichendt, 2009 or Hickman, 2005, have proposed a similar approach with “arts education that celebrates artistic practices and artistic ways of thinking in the classroom” (Daichendt, 2009). Examples and terminology go back a long way and were reinforced by the influential Walter Gropius and students at the Bauhaus school who wrote (Elkins, 2001) on how the Bauhaus bridged the divide between art and craft and art and industry. The notion of teacher/artist implies compiling studio practices, problems and discussions from the art world to enhance learning.

This compiling practice involves constantly adapting to context and applying a variety of methods in the classroom that mirror the diversity of artistic approaches in the art world and is primarily about promoting thinking as an artist. As visual artists and teachers, the authors feel that they take ownership of their own artistic skills and value the connections between the studio and the classroom by creating a classroom experience that employs individual artistic interests – sometimes making the classroom itself a creative challenge for the teacher. This posture brings the authors closer together between two fields, trying to exercise, as Daichend (2009) proposes, the middle ground where the more conventional understandings of education and art merge. “In this way, contemporary art educators who subscribe to this orientation can constantly reinvent what they do and how they do it in the classroom.” (2009, 37) Nevertheless, sustaining artistic practice, fulfilling the requirements and responsibilities associated with teaching with current bureaucratic and research requirements is not without difficulties. To overcome this problem, the authors support themselves by collaborating in artistic practice and in the design of pedagogical logics and strategies that allow us to look at teaching as a unique and dialogic opportunity that provides aesthetic social interactions with students as a stimulus to continue with the individual creative practice. This is exactly the approach of the authors, who enter their classrooms (BA and MA Fine Arts) with the challenge of experiencing an artistic process throughout the classes, each semester a new challenge, new students, therefore new exercises and methodologies, only a scaffold is maintained and even permeable and a way to become more than a fixed protocol.

Since the 1960s, art has taken on a wide range of forms and mediums as diverse as the imagination. Where it was once marginal and transgressive for artists to work across a spectrum of media, it is now common practice. Despite the openness of contemporary artistic practice, art teaching in many universities remains based on disciplines, media and technologies. This article intends to

reflect on the way in which the studio practice approach to the study of the visual arts strives to incorporate the diversity and complexity of contemporary art, while preserving a sense of collective purpose,

The authors both studied at the School of Fine Arts in the Department of Sculpture (in the 1990s, pre-Bologna, five years in sculpture with a very narrow understanding of the scope and breadth of the crafts and mediums that contemporary sculpture could include). After that they went to the UK to do practice-based MAs and were happily confronted with a much broader understanding of Fine Arts without borders with all means and crafts available. Not only did curiosity about materials other than traditional sculptural means grow, but brains expanded in the ability to interrelate artistic thinking through making, with the academic and critical discourse of art with its ethical, social and political dimensions.

As they grew up in art and as people, they gained the opportunity to be in a different environment, setting and learning structure. It was a moment of fracture that, like an epiphany, contributed to the teaching philosophy that has been developing. They concluded that maintaining a hermetic approach to the medium does not sufficiently prepare students for the reality of artistic making in the 21st century. In fact, by pretending that there is a select range of fundamental techniques for the artist's craft, discipline-based teaching can often seem more engaged with the notion of preservation of skills than with the effective promotion of artistic making, in its complexity. Contextualized through the writing of Gert Biesta (2017), the authors as teachers/artists suggest that the motto 'let art teach' taken from examples such as Joseph Beuys, proposes a position for teachers/students that focuses on developing a desire motivated by curiosity, from a dialogic relationship with/in the world through a broader educational and existential experience. If the qualification proposed by Biesta (2017) is an important part of carrying out the training of art students, it cannot only provide the foundations for proficient art professionals. As the authors move forward with their studio practices and teaching practices, we feel the need to synthesize the professional reality of contemporary art practice into our approach to teaching and learning.

Although the authors propose that the art studio method is the one that has provided evidence on the successful outcome on the balance between artist/teacher and the student/artist they acknowledge the resistance and struggle found in creating classes that became sites of meaningful critical engagement, participation, playfulness and promotion of social change.

The paper/presentation invites a dialogue and a reflective discussion of several experiments from the authors' ongoing practice of art teaching research, which bring together an embodied knowledge of assignments and exercises to uncover how art praxis may be valued as an inactive physical, cognitive, and perceptual process of poesis and empowered cognition, also highlighting the difficulties in resonating with each class/institution developing to unfold place-time complexities of practice.

Literature Review

On Creativity

Margaret Boden is a cognitive scientist who has written extensively on the nature of creativity. According to Boden (cited in Lopes & Bastos, 2006), creativity involves the generation of novel and valuable ideas, artifacts, or solutions that are not simply the result of logical or routine processes. Since 1990 in her book "The Creative Mind" Margaret Boden notes the existence of three types of creativity: combinational; exploratory; transformative creativity. The main concern of Margaret Boden is to understand the origins and formation of creative ideas, within the context of discovery. The "idea" the author refers to could be taken as a structure to satisfy a style of thought or a solution for that style. According to her the solution and the style are associated with the conceptual space (system generator - genesis/training - which maintains a given area and defines a certain set of possibilities) - thus, the greater the knowledge about the conceptual space, the greater the chances of obtaining better creative solutions.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996), also points to creativity as the result of the interaction of a system composed of three elements: a culture (which contains symbolic rules); a person (which brings new features within the symbolic field); a panel of experts (who recognize and validate the innovation)

What is the Creative Process?

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica¹ creativity is "the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new, whether a new solution to the problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form." According to this definition we may assume that the creator is the one that creates (makes) or has created; and create is to give existence. Nevertheless, the concept of creativity raises several controversial issues (Boden 1996). How may creativity be understood? A simple idea, when it is first (original), is creative? If not, what is the difference? The creative process is the same in the arts and sciences, or originality of these forms are fundamentally different? Creativity can be measured? Can we compare two original ideas to show that one is more creative than other? On the assumption that creativity can be recognized, you can explain how this happens?

In Boden's view (1996) creativity may be organized as three different types. Combinational creativity which involves combining existing ideas or concepts in new and innovative ways. This type of creativity is often associated with humour and wit and involves making unexpected connections between seemingly unrelated things. Examples include poetry, and analogy, where two or more related ideas in innovative ways share a coherent conceptual structure. Exploratory creativity involves the exploration of new ideas or domains. This type of creativity is characterized by a willingness to take risks and to push beyond established boundaries. This often results in structures, or "ideas" that are not only new but unexpected and recognized as to meet the assumptions of the style of thought to

¹Encyclopedia Britannica (on.line - <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/142249/creativity>)

which they relate. The third type is Transformational creativity involves transforming existing ideas or concepts into something new and different. This type of creativity involves changing the way that we think about and approach a particular problem or domain. Boden argues that creativity is not limited to a particular domain or discipline, and that it can be found in a wide range of contexts, from the arts to the sciences to everyday life. She also emphasizes the importance of social and cultural factors in shaping creativity and argues that creativity is often a collaborative and socially situated process.

Overall, Boden's concept of creativity highlights the importance of novelty, value, and originality in creative thinking and problem-solving, and emphasizes the importance of exploring new domains and taking risks in order to foster creativity. Lopes and Bastos (2006) assert that as visual artists (we) feel reflected in Boden's (1991) approach is in her focus on the generation of creative ideas, not on validation. She emphasizes the context of discovery, not the evaluation. While admitting that the criterion of validation can be part of the creative process, the first focus is how the ideas are in people's minds.

The distinction between a change of view and a transformation is to some extent a matter of tentativeness, but the better defined the space, the clearer the distinction can be manifested. As artists, the authors claim (Lopes and Bastos 2006) to have inherited a style of thinking to accept our culture, but work to find the limits and use the full potential of our fields. Sometimes the known conceptual space is transformed by removing or adding one or more dimensions. These transformations make it possible to generate ideas that were previously unattainable about that space. The surprise that accompanies such previously impossible ideas is much greater than the surprise caused by mere improbability, however unexpected. If the changes are extreme, the relationship between old and new space will not be immediately apparent. In these cases, new structures will be unintelligible and likely to be rejected.

About the possibility of art generating art and the idea of creativity Joseph Beuys (1971) states: "Creativity is a question of the possibility of thinking [...] it is also a question of level of the creativity of feelings". (Beuys, 1971)

Beuys goes on to say that this reinforces the idea that emotional investment is essential in the creative process. When very busy, it's easy to underestimate and ignore it. Without the ability to draw on one's emotions, one's ability to truly connect with one's "thought power" (Beuys, 1971) and imagination becomes limited.

On an Exeter University Study on Creativity cited on Naiman (2023), they conclude that excellence is determined by opportunities, encouragement, training, motivation, and most of all, practice. Thus, if creativity is known for being excellent when given opportunities, encouragement, training, motivation, and practice, then the teaching pedagogy in the arts should precisely be promoting those in order to have younger artists excel at creativity.

On Pedagogy

Gert Biesta's theory (2017) - Biesta is a Dutch educational theorist who has written extensively on the role of arts education in contemporary society - on art teaching emphasizes the importance of three fundamental dimensions: qualification; socialization; subjectivation, and all three also promotes the vision of art (reflected) as a way of learning about art. Qualification refers to the acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary for artistic practice. According to Biesta, qualification is an important dimension of art teaching, but it should not be the only focus of art teaching. Socialization refers to the process by which individuals become members of a given community or culture. Biesta argues that arts education plays an important role in socialization, helping students develop a sense of identity and belonging. Subjectivation refers to the process by which individuals become aware of their own subjectivity and develop their own perspectives and ways of seeing the world. Biesta argues that arts education should prioritize subjectivation, helping students develop their own creative voice and explore their own unique perspectives on the world. Biesta's theory (2017) emphasizes the importance of artistic education as a means of fostering creativity, critical thinking, and individuality. He argues that arts education should not be reduced to acquiring technical skills but should focus on helping students develop a sense of agency and become active participants in the cultural and social life of their communities.

This may be clear in concept, but applying this agency in the field of Higher Education was not easy for us and we were able to perceive the limitations of an almost mechanistic paradigm, adopted by a large part of the theory and practice of Arts Education, to describe and explain the action and for its pedagogical application.

Methodology/Materials and Methods

Looking for encouraging methodologies and methods to apply to their art teaching opportunities, the authors read about: Bauhaus educational strategies; Beuys's "pedagogical conception of art"; Ascot's *Groundcourse for Art*; Schmidt and Eno *Oblique Strategy Cards*; Paul Thek's *Teaching Notes on Four-Dimensional Design*. Considering that all were innovative approaches to art/education, the first are understood as pedagogical philosophies that lasted as organizers of courses and schools and the last two are taken as didactic methods that derive from the first ones, the authors briefly clarify the perception of each one.

The Bauhaus (art school founded in 1919 in Germany) was known for its interdisciplinary approach to art education. The school's curriculum emphasized the integration of art and design with industry and technology and encouraged students to explore connections between various art forms. The Bauhaus also stressed the importance of practical skills, and students were required to complete internships in the school's workshops. They conceived different thematic exercises for each year and individual and collective work methodologies that students like Klee or Kandinsky describe in their books. German performance artist, art theorist,

and artist teacher Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) believed in the art pedagogy of let art teach art. Believing that everyone is an artist and that art has the potential to transform society, Beuys proposed the concept of “social sculpture”, a human activity that could be a work of art, with the artist (social sculptor) using action, ideas, language, concepts, and objects to change society. Beuys' *pedagogical conception of art* was a theory that emphasized the idea that art is not just a product or object, but a process involving spectator participation. Beuys believed that art should be used as a tool for social and political change and that everyone should have access to art education.

“The teacher-student relationship must be changed, eliminating the idea that the teacher has the knowledge and the student must sit back and simply listen. It should not be assumed that the student is less capable than the teacher. Therefore, the teaching-learning relationship has to be totally open, and constantly reversible.” (Beuys, 1972; cited in Durini, 1997, p.46)

According to Frieze Magazine (2006), in the mid-1950s Roy Ascott studied with Victor Pasmore and Richard Hamilton on the interdisciplinary 'general course in art and design' in Newcastle upon Tyne, which was based on the synthetic approach of the 'course basics' of the Bauhaus. After a brief tenure as a studio demonstrator in Newcastle, in 1961 Ascott was appointed head of basic studies at Ealing, which he called the *Groundcourse* in reference to the principle of learn from scratch.

Hamilton believed in eradicating preconceived ideas, where *art is not something you think, but something you feel*. However, what is this thought process when its pedagogical ethos was not based on discussing or showing pictures but developing the process of helping students to think. Hamilton summarized, “The first objective of our course is to clean the slate. Removing prejudices. People come to art school with ready-made ideas of what art is. We have to do some erasing. So we have to build a new sense of values. We try to convey the idea that any activity must be the result of thinking [...] What we do is introduce problems that can be solved intellectually.” (Hamilton, quoted in The Quietus, 2023)

Roy Ascott's *Groundcourse for Art* was a foundation course for art students that emphasized experimentation and exploration. The course is designed to encourage students to think creatively and develop their own unique approaches to art. These ideas about information, interactive exchange, feedback, participation and systemic relationships would form the basis of his pedagogical practice and provide a model for the relationships between artist, audience and environment and their positions within a wider social system. Ascott's artistic pedagogy was focused on discovering an artist's place in the world and how that manifested itself, with Eno confirming, "part of the deal was that you were what you believed in". In this course, cybernetic theories about systemic relations, communication, interactivity, participation and feedback were methodically used in an artistic academic environment. Ascott saw his cybernetic art pedagogy as an extension of his artistic practice, finding a way for each context (classroom and studio) to feed back into the other. The curriculum at Ealing – as at Ipswich Art School, where he later repeated the *Groundcourse* – was structured around consciousness-expanding challenges. Games, quizzes and exercises are designed to break down creative

preconceptions and stagnant notions of what art can mean, be or enhance. *Groundcourse* participants were encouraged to explore deep personal understanding and immense artistic flexibility. In the first year, exercises included perception problems such as *describing the world from the perspective of a sponge*, classes in light manipulation, in which they had to *control a limited environment with lights, colored filters, lenses and screens* or challenges such as *drawing the room in reverse perspective*. In the second year, the students themselves had to create the problems themselves, among other things, working in groups to form self-regulating systems and representing a new personality opposed to their own for ten weeks, designing 'calibrators' and 'mind maps' to read out their responses to situations. Ascott's artistic pedagogy was focused on discovering an artist's place in the world and how that manifested itself, with Eno, a student of the *Groundcourse* confirming, "part of the deal was that you were what you believed in".

On the case of short-term strategies, didactics and exercises the authors looked at Schmidt and Eno's *Oblique Strategies cards* were a set of cards that provided artists with prompts and suggestions for overcoming creative blocks and developing new ideas. The cards encouraged artists to think outside the box and to approach their work from new and unexpected angles. Paul Thek's *Teaching Notes on 4-Dimensional Design* was a series of notes and essays that outlined Thek's approach to teaching art. Thek emphasized the importance of experimentation and encouraged his students to work collaboratively and to explore new mediums and techniques.

All the above pedagogies and strategies were dedicated to promoting: creative thinking; lateral thinking; divergent thinking, and, by all that, providing role models and fostering creativity. While some of the more extreme behavioural experiments may now seem somewhat questionable, viewing them in relation to today's more static models of arts education, one cannot help but recognize them as moments when the art school became a place of critical engagement among practicing artists, and students who are active in experimenting with new methodologies and models of practice, highlighting participation, the importance of play as an artistic strategy, the potential of art and education in relation to society and the possibility of change.

Results

Our Strategies

The authors explore strategies derived from the previous ones to clear the prejudice of what art can be in students who reach Artistic Higher Education, and throughout their undergraduate and master's degrees, they provoke engagement, relevance and agency in their students, providing a dialogical relationship and, as Ascott's method, a translation of images, texts, strategies, techniques and meanings between the studio classroom and the art studio.

Lopes usually teaches the first and third year of the BA course and Bastos the first and second year of the MA, therefore, the collaborative process between the authors beyond the art studio provides a sense of continuity that results as a matrix to give meaning to the base experience of his teaching philosophy. As stated by Lopes and Bastos (2016) A creative process is an intensive process, which requires a high degree of self-knowledge and the capacity for critical reflection. However, in our experience, the collaborative creative process is equally, if not more, intensive and, also, requires a high degree of self-awareness and capacity for critical reflection, simply the creative process is located within the intersubjective relationships created between individual collaborators, and not within of an individual.

1st year BA strategies are varied and all focused-on *Deconstruction* - demystifying preconceptions, promoting uncertainties and expanded possibilities for new beginnings. The author also proposes team building exercises to support students in acquiring a network for sharing uncertainty, mastering techniques and promoting a safe environment for critical thinking and discovery.

Figure 1. *Expanding Possibilities*



This is supposed to support the development of creativity and help each student acquire independent learning skills. This approach requires students to be engaged, to be able to thrive on constructive criticism exchanged between faculty and students, and to participate in critical thinking about each other's work and that of others. Different subjects (courses) provide approaches to different mediums and students must experiment many and diverse and conjugate the acquired crafts in their own responses to cross-cutting exercises. The exercises are varied and depend on the number and background of the students. The relevance for the authors is the way of framing the exercise.

“Even the act of peeling a potato can be an artistic act if done consciously.”
(Beuys on Madera, 2021)

3rd year BA strategies imply the *Wrapping Up* a cycle, promoting autonomy for those who are able to gain a sustainable practice with tutoring and guidance from the University faculty. Students should propose their own exercises and mediums. Professors and visiting artists offer tutorial support and guidance to contribute to a self-learning process of experimenting and failing. Failing and error seems to be an overlooked concept in the institutional academic culture. The authors believe that the error is a part of learning that should be promoted at school, thus the paramount value for the authors of strategies and exercises such the open-ended propositions of the Schmidt and Eno's "*Oblique Strategies cards*", as for example, “Remove specifics and convert to ambiguities.” Or the wide scope of Paul Thek's personal and philosophical questions in *Teaching Notes on 4-Dimensional Design*, as for example, “How much time should you work on a class project? How much time should you think about it? Discuss it?”

Figure 2. *Students Exercises and Mediums*



1st year MA – *Self and Commitment* - during the program, students are asked to continually commit to what contemporary artistic creation means and what positions they assume as drivers of artistic practices in the complex context of art and to recognize their importance in social processes and broader cultures. As the MA is comprehensive and welcomes artists with paths and practices beyond the visual arts, one of the premises for discussion is how a student's practice, in its themes and presentation, can be understood in different social, artistic, and conceptual contexts. The aim is to create engaged students with agency willing to contribute to societal change.

Figure 3. *Emphasis is on Student-Centred Learning in Studio-Class Room*



The emphasis is on student-centred learning, particularly in seminars and personal tutorials based on their artistic projects, however, as backgrounds and artistic maturity are varied, the first semester proposes the resolution of three identity-based exercises to explore the main concerns and ideas of each student and their mutual inter-development. The programs of the studio's complementary curricular units contribute to the understanding of concerns related to contemporary art in broader contexts.

Strategies for the first semester are based on three progressive exercises on the idea of becoming that function as a meta-analysis metaphor for the solidification of each artist's autonomy. The idea of identity is seen (Beijaard et al., 2004) as a relational process of being and becoming, and not as a fixed thing. The exercises have a conceptual matrix that focuses on the self; the other; and the space. The first 'self' exercise is answered within the studio space (classroom); the second exercise 'other' is answered in a place of residence that works as an extension of the classroom space, but in a rural context and with a time of critical immersion of the group, and the exercise of 'space' is answered in an exhibition context (Museum of Aveiro, Santa Joana Princesa).

Residency as a Change of Scenery for Slowing Down to Reflect

Going out as a group for about a week to a residence space in a rural context has allowed a space for collective dialogue that accompanies the assembly or preparation of the presentation of each student's work and seems (according to the feedback of the students themselves and the professors) a gain of space/time to reorganize thinking and consider how artifacts/projects and the act of creating them create space for reflection, which in turn informs subsequent practice. Reflection, following the assumptions created by Hamilton, Beuys and Ascott, is part of creation and a fundamental part of learning, as reflection on experience consolidates it. As Sullivan (2004, p.57) proposes, reflexivity “recognizes the

positive impact of experience as a necessary agency to help frame responses and shape actions”.

Figure 4. *Discussion with Residency Program Manager (Luís Costa BINAURAL)*



If, on the one hand, the installation and presentation of projects outside the studio space, that is, the daily life where it was initially conceived, contributes to the ability to adapt and grow the works, the sharing of a group daily life allows for individual interaction, within of a social environment, which is used to inform values, processes and which creates impact. This change of setting and collaborative process throughout the week strengthens trust (not just by sharing works practices and exhibition but by sharing meals, rooms etc) between the students and sparks the imagination and mindsets once, “The promise of change that comes from imagination takes shape in the things we create, through what we make and experience, or from what we come to see and know through the experience of someone else.” (Sullivan, 2004, p.121)

Figure 5. *Working Outside in a Rural Environment*



A collective body created by this method/strategy of the residency and its resulting strengthened support network can have positive benefits, and the authors believe that this social space/time is essential to practice, enabling artists to evaluate their own work and build upon the work and input of others.

On the same note of peer evaluation and assessment and in preparation for the autonomous art *praxis* the third exercise promotes the opportunity to exhibit at a local museum, providing a new challenge of dealing with showing the work in an institutionalized art space in a more professional way that the one in a classroom or a rural setting provide.

2nd year MA - *Project Based Practice* - the strategy is devoted to tutorial support towards the development of a project which, according to the 1st year, has been discovered by the student bringing light to a particular field of interest as a base for researching as an artist.

Figure 6. *Final Examination Project-Based*



Conclusions

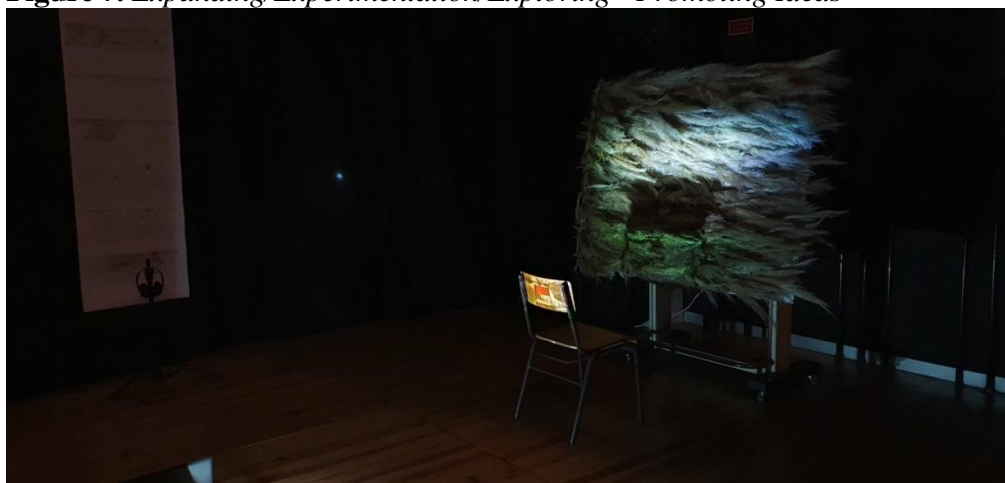
The authors conclude that, despite the methods and methodology used in classrooms, the general objective of art schools should be to promote creativity and flexible people with social skills to collaborate, promote dialogic relationships and learn from experience.

As mentioned by Lopes and Bastos (2016) “(...) the function of the art school is to promote art as a field of possibilities, free exploration and unrestricted experimentation by the established methodology. Inter and transdisciplinary knowledge, including reception theories, does not replace lived experience, artistic intuition and free experimentation, but adds to them.”

As artists, the authors feel capable of embracing inconsistency, expanding the need for experimentation, exploring materials and promoting ideas, and also of not retreating in the face of possible failure. As artists/teachers, we believe that we give more than doctrines, clear examples and meaning to the learning opportunity through practical investigation and experimentation, which inevitably includes impossible questions such as those shown by the strategies presented by the mentioned authors, mistakes, surprises and reassessments. This learning process in the atelier requires a high commitment and openness to accept failure, the incomprehensible, which is very rich when forming a close relationship with peers in practice and mentors in the classroom.

“After all, to try to understand, to acquire skills or, more concretely, to learn [...] is never a matter of just wanting something but is always about encountering realities to finding one’s way to come into a relationship with them” (Biesta, 2021)

Figure 7. *Expanding/Experimentation/Exploring - Promoting Ideas*



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