Arts, Creativity and Social Intervention in the School Environment. Connections and Critical Refections

Helena Neves Almeida[1*] and Sarah Karenine P. R. Proença[2]

[1]*Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Coimbra, Portugal.*
[2]*Social Intervention, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (FPCE and FE), University of Coimbra, Portugal.*

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Short Research Article

ABSTRACT

The article reflects on the importance of valuing the informal and formal knowledge (school), and focuses on an education model that respects and encourages the participation and empowers the knowledge brought by the student. In collective work, the exercise of understanding the discipline of arts, as a sponsor of production and reflection, can stimulate the development of creative and critical people. This reflection attempts to make a connection between the increase in the number of social projects in arts and culture, the social emergence of the creation of policies that will combat social inequality and the real role of art in enhancing creativity.

_____

*Corresponding author: E-mail: helena.almeida@fpce.uc.pt;

1. INTRODUCTION

"(...) There are multiple realities that exist in the form of social and located experientially mental constructs, inspired by a subjectivist epistemology that values the role of the researcher in building knowledge, justifying why the adoption of a methodological framework is incompatible with the proposals of positivism and new versions of post-positivism." [1,2].

The critical approach doesn't propose the stimulus to ideological questions but assumes that they will arise from the reading. In this article we seek to reflect on how the "arts and culture", valued at school, can support learning processes and creativity. The article is divided into three topics that "at times" seem to have different approaches, but that converge at similar points, namely*: I. The importance of valuing formal and common knowledge.* In this topic, we weave considerations about the importance of enhancing a learning process that respects and encourages the connections of ideas and values the knowledge brought by the student. *II. The teaching of art and their use as connections and critical tools.* In this item we exercise to understand how the arts can act to stimulate connections, valuing the knowledge of the student and how the production and reflection in the arts can stimulate the construction of creative and critical people*. III. Arts and Social Intervention: the rhetoric of creativity.* Here we weave considerations regarding the use and effectiveness of arts and culture in the justification of public policies, as well as the growing use of social intervention in artistic and cultural projects and the call for creativity in times of economic crisis.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF VALUING FORMAL AND COMMON KNOWLEDGE

Behavior is directly related to the social environment in which they live, as well as their expectations derived from family, social and political contexts. There is a wide range of factors involved in the decisions, actions and ways to express the contemporary world. In this context, school becomes an important point of convergence of interests that pulse on a daily basis, as part of a complex puzzle of the same board of social life. However, students bring with them knowledge socially acquired and rarely valued. The school does not always seems to be able to associate the knowledge or formal curriculum and common knowledge [3][1]. José Machado Pais points out that "For many young people school world seems random: the grades are random, diplomas idem, the future the same, despite the family support. The real world of "real life" is full of uncertainties [4].

The young people, especially in the suburbs, live in a world full of uncertainty, often without adequate family support and without understanding the connections between school and "real" life.

The teaching-learning processes are constant targets of new methodologies that are proposed by several education professionals. Most of these teaching methods aims to minimize the existing gap between what the teacher "teaches" and what the student "learns". To learn, we must recognize, decode and take ownership of the information, connecting this new knowledge to as many possible life knowledge: the concept of knowledge complements the information with relevant value and definite purpose [5]. In other words, we only know that the information has a relevant value after its contact with existing knowledge and when we can give it a useful meaning and define its purpose.

The appreciation of the knowledge acquired is very important in the teaching-learning process and, according to the researcher and educator Paulo Freire, these values must be considered by the school in the construction of collective projects. It is part of school's responsibility "(...) the duty not only of respecting the knowledge that students, especially the popular classes, already have - knowledge socially constructed in community practice - but also, as i have been suggesting for over thirty years, discussing with students the reason for some of this knowledge regarding the teaching of content [6].

Freire's proposal assumes that consideration must be given to the life stories of children and young people who are treated by schools and teachers as "tabula rasa", ready to absorb everything that is taught. It must be considered

---

[1] *Common knowledge itself can be understood as the knowledge resulting from daily and community interactive practices. It refers mainly to the worldviews arising from ordinary life, from the perspective of what [3] (Certeau, 1996) called "ordinary" life, to designate the development of life through everyday experiences. Common knowledge is an integral part of the social formation of people, to the extent that it results from the most immediate social interactions in family and social environments.*

that the connections are needed and that an approach or methodology, that respects the knowledge acquired, facilitates learning and makes it more enjoyable and full of good insights. We must not only take into account the cultural reality in which children and the youth are inserted, but mostly listen to what they have to say, to value their opinion and knowledge acquired in their life experiences. "Why not establishing a necessary "intimacy" between the fundamental curricular knowledge to students and the social experience they have as individuals?" [7]. That is to say: why not establishing more and more connections between these knowledge?

Besides the noticeable gap between the knowledge given in school and knowledge acquired in the social practices of everyday life students increasingly expand the access to digital information. The teacher, "keeper of knowledge" finds himself in a more and more challenging situation. The speed of knowledge that young people have access to is astounding, though often misguided. It searches objective answers to questions, without any deeper understanding about the researched topic. This is the exposure to a huge world of information that does not necessarily result in learning.

"Access to information is no guarantee that this results in knowledge, much less learning. In order for this to happen, it is necessary that, in when facing the presented information, people can rework their knowledge or even deconstruct it, aiming a new construction." [8].

The perception of the world is given by connections. The excess of information, or their excessive exposure, is not learning guarantee. According to Ausubel [9], the challenge is to know how all this arsenal of information that has no time and space barriers, may contribute to the democratization of knowledge. Simultaneously seeking meaningful learning in which new information is internalized and incorporated considering what the individual already knows.

The importance of valuing what the "individual already knows" is essential in the learning process. Increasingly more frequently an attempt is made to break with the comfort that revolves around the reproduction of official knowledge in teaching materials. It is easy to find dedicated teachers who use technological tools reinforcing their classes on devices to make it more attractive and easier to understand, although

sometimes they can also be tiresome and excessively visual. It is not enough to animate the text through the image or add to this a number of cognitive functions. It is necessary to establish connections.

"Knowledge is understood as the student's ability, before given the information to develop a reflective competence, linking its many aspects according to a particular time and space, with the possibility of establishing connections with other knowledge and using it in their daily lives." [10,11].

According to the quote above, we can see that the reflective process about a certain topic covered in the classroom is done through a coherent perception that takes into account what is known, what is presented. Only through these connections it is possible to deepen knowledge; otherwise students continue to ask the same thing that many of us have asked ourselves in the past: And what will I do with it? What is the matter? Helping students to make connections from their knowledge is a challenging attitude toward teaching, and respect for the learner and is also a major challenge presented to schools, especially in today's world, where information is no longer under the power of the teacher and where creativity to deal with the challenges of the contemporary world and the future is of great importance in the learning aspect.

"We live in a time where attention is focused on the internet, interculturalism, interactivity, interaction, interrelation, interdisciplinary and the integration of the arts and media, as production and meaning methods, which challenge boundaries, borders and territories" [12].

Combining the knowledge in order to connect information, respecting and valuing individuals, can be the first step in the development of committed, curious and creative citizens.

3. THE TEACHING OF ARTS AND THEIR USE AS CONNECTIONS AND CRITICAL TOOLS

We should reflect how the arts can contribute to these processes' connections between formal and common knowledge, stimulating and strengthening creativity, to the extent that, as highlighted by Jorge Santos, in his communication at the Plenary of the National Arts Education Conference which took place in Porto in 2007: "Contrary to what often is

prejudicially thought, the artistic behaviors are not disordered outpourings of personal subjectivity. Further than that, they are tangible results of the higher mental discipline, often supported, over long periods of reflection, experimentation and rigorous training" [13].

The artistic thinking is prepared, thorough and critical. Despite the current appreciation of arts and the processes that stimulate creativity, it is known that within the school, the arts continues to be treated as a minor subject. The best teacher training, and appropriate training to perform the function seems to help establishing a greater professionalism. However, the issues are still delicate and the daily challenges in educational institutions tend to propagate the traditional rigid format that values the professorial knowledge focusing on the "noble" subject, leaving the arts to less central or allegorical actions. According the same author, "you have to move away from the educational prejudice belief that the arts are a mere entertainment space. The arts provide a multitude of ways in which it becomes possible to experience, understand and reinterpret the world and our relationship with it. They are a key reserve of human wisdom. They favor the development of imagination and originality and play a key role in the ability to teach us to know ourselves and others. The arts establish a basic and deep relationship between the individual and their cultural heritage" [13].

It is believed that arts can perform an important job when integrated in a proposal that values the common knowledge which comes with the children. How can it be done? Helping them to understand the world around them and articulating knowledge through an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary way; Helping them to establish connections that are inherent in the processes of interaction and in critical construction of the world perceived around. In the same book, Santos argues that arts can be a strong contribution to the opening of horizons, both in the sphere of feelings and reason, helping students to look beyond the limits of understanding small group of friends, family or their social context. The arts offer vital opportunities in the field of personality development - which is highly desirable in these times of tragic conflict.

Challenging time of crisis and stimulus to creative and innovative processes, arts demand strong capacity of articulation of ideas and solutions. Nowadays, the arts' education not only includes the cognitive and aesthetic awareness function, but mainly aims to empower children and young people of this world of information. The arts' education is important to know and create alternatives to the difficult situations of conflictuality, vulnerability and social exclusion.

"(...) Is the due importance regarding the indispensable role that arts play in people's lives and in society since the dawn of civilization, that makes it one of the essential factors of humanization" [14].

In fact, the use of arts has a great potential. However, this potential is being separated from one of its main feature that is its character for a strong social criticism. Common knowledge is related to the perceptions and understanding of the world around. Separating formal knowledge from common knowledge itself belittles the many possible and important connections in building critical beings, aware of the oppression processes and the basic rights restriction. So, it configures strategies for the maintenance of inequalities under the guise of creative solutions, contemporary and entrepreneurs for old social problems.

An interesting aspect that is necessary to point out is that arts had always a critical feature. In the realistic period, arts broke more strongly with the standards or bonds of the academia and considered or even represented the society with more autonomy, developing criticism increasingly linked to the reality of social and political excluded or marginalized groups. The critical and acid character is one of the most significant biases in modern history and contemporary arts. The break with the classical Greco-Roman and Renaissance arts and the beginning of a new period of arts or an art with a new function, a social function, was a milestone in the process of change of imposing art of the beautiful. A change had already started in the Renaissance, through the French Revolution and its ideals that influenced the world, the industrialization and the arrival of modernity.

The realistic art was a social nature of art that represented the precursor characteristics of modernity. The art as a social denunciation mechanism, broke the bars that imprisoned it on models and formulas aimed at the critical and political maintenance and of certain social realities. In fact, art is and has always been an instrument of power. Nowadays, the analysis of the social impact of the arts almost unsets their

characteristics and initial logic. When we refer to educational, therapeutic, emotional and holistic arts, we must be careful in its reference as a social impact, because using it as an element of cohesion and participation, is an extremely jarring and provocative questioning of their role. The Brazilian writer Graciliano Ramos, in response to a letter sent by the artist Candido Portinari, also an artistic icon in Brazil and worldwide, argues:

> "In a quiet and happy life, what kind of arts would exist? I even think we would have trading cards, pink angels, and this horrifies me. Fortunately there will always be pain, it's our old friend, and nothing will suppress it. And we would be ungrateful if we wanted its elimination (...)" [15].

What Graciliano Ramos allegedly wants to highlight is that the role of arts should be to position themselves critically towards crisis situations experienced by humanity. It is up to the arts the harsh or humorous criticism, making visible what is hidden, and nowadays, positioning itself regarding the mankind, and environmental and climate issues. Let us remember here the classic painting, "Liberty Leading the People" by Eugene Delacroix, which takes in his work the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, often shouted by the French people in their public demonstrations. Also remember the work "The Shooting of 3 May 1808," by Goya y Lucientes, where the artist represented a particular event in Spain, earning symbol *status* of social struggles. The literary work of Victor Hugo, "Les Miserables", denoting the ills of French society and their struggle for change. Gustave Courbet and Eduard Manet, with works like "Women sifting wheat" and "Luncheon on the Grass; "Guernica" by Pablo Picasso, and many others who came to consolidate the critical role of arts.

"The arts are not just for communicating ideas. They are privileged fields to create new ideas, to explore the world and transform it. The arts are among the most significant ways of moving the culture and traditions" [16,17].

Arts are useful for the promotion of a broad view of social issues and their critical character is unquestionable. However, some market processes and emergency procedures for the resolution of social problems, tend to stimulate creativity, through an overvaluation of movement of art and culture, such as high-impact tools in combating social problems.

4. ARTS AND SOCIAL INTERVENTION: THE RHETORIC OF CREATIVITY

In a world of uncertainty and constant change, the rhetoric of creativity gains strength. The fact that the creative capacity is present in every context of human creation places it as a great tool accessible to all. It is through it that human beings can produce innovative solutions to their problems. The transition from traditional models for collaborative / participatory models, and the current economic crisis highlights speeches where creativity rhetoric appears as resolution mechanisms of various social problems, especially in interventions with the most vulnerable groups.

This creativity, besides being inherent to the human being, is powerful when linked to the assessment of projects of social intervention through art and culture. It is a bias that permeates the school, the neighborhood and the city. There are countless projects that strive to promote social welfare in an attempt to provide greater access to arts, culture and leisure. However, many are the factors that incur when social inclusion through arts is proposed as a replicable public policy. The importance to support artistic and cultural projects, is required. However, it is also known how the market process involving the public sector and the entrepreneurial emergency release formulas that with time and reduced budgets will "solve" the problems of society.

The justifications given for the use of arts and culture as a social impact mechanism within the social policies do not always correspond to reality. A number of methods (in the form of a toolbox) are devised to organize and facilitate operations accordingly. Files and projects are developed, positively reinforcing investment in arts and culture, measuring the impact and importance of this support as legitimate bias, efficient, economically viable and effective when linked to public policy.

"There is no methodology currently established or universally accepted used to investigate the social impact of the arts. The difficulties arise from the attempt to create appropriate means to objectively measure something that in its essence is complex and subjective" [18].

The fact that arts have the power to transform is undeniable. However, that power when subsidized and linked to the goals of social

inclusion through social and economic policies, can become extremely speculative. Belfiore [19] is clear when critically analyzes social policies and social inclusion strategies, and says that linking the art and culture to such policies limits and conditions its importance. For the author, it is even worse to use the positive results obtained in some actions, as models to be disseminated, it is believed that their impact can be replicated by using a kind of formula.

The idea of the arts' social function always becomes complex when the company and its organizational systems are in crisis. Even though no one expects that arts can really offer solutions, it is used as a strategic resource because it is intrinsically linked to the production of culture and history. However, market issues involved in creative processes underlying the financing of arts and culture, is part of the contemporary routine and eventually standardizing certain artistic production processes within or out of school or even stimulating creativity.

"It must avoid the tendency to restrict the overall objectives of education in times of economic depression periods, making them coincide with too cyclical demands of the labor market" [20].

Market requirements, and the frantic rhetoric of creativity as motivating and driving force of social change, may apply for an excessive and speculative power of change through arts, which actually hardly fits in a standardized and replicable way. The pressure to produce a "major idea" and make it profitable, replicable and with impact puts people in a social pressure for the creative process, that might be, on the other hand the death of creativity.

To create and innovate is also to respect idleness, respect the time. Boxes and tools can help, but can also create a frenzy of projects and overly technical superficial actions.

The obsessive and instrumental way that politicians, policy makers and planners have used culture in urban renewal is subject of inquiry and reflection regarding the differences arising therefrom, concerning the involvement of people and their importance for the cultural development.

"The obsession that politicians, policy makers and planners have shown in using culture as a tool at the service of urban regeneration programs and competitive repositioning of cities subordinates often two other essential aspects: the actual involvement of people in their various conditions (breeders, mediators, users, consumers...), is essential so that the cultural development is consistent and consequent; and that in order to be real development, should be done according to the resources, interests, needs and expectations of the people" [21].

The European Commission, through the Directorate General for Communication (DG COM), coordinated a research on the topic of appreciation of the European culture, in order to ascertain the opinions and behavior of citizens in this area. The research took place from March to May 2013, and was published by the Eurobarometer in November 2013, covering the universe of 27 Member States of the EU.

The first part of the report analyzes the levels of engagement in different cultural activities and barriers to participation, in order to promote cross-border cooperation; the second part examines the active participation of EU citizens in a number of artistic activities such as singing, dancing, making a movie, etc. and consumer actions like going to the cinema or reading a book.

The Eurobarometer also points out, due to the diagnosis of lack of cultural interest, the importance attributed to the stimulus of interest, participation and creativity since the first years in school.

"… increasing cultural interest and participation in schools from an early age could increase interest in culture among those groups that are least engaged. (…) Engagement could perhaps be enhanced by encouraging not just participation, but also by encouraging individuals to become involved creatively to help establish a greater appreciation and enjoyment of cultural activities" [22].

The excessive formalism and the teaching focused on a mechanic pedagogy does not stimulate creativity. Excessive goals and the pressure that this entails for students and teachers makes it difficult to feel and produce knowledge, art and science. Producing and consuming art comes from a state of mind stimulated at home and school, in moments of reflection and freedom that have been losing space, due to pressure from the rigid logic of

training efficiency and effectiveness. Creativity needs stimulation.

As emphasized by Paulo Freire "There would be no creativity without the curiosity that drives us and makes us patiently impatient before the world that we didn't do, adding to it something we do" [23].

Creativity currently encouraged in schools as a curricular item to be executed, as a goal to be fulfilled among many others, only contributes to excess. Creativity cannot be reduced to mechanically moving paint and glue under the teacher's order, creativity can be stimulated and produce results, in the case of children and young people in schools, there should be an education that respects and values the connections between formal knowledge and socially acquired knowledge in everyday life. In order to innovate and create we need to understand: arts, culture and creativity are closely linked to dreams, wishes and expression.

Therefore, in order that the information society can be considered a knowledge and creative society, it is essential to appreciate the connections of knowledge: "(...) The naive curiosity, "disarmed", is associated to common sense knowledge, it is like the critical curiosity that, approaching the object in an increasingly methodically rigorous way, becomes epistemological curiosity" [24].

5. CONCLUSION

The complexity of the described terms means that their approach is always incomplete. The theme of arts, culture, creativity, and learning leads us to countless reflections. The questions here arise as issues of everyday life, in which, linking arts and social intervention, can be understood and approached in epistemological ways. In it, the exercise of understanding arts, as a sponsor of production and reflection, can stimulate the development of creative and critical human beings.

It is considered that a large number of NGOs and projects within the school itself, which address the issues of arts and culture, often tend to camouflage very complex social issues, and the route of public policy and guided financing social emergency. It is today the most widely adopted way. We can also mention the rhetoric of creativity in the processes of innovation and entrepreneurship as an easily accessible tool,

free. This means that's enough the individual will to change its life and the world around him. Scherer defends an "engaged and critical art that wants to deny the fragmentation of postmodern theories, as well as the use of this dimension of human life as mere "methodological tool" [25].

We believe that more than fostering creativity, we need a school that listens and develops critical thinking in their students, building collective projects that enhance their life stories, competences and skills. It is in this perspective that we included the need for evaluative education and understanding of the dimension of time and subjectivity involved in creativity.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

1. Guba E. The paradigm dialog. New-bury Park. CA: Sage Publication; 1990.
2. Coutinho CP. Metodologia de Investigação em Ciências Sociais e Humanas: Teorias e Práticas (2ª ed.).(Research Methodology in Social Sciences and Humanities: Theories and Practices.) Coimbra Portugal: Almeidina. 2013;17.
3. Certeau MD. A Invenção do Cotidiano. (The Practice of Everyday Life.) São Paulo: Martins Fontes; 1996.
4. Pais JM, Introdução. Em J, Pais M, Blass LM. Tribos urbanas: Produção Artística e Identidades. (Urban Tribes: Artistic Production and Identity.) Lisboa: Anablume. 2004;12.
5. Coutinho CP, Lisbôa ES. Sociedade da informação, do conhecimento e da aprendizagem: desafios para educação no século XXI. (The information society, knowledge and learning: challenges for education in the twenty-first century.) Revista de Educação. 2011;18(1):5-22.
6. Freire P. Pedagogia da Autonomia: Saberes necessários para à prática educativa. Portugal: Edições Pedagogo 2012;16.
7. Freire P. Pedagogia da Autonomia: Saberes necessários para à prática educativa. Portugal: Edições Pedagogo 2012;17.
8. Coutinho CP, Lisbôa ES. Sociedade da informação, do conhecimento e da aprendizagem: desafios para educação no

século XXI. (The information society, knowledge and learning: challenges for education in the twenty-first century.) Revista de Educação. 2011;18(1):8.

9. Ausubel D. A aprendizagem significativa: A teoria de David Ausubel. (Meaningful learning: the theory of David Ausubel.) São Paulo: Moraes; 1982.

10. Pelizzari A, KriegL MD, Baron MP, Finck NT, Dorocinski SI. Teoria da aprendizagem significativa segundo Ausubel.(Theory of meaningful learning seconds Ausubel.) Revista PEC, Curitiba. 2002;2(1):37-42.

11. Coutinho CP, Lisbôa ES. Sociedade da informação, do conhecimento e da aprendizagem: desafios para educação no século XXI. (The information society, knowledge and learning: challenges for education in the twenty-first century.) Revista de Educação. 2011;18(1):10.

12. Barbosa AM. Arte na Educação: Interterritorialidade refazendo Interdiciplinaridade. Desiner, Arte e Tecnologia. (Art in Education: Interterritoriality remaking Interdiciplinaridade. Desiner, Art and Technology). 200;2:01-20.

13. Santos J. Educação básica e educação artística: uma agenda comum. Plenária da Conferência Nacional da Educação Artística.(Basic education and arts education: a common agenda. Plenary of the National Arts Education Conference.) (p. 4ª Sessão). Porto-Portugal. 2007;2.

14. Ferraz MH, Fuzari MD. Metodologia do Ensino de Arte. (Art Teaching Methodology.) São Paulo: Cortez. 1999;6.

15. Fabris AT, Fabris MR. A função Social da Arte: Candido Portinari e Graciliano Ramos. (The social function of art: Candido Portinari and Graciliano Ramos.) USP-Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros. 1995;38.
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-901X.v0i38, pag.25

16. Foundation (Ed.), CG. The Arts in schools: Principles pratice end provision. London: Oyez Press; 1982.

17. Santos J. Educação básica e educação artística: uma agenda comum. Plenária da Conferência Nacional da Educação Artística.(Basic education and arts education: a common agenda. Plenary of the National Arts Education Conference.) (p. 4ª Sessão). Porto-Portugal. 2007;5.

18. White T, Rentschler R. Toward a new understanding of the social impact of the arts. 2005;7.
Available:http://neumann.hec.ca/aimac2005/PDF_Text/WhiteTR_RentschlerR.pdf

19. Belfiore E. The social impact of the arts – Myth or reality? Culture vultures: Is UK arts policy damaging the arts? London: Policy Exchange Limited; 2006.

20. Lawton D. Beyond the natonal curriculum: Teacher nprofessionalism and empowerment. London: Hodder & Stoughton 4th ed. 1996;10.

21. Ferreira C. Cultura e Regeneração Urbana: Novas e velhas agendas da política cultural para as cidades. Revista Tomo. 2010;16:19.

22. Eurobarometer. Cultural Access and Participation, Special Eubarometer 399. Comissão Europeia, Direção-Geral da Comunicação (DGCOM). 2013;22-23.

23. Freire P. Pedagogia da Autonomia: Saberes necessários para à prática educativa. Portugal: Edições Pedagogo. 2012;44.

24. Freire P. Pedagogia da Autonomia: Saberes Necessários à Prática Educativa (36ª Edição ed.). (Pedagogy of Autonomy: Knowledge Required to the Educational Practice.) Petrópolis: Editora Paz e Terra. 1996;17.

25. Scherer GA. Serviço Social e Arte: Juventuve e Direitos Humanos Em Cena. (Social and Art Service: Youth and Human Rights In Scene.) Cortez ed. 2013;177.

_____