

# Experiential Approach to Art Teaching

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## Abstract

*The objective of this work is to present a case study with high school students, aged 14 to 15, from Escola Técnica Estadual Jornalista Roberto Marinho in São Paulo, Brazil, carried out in the academic year of 2019 (between February and December of the current year). It proposes the study of the learning of the History of Art and Design, based on the research of concepts and the performances of Annie Smith with the Experiential Approach (Canada) and Ana Mae Barbosa with the Triangular Approach (Brazil) in the Art component. The methodology of the classes is based on theoretical and practical classes. With prior knowledge of artists and works from the History of Art, students learn about the artist and his time (historical contextualization), about the visuality of the work and its meaning (artistic appreciation) and have the opportunity to learn and apply the technique used. (artistic making), using to create, from their references and subjectivities, the project methodologies used by design.*

## 1. Introduction

The objective of this work is to present a case study developed with high school students, with the introduction of active methodologies used in design, from the History of Art based on the work developed by the Experiential Approach by Annie Smith and the Triangular Approach developed by Ana Mae Barbosa. A case study will be shown, in which the classes were taught from a pedagogical project that places the projectual action, the doing, the student as a researcher and protagonist of his knowledge. From the contents taught in History of Art in confluence with the methods used by designers, the possibility and feasibility of an active doing for a significant learning is recognized.

The basis for the research begins with the studies and activities described by Annie Smith in her book *Getting Into Art History*, the result of years of research with her students at the University of Mississauga, Canada. The author uses active methodologies and methodologies used in design, and demonstrates how students, from an immersion in the History of Art, can create and redesign works, based on artistic periods.

At the confluence between the fields of Art History and Design, the construction stages used in

the projects can be used as a potentiating tool for the acquisition of knowledge.

Annie Smith was in Brazil for the 3rd International Symposium on Teaching Art and its History, in August 1989, MAC (Museum of Contemporary Art) at USP, invited by Ana Mae Barbosa to give a lecture, in which she highlighted the importance of coexistence with works of art and the benefits presented by its students.

Annie Smith started the lecture *Theoretical Foundations of Art History Teaching*, in which she spoke about the various theorists of Art History and their conceptions. To get to know this author better, some parts of her lecture will be transcribed: I learned Brazilian Art with my Brazilian students making masks. I learned about Di Cavalcanti, Tarsila do Amaral, Ivan Serpa and Portinari. I wanted my Canadian students to see real things. They had to go to the city's historical archives, find an old photo of Toronto, go to the same place and take a new photo of what the place looks like today. Then they could compare the past and the present. I wanted them to see real objects from the past.

They were studying Bauhaus, so they took the title sheet of an old 19th century book and redid it as if they were Bauhaus disciples. They had to look at 19th century labels with the same idea. The architectural revival of 1860, 1870, 1890, was studied. Objects that did not exist at that time were taken and they were asked to make a neo-gothic or neo-romanesque mailbox, neo-baroque and neo-Egyptian bicycle backrests, a neo-baroque and neo-Egyptian telephone booth, a Neo-Baroque and Neo-Levantine hydrant.

I asked the students to take any utensil and draw a picture. If Modigliani designed a utensil, what would it look like? I think maybe this could be the cover of my book *“Getting into art history”*. It's like sleeping with the history of art. You can do this with anything. How about using things from the past to These guidelines include complete descriptions of make current advertisements? Do you think we don't do that today? *Mona Lisa advertising meatloaf ? [3]*.

## 2. The experiential approach

In the book *Getting into Art History*, Smith [3] explains about the results of six years of research and experiences with students, from the basic level to the graduate level at the University of Toronto in

Mississauga. With the results obtained, she challenges teachers and students to create their own introductory projects to the History of Art and Design, contextualized with concerns and historical interests from the past to contemporary art.

The essence of Annie Smith's work aims to "make the art object and its history a present, living and meaningful experience" for students, indeed for all, as a means of increasing their awareness of aesthetic heritage and culture in the world. widest possible degree.

The approach proposed and demonstrated by Annie Smith aims to encourage the original study of artists, their subjects, the circumstances of their lives and the products of their creativity, translating all these subjects into recognizable problems today, through projects. This is achieved with a variety of teaching techniques: situational, dramatic staging, games and others, using some of the art's historical episodes. During the eras, periods and "isms" of Art History, applied to teaching and learning, when shared, these result in intentional and personal confrontations with works of art and artists, a process called "Experiential Approach to Art History Teaching".

The author clearly and enthusiastically describes in her book how new study methods can be introduced into student life. "Let's not just look at art... Let's get into art history! (Getting into Art History)" [3]. The narrative starts from a series of questions about the characteristics:

How can we help students experience the impact of art on the eyes and therefore the mind? How can we help them make a "connection" so that what is old becomes excitingly new? How can we make the art object and its history a present, living and meaningful experience? [3].

The author develops a method that aims to involve students as:

[...] participating individuals, not as an audience. She wanted them to get out of their chairs and explore a painting or sculpture so they could discover for themselves exactly those aspects that textbook authors and art historians point out in grueling detail. I wanted them to understand and appreciate the process of creating a work of visual art, expressing their own responses in a similar way, looking at a work and responding to it, not verbally but visually [...] and paste instead of notes and rearrangement of chairs and tables, and students assuming poses that to the uninitiated hardly resembled Adam and God on the Sistine Chapel ceiling? [3].

The Experiential Approach is driven by the need for direct experience with art and has as its main objective the acquisition and use of skills such as visual acuity, visual recall, time reference and verbalization of visual material. They are divided into two categories of projects: projects that do not

require prior knowledge of Art History, artist or culture on the part of the students; and those that require careful and more detailed analysis and/or research to develop a task.

This Approach is a process to be used in conjunction with the curriculum and serves any age group willing to respond to art rather than just looking at it. The response of one artistic creation from the past becomes other artistic creations and both now exist in the present [3].

The studies by the aforementioned author, carried out in the 1970s, are current and relevant when applied to the teaching of Art History, which follow a chronological and traditional approach, with a slide show; in this process, the teacher is the speaker and the students are passive receivers. This way of teaching was the one that many of the teachers were trained, and as a consequence the reproduction of slides of works of art, consolidated in the institutions. Information such as dates, period, without any connection with the student's reality or daily life, does not produce knowledge or even interest. "For the student, it is useless to just mention the artist's name, the name of the painting and/or sculpture, the year in which it was created; this information is irrelevant milestones for them to obtain an effective knowledge of art." [2].

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The experiential approach develops on four basic needs in the teaching of Art History:

- First apprehension: direct the student to dive into an important idea, for the study of art, for example, the scale, or "abstraction" or "baroque";
- Second apprehension: encouraging students to express the formative characteristics of each historical and artistic period, aspects and most relevant ideas of this study, so that the answer given by the individual is a visual creation;
- Third apprehension: reinforcing the way in which Art History is looked at, encouraging careful observation of the original work: attention to essential characteristics, analysis of color, line, shape, texture and other elements that belong to the visual language, together with appropriate descriptive vocabulary;
- Fourth apprehension: focus on periods and time comparisons; create interest in discovering the context of the material studied, why the composition and visual syntax are organized with

a certain layout and not otherwise, shown in a certain period and with a certain artist [3].

To draw attention and engage students, the Experiential Approach is based on some instructional principles:

- Projects that do not require prior knowledge of culture, art or artist.
- Projects in which the teacher presents characteristics of 'art', the artist or the period or the 'ism'.
- Projects in which the teacher presents characteristics of art, or the artist, or referring to the period. These processes are accompanied by research interactivity, to conceptualize an object, using design concepts and re-signify objects, the redesign of the object from the chosen period and artist.

Example: redesign objects from periods of art history "isms".

In the three pre-defined project classifications, methodologies can be used to approach the works in different ways, jointly or not: starting with a personal history of the artist; enter the scene (of the work) and turn around to shift the view (enter and turn); make artists memorable (students enter the room as if they were artists and introduce themselves to their peers); invert the scale (project the image of the Sistine Chapel on the ceiling and everyone lying on the floor to appreciate it); displacement (cut and paste); transform a 2D work into 3D; what would this object look like if it belonged to a certain era and artistic period? Redesign, create an object or redesign it [3].

The term redesign for Annie Smith refers to the insertion of "essential" and specific features that pertain to each period. Take, as an example, the Baroque period, the characteristics that define this period are sinuous and curved lines, gilded carving (objects coated with gold leaves), decorative elements such as leaves, fruits, flowers, angels, added to architectural objects, such as the altar, church pulpits, Solomonian shafts (winding columns with floral and other ornaments), architecture of the exterior and interior of churches with curved walls. This set of elements used to define the characteristics of the Baroque period can be transposed, as inspiration to compose other elements. You can use an ordinary vase and redesignate it as Baroque; this same one can become a Cubist vase, if the characteristics that define Cubism were transferred to this object, such as the geometric shape part of disconnected objects, collage of newspapers, letters, etc.

The idea is to know the characteristics of each period, choose ready-made parts or objects and use these principles to modify the object's original status, or create and design a new object, based on this set of characteristics that define a period and use as inspiration.

With the knowledge of the works and periods, history and the economic, social, ethical and moral circumstances that governed society at a given time are also absorbed. The period of contextualized art allows the insertion and expansion of Art for a knowledge of human formation, in addition to expanding perception and creativity.

These different ways of presenting works of art are far from a traditional class, with only a slideshow; although the slide show exists at some point in the educational process, to show the works, the invitation to the student's participation, makes him/her become involved in his/her own and individual narrative, and stimulates him/her to seek solutions, for the questions and problems resolution, placed there. Smith stresses the importance of getting visual responses from students: You are helping your students learn to discover what the story is about, not just learn the story itself. Whether written or visual response, the criteria remain the same. Students imagine themselves observing a situation and share their recorded version with others. The project provides a way to compare your interpretations with those of the artist. By tapping into each student's imagination, the way is opened to explore what previous artists have done with the subject, in addition to studying the theme, artist or technical solutions [3].

Regarding the evaluation of the works, the author describes that this action is carried out in a similar way to other curricular components, from an unconventional perspective: no matter what the project, the following underlies all evaluation criteria: I want students demonstrate that they have learned through the visual mode and defend their interpretation tangible visual. I want to hear and see that they know why they did what they did. It should be obvious to the class and me that the student has absorbed a sufficient amount of art historical understanding for the task. What I'm looking for is the student's ability to absorb and understand an artist and that artist's work, or a specific work, or perhaps a style. I look for evidence of understanding of the artist's personal traits and evidence of trying to "think like the artist." Or, I want to see a solid defense by a solid logic of the student's chosen approach to the problem [3].

This Approach is a process to be used in conjunction with the curriculum and serves any age group willing to respond to art rather than just looking at it. The response of one artistic creation from the past becomes other artistic creations and both now exist in the present [3].

Annie Smith came to Brazil twice at the invitation of the Museum of Contemporary Art, University of São Paulo (MAC/USP), to teach a course on History of Art, and in 1989, she participated in the 3rd International Symposium on the teaching of art and his story, held at MAC, USP, where he presented his

work entitled, *Theoretical Foundations of Art History Teaching*, transcribed in an article published in the *annals*. In it, she cites several art historians, the concepts addressed by them and some examples: Mark Rothko, Jansen, Rudolf Wittkower, Wölfflin, Herbert Read, among others, such as George Kubler [3].

Traditional methods such as formal analysis and iconography. He said that the history of art is the history of material culture. All materials worked by man arise from the search for a solution to a problem. Therefore, works of art are solutions to problems, the problem leads to the solution, therefore, interconnected solutions soon emerge that turn into formal sequences, which in turn lead to other problems that require solutions, that lead to interconnected solutions and that lead to formal frequencies that lead us back into trouble, and so on [3].

Following the presentation, she describes the way she inserts Art History in her classes, reporting the results of her students' work.

[...] We studied the architectural revival of 1860, 1870, 1890. I took objects that did not exist at that time and asked them to make a neo-Gothic or neo-Romanesque mailbox, neo-baroque and neo-Egyptian bicycle backrests, a neo-baroque telephone booth -Baroque and Neo-Egyptian, a Neo-Baroque and Neo-Levantine fire hydrant.



Figure 1: Neo-Baroque fire hydrant [3]

[...] When we studied certain artists in particular, I asked them to take the cover of their favorite record and redesign it as if it belonged to that given artist.



Figure 2: Album Cover of Simple Minds x Redesign inspired by William Morris [3]

This is the William Morris-style album “Simple Minds” (see Figure 2) [3].

Art and art historiography must be introduced to students in a more current way, present as a visual language contextualized in their time; but also to be decoded, understood and contextualized in the space/time experienced by the student. The understanding of visual languages are principles that contemporary educators aspire to, for the apprehension of reading a visual discourse.

Barbosa clarifies “it is no longer a question of asking what the artist meant in a work, but what the work tells us, here and now in our context and what it said in other historical contexts to other readers.” [1].

### 3. The Triangular Approach: See, Do, Contextualize.

The Triangular Approach, also known as Triangular Proposal, developed by Ana Mae Barbosa in the 1980s, encompasses several teaching-learning parameters, in a non-linear way and that can be worked by the teacher at the same time and they are: image and object reading, through the interpretation and analysis of the art object; the contextualization of the art object in the society, linked to the time/space in which the work and the artist are inserted; and the artistic making, the artistic practice developed by those who knew and appreciated art.

The Triangular Approach brought to the teaching of arts an expansion of knowledge in art, by placing the work and the artist in a social and temporal context, bringing historical and cultural information, to which the art object is intrinsically linked.

The Triangular Approach was tested at the Museum of Contemporary Art at USP from 1987 to 1993, having as a means of reading original works. The exchange with international researchers in Art, including the presence of Annie Smith, in Brazil, highlighted the need to deepen the knowledge of works and artists and bring the teaching of Art to the public in formal education. From 1989 to 1992, it was also experimented with in municipal schools in São Paulo, through reproductions of works of art and visits to the originals in the museum. This project started in the period when Paulo Freire was Secretary of Education for the Municipality of São Paulo. Still in 1989, experimentation with the Triangular Approach began, using video to read the artwork. This last project, financed and coordinated by the IOCHPE Foundation, involved preliminary research in Porto Alegre, RS, and triggered an intense program of updating teachers in many states and cities in Brazil. The objective was to reach schools in the interior of the country where there are no museums and where libraries have few art books, as these are very expensive in Brazil [1].

The educator must provide the student with information through the work of art, initiate knowledge of the image, referencing the social and historical circumstances in which it was created. It is also necessary to minister and conduct a series of clarifications and directions for a better understanding of artistic production. “Art as a language that sharpens the senses conveys meanings that cannot be transmitted through any other type of language, such as discursive or scientific” [2].

The Triangular Approach works with three non-linear axes, seeing, doing, contextualizing the work, and these actions can be taken up as many times as required by students, strengthening the dialogical thinking explained by Freire in educational actions and Dewey's principles of doing. According to Barbosa, “Art Education is a process of liberation, the individual becomes aware of himself and the world around him” [2].

Seeing goes beyond the physiological gaze, it goes through the stage of thinking, discovering and decoding what the image, the visual narrative tells; involves a critical analysis of the image. “A critical reading of the world”.

Contextualization situates the image in its time/space, referring to the social, economic and political conditions of each mentioned time; situating information opens the door to interdisciplinarity, to relationship with other means, other media. It is at this stage that relationships with seeing take place; the individual sees and contextualizes or, on the contrary, in possession of previous information (contextualized in time, space), starts to see, see previously unperceived information and performs mental, cognitive processes. According to Barbosa, “Eisner explains that refining the senses and expanding the imagination is the work that art does to enhance cognition. Cognition is the process by which the organism becomes aware of its environment” [2].

Doing is the appropriation of knowledge obtained in the apprehension of what was seen and understood, and decoded (always according to the degree of prior knowledge or knowledge obtained by the individual). In this phase, the cognitive associations made can be externalized in individual expressions and subjectivities, in order to conceive a formulation. The act of conceiving an action, the doing, is a consequence of the previous steps. With the apprehension and perception of the previous images / information, changes how the individuals see.

Barbosa points out that: Education is mediated by the world in which we live, shaped by culture, influenced by languages, impacted by beliefs, clarified by need, affected by values and moderated by individuality. It is an experience with the process of generating meanings, through self-voiced personal

readings of the phenomenal world and “inner landscapes” [1].

The acts of seeing, contextualizing and doing retain in each one of them a degree of learning and discoveries, which are intertwined and when they meet again, they carry new information, which is added to the previous ones, recombining and organizing themselves in a cognitive process of new knowledge, with the social, cognitive and subjective involvement of the individual.

For the implementation of this project, the teacher's procedure needs to be as an interlocutor agent of the teaching-learning process, as a mediator for the presentation of the proposal and content, in order to provide guidelines for the analysis of the work. Once the work is presented to the students, it can be felt, explored, researched in its visual syntax (color, shape, light, shadow, materiality of the object, arrangement of the figure/background, the questioning of the intentionality of the work given by the artist), and others questions raised from the exposed content. As Barbosa reiterates: [...] art is not separate from the economy, politics and social patterns that operate in society. Ideas, emotions, languages differ from time to time and from place to place and there is no uninfluenced and isolated vision. We create a story from each work of art and through children establishing connections and relationships between other works of art and other cultural manifestations [1].

#### 4. Project With students

Based on the Experiential Approach together with the educational experiences carried out by the Triangular Approach, the school year of high school classes was planned with the knowledge of periods, works and artists; after reading the works, each student could choose the support with which they will work.

During the teaching-learning process, many painting exercises, woodcuts and other representational techniques were performed. At the end of the explanations of the artistic periods referring to Impressionism (1874), Expressionism and Fauvism (1905), Cubism (1907), Dadaism (1916), Bauhaus (1919), Constructivism (1920), Surrealism (1924), Pop Art, among others, students could choose the period and artist they most appreciated (Figure 3 and 5) to work on an object (see Figure 4 and 6), with the essential characteristics belonging to each period.

There was talk about the possibility of working with small parts; the next proposal came from themselves when they considered that they could paint a shirt “in the style” of impressionist, cubist, surrealist, among others, but the unanimous response was the transformation of a sneaker. Among the various options, everyone had an old sneaker, but

they liked it a lot and could redefine it. Most students made both objects: the sneakers and the t-shirt. They finished one and started working on the other (see Figure 4 and 6).

Design Thinking was the guideline to seek solutions for carrying out educational work, as were the questions made by Annie Smith's Experiential Approach: in class, was a problem proposed, discovered, how can I approach it? and if you were in that period, how would you do it? (how can I interpret it?). If you were a designer, how would you think about solving it? (I see an opportunity), how to have ideas (I have an idea).

In the next step, after being equipped with some knowledge of the artistic periods and choosing the product, they would choose the periods, the first inspiration drawings (the drawings should be original, created by them), to proceed to the actual size of the sneakers and adapt the chosen design to the support to be worked on the sneaker or t-shirt.

In this work proposal, each student starts from the theoretical framework chosen by him, and proposes subjective insertions, with his personal taste and with his own aesthetic approach, recreating for himself an object for his own use (see Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6).



Figure 3: Source of Inspiration - Starry Night, 1889, Van Gogh



Figure 2: Tennis development – based on Van Gogh’s Starry Night



Figure 3: Inspiration by René Magritte “The False Mirror”, 1928



Figure 4: T-shirt development – René Magritte “The False Mirror”, 1928

Students follow the following steps:

- Choosing an artistic period, work or artist who has identified himself.
- The identification and design of the appropriate measures for the project application space.
- Drawing from the reinterpretation of the work and creation (inspiration).
- After determining the project, the execution begins, following the developed proposal.
- Execution in the piece, sneakers or t-shirt, with the choice of color palette.

## 5. Conclusion

This work, as a formal research in the educational environment, intended to prove the efficiency of school productivity in the Arts component, through the conjunction of Art History and Design, as providers of significant knowledge. By presenting the actions and design phases developed by designers and the steps developed in Design Thinking, “thinking like a design”, the objective is for students to become curious and active individuals within the teaching-learning process.

To achieve this objective, the teacher, as a mediator and conductor, using active learning methodologies, worked with the students, ensuring that in the Arts discipline artistic periods were demonstrated, inserted in the History of Art, used as

a reference basis for the redefinition and/or production of objects in the school environment.

In carrying out this educational planning, the integration and familiarity of students in relation to new technologies are considered and how these are already part of everyday life, of the “modus vivendus”. It was observed that Design Thinking is considered a form of project thinking and not exclusive to design, practiced in companies and that serve professionals from other areas to create and elaborate new procedures, such as Project Management, Architecture, Engineering, Art and others.

It was demonstrated how the necessary steps to be covered can be used, from the ideation, creation and development of the product, and be applied and interrelated with the teaching-learning process and other disciplines.

Contributed to the understanding, junction and intersection of the Experiential Approaches by Annie Smith and the Triangular Approach by Ana Mae Barbosa, consolidated as active and productive methods in the teaching-learning action, and how they can be implemented with the stages and design methods used by designers. Offered, this knowledge opens up possibilities of action to those individuals who are interested in this profession.

The path taken by Annie Smith showed that the areas of History of Art and Design must be presented in an interrelated and intersecting way, and can sharpen the senses and the perception of the look, and awaken the observation for the everyday objects that were part of their lives.

The Triangular Approach helps to implement learning about works, artists, objects and meanings, through the clarification of seeing, doing and contextualizing. It could be seen that the insertion of design, as an interdisciplinary bias, in an effective action in the teaching-learning process is possible to be carried out.

For the mediator teacher, it was found that the insertion of Design and the intersection with the History of Art resulted in a motivating, interdisciplinary project, as it covered different disciplines and interests, which culminated in an expansion of the perceptive and cognitive look about, not only art and objects, but also in the awakening of criticality, in looking at the relationships placed in everyday life. The process and results of the work were discussed at the end of each stage with the students and, at the end of the school year, to be evaluated in its entirety. The conclusions reached is that after the execution of this lesson plan, the following objectives were achieved with the students:

- Students acted as curious and active individuals.
- The discovery of the design concept and the professional designer sharpened the senses and

the perception of the look, to observe everyday objects that were part of their lives.

- Learned to design tasks in stages to achieve a product.
- They understood the importance of designing, designating stages and constituting them for an educational production.
- They understood how a designer works and how comprehensive and interdisciplinary the field of design is.
- Worked on making objects based on historical principles already worked on in art history.
- They became individuals satisfied with the results of the work obtained and more self-confident because they knew “more” about the History of Art, artists and periods, in addition to understanding the actions of designers.
- Contextualized Art History as a theoretical and significant reference for formative educational experiences and cultural insertion.
- Expanded the knowledge of art, from the study of the History of Art, intersected with design products.

It is known when a project works, not by the result that is presented by the students, but by the degree of expectation that this student places in the continuity of this project. Near the end of the school year, many students had already finished their work to be evaluated by the subjects and were interested in “designing” objects. One student told me he wanted to make a Cubist bench to put in his bedroom, another told me he would paint the living room wall with works by Kandinsky and would research the artist's work to decide which one it would be. Curiosity and research were in place.

## 6. References

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