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Digital Art& Magazine: Interactivity and Collaborative Learning in the Production of Collective Knowledge

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I- Introduction:

Brazil is currently experiencing growth in the use of Information and Communication Technologies. ICTs, in the areas related to school and university education. This is partly due to the implantation of the ICTs in schools and the growing demand for professionals who can use these new technologies, be it for their personal development as professionals searching for significant learning in websites, taking part in discussion lists, forums and teleconferences, as well as participating in learning programs offered by university institutions and/or cooperatives.

Teachers, in general, have been stimulated to integrate the resources offered by these new technologies in their classroom activities.

Mainly in the field of the Arts, studies have shown that even though the Information and Communication Technologies are already a part of many young Brazilians, the majority of the Art teachers have still not incorporated them in their day-to-day routine, and many don't even know how to use them. (SAMPAIO-RALHA, PRATA-LINHARES, 2003). The Digital Art& Magazine was created with the intention of publicising scientific studies and Art projects in their most varied forms encouraging and helping to promote the incorporation of the digital technologies into the development of art educators. It also offers the challenge of providing a space for learning and collective knowledge for these Art educators and educators who are interested in Arts.

II – The cyber doing together in the discussion list: the birth of Art&

The idea of creating the Magazine came to mind on 20 November 2002, during a cyber conversation in the discussion list Arte-Educar. In November 2002, one of the participants of the list started a debate stimulating the associates to the creation of an *on-line* publication. With the message of number 14,914 coming from Professor Afonso Medeiros, the work started, carried out by the group which would, on January 27, 2003 have its "own headquarters" with a cyber address dedicated exclusively to debates about the magazine, the discussion list "Art-Magazine".

Right from the beginning of the work, the idea was to establish a collaborative and relating to practice (SOUZA, 2001) cyber community (RHEINGOLD, 1993) in the sense of developing the editorial work in a way to promote interaction and "*communicative action*" (HABERMAS, 1984). In other words, actions which "*through talk, reach a consensus and through metacognitive processes promote emancipation*" showing that "*the importance of conversation for a community*

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of practice is based on an idea of knowledge as investigation that replaces the idea of closed, essentially objective knowledge." (COELHO, 2001).

The cyber community configuration is based on the idea that the benefits of participating in cyber discussion communities are: *"Make contact with current ideas, launchings and events in the study field; provide the opportunity of obtaining quality answers very quickly; obtain worthwhile materials, or pointers to these materials; learn about the environment itself; acquire the feeling of being part of a community of interests; have the opportunity of expressing ideas and feelings; have the opportunity of intensifying contacts with people and sharing similar interests"* (ROJO, 2000).

Currently, there are 40 members distributed among eight states of Brazil, and abroad, in Lisbon-Portugal and Lim-Peru, who have already exchanged almost two thousand messages since the beginning of the group.

The directing members of the magazine are located in various locations in Brazil and know each other almost exclusively as cyber friends. They develop the work of the cyber magazine voluntarily; none of the members receive any salary. On the contrary, the members pay the hosting of the magazine site with voluntary donations.

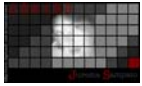
The Academic Council is formed of professors, doctors, members of research and teaching teams in the most well known education and research institutions from Brazil, who manifested their desire to accept the invitation to participate. The members of the council take on a lifelong mandate, and will only leave the project by their own free will. All the regions of the country are represented on the editorial council.

This diversity of regions gives the publication a multicultural character and identity, showing different points of view on the teaching of art in our country. Such identity has its origin in this socio- economic, historical, geographical and cultural diversity of its members.

This multiculturalism is made evident in the critical way that the discussions are carried out at each new theme broached. The members present their arguments and defense of proposals with great emphasis on personal and individual experience, which, according to Pareyson (1997), reaffirms the fact that *"... art puts into motion the most difficult concept of sociability, because it speaks to everyone, but to each one in his own way, and thus assures a universality through individuality and institutes a community through singularity..."*. This requires new daily demands on the project of the Digital Art& Magazine.

III- The Project of the Art& Magazine: game playing and development in a scarce reality dealing with art/education

Art& is a thematic academic magazine, for divulging and promoting art-education, culture, formation, communication and production in a twice-yearly periodical basis. It is focused on readers who are Art teachers, students, artists, researchers and anyone who is interested in Art. It presents a game playing aspect, and has areas reserved for an event diary, for reviews and commentaries on books, as well as the discussed websites, where the readers, apart from informing themselves about the cultural and artistic events and having access to other information of interest, also have texts available for reading and websites that may be useful for work or professional development.



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There are also articles, which are selected by the academic council. With the purpose of broaching all the artistic languages, this council is formed by invited members with different formations from different artistic areas and a team of fixed and invited members.

The magazine also has a forum and a discussion list, so that there can be interaction among the readers, editors and members of the magazine. There is a deep preoccupation for not only transmitting information, but also for the collaborative development of knowledge. Thus, our aim in the project is to have an interactive environment, which will promote learning. This opens a wide range of possibilities for continued formation of art/educators, and which, according to ALMEIDA (2003), allows the learner to represent his own ideas and take part in a constructive process.

It is important to highlight the lack of national Art/Education magazines. According to Barbosa (2003), apart from bulletins from Associations, only two Art/Education national magazines were published in Brazil. There was a first one, Art & Educação which was published by Escolinha de Arte do Brasil and was published during the sixties and the seventies, and the most recent one, which was published at the beginning of the eighties, called Ar'te da Escola de Comunicações e Artes from USP. This lack of a national Art/Education magazine is very significant, as it underlines the necessity and importance of a means of communication and interaction among people interested and involved in Art/Education. According to BARBOSA, the level of production in Art/Education in Brazil was approximately 80 researches for masters and doctorate degrees between 1981 and 1993, becoming three times more in the last 8 years. The subjects are varied, starting at studies concerning children's drawings to the experiences with new technologies.

IV- The experience of learning and building with another person: the self-formation of the Magazine creators.

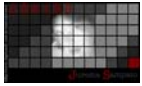
The continuing self-formation of the Magazine creators can be seen through the questions and answers, all on-line, in the messages exchanged through the list. It is a process that involves multiple interactions in the sense of understanding what the others suggested, reflecting about it, proposing challenges and collaboratively constructing answers. It is impressive to see such a large work which appears without any face to face meetings having been held in the presence of the members, although this does not appear in the result. The exchange of ideas, the disagreements, and later the agreements, use cyber to come to 'life', and this demands personal effort and collaborative perseverance of each one of the members involved.

The decisions are made collectively, by direct vote, supported by digital control devices (Yahoo tool), in an open way, allowing participation of all the members of the group. One of the first group decisions, which was carried out by direct election, was the choice of the publication's name: Digital Art& Magazine.

V – Communication, interactivity and interaction: a road to follow.

As to the future of the magazine, it is expected to deal more directly with projects relating to teacher education such as the construction of a larger virtual forum, maybe even a 'chat' room for discussion of specific subjects in each issue. As an example, we could have the debate around an article in which the author should be present.

The Digital Art& Magazine is a dream that became reality, thanks to the possibilities of communication and interaction offered by Internet, giving force to the idea and words by Simon (2000) that basically all the activities on the web develop around some cyber community.



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