

EXPLORING RESOURCES FOR CREATIVE SELF-CONFIDENCE OF VOCATIONAL MEDIA DESIGN STUDENTS

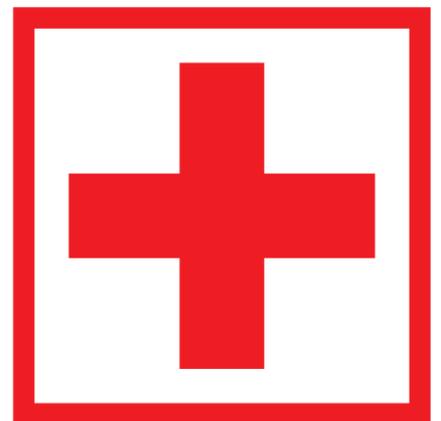
*How can students be encouraged to act
towards feeling at ease with uncertainty?*

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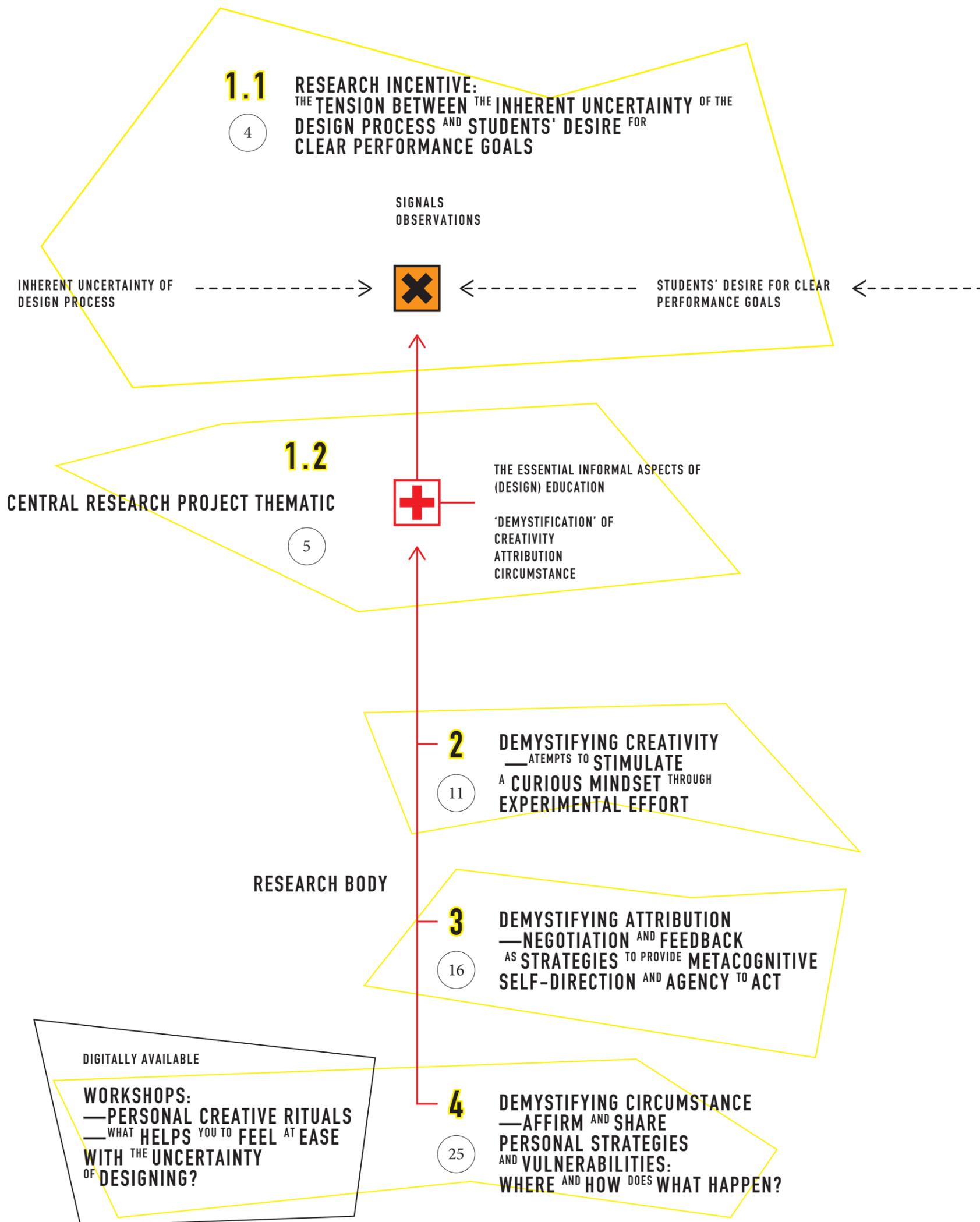
research thesis

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This thesis is part of the research I've conducted during the Master of Education in Arts programme (MEiA) at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam, between September 2018 and July 2020.

The practical research took place at the Da Vinci College, Technology and Media Departement, Media Design course in Dordrecht, The Netherlands.

Rob Wieringa, July 2020.



1.1

RESEARCH INCENTIVE: THE TENSION BETWEEN THE INHERENT UNCERTAINTY OF THE DESIGN PROCESS AND STUDENTS' DESIRE FOR CLEAR PERFORMANCE GOALS

For a decade I've been coaching vocational media design students, level 4, in the ages between 16 and 23 years in acclimatizing to a practice-focused, but inherently uncertain design process. *"The uncertainty of design is both the frustration and the joy that designers get from their activity [...]"* (Cross, 2015). In the case of my students there can be a lot of frustration. The design process is inherently experimental, so in essence it has no predictable result. However, my students very much like precise goals to adhere their performance to. These are 'opposite' concerns and students experience tension. Students enthusiastically start this 'creative education', but under pressure they often find it difficult to engage in a fertile design process.

Creativity —being able to conceive and execute ideas— is regarded as a mystical 'happening' by students. At the same time many think they need to be original instantly and constantly. It is difficult to know you will be assessed on the basis of something that doesn't feel to be in the realm of your control. Facing this difficult task, they feel they don't have enough time, or they cling anxiously to their first idea —the primary generator (Rowe, 1987, in: Lawson, 2006), and avoid risks. I detect signs of a 'helpless response' (Dweck, 2000)—a non persistence: freezing, fleeing, irritation, a lack of tenability, external attribution of motivational problems, or even showing signs of burn-out, etc. *"For students having a helpless response, their whole intelligence, and perhaps their self-worth, seemed to be on the line [...]. There, the risk could hardly be greater."* These students regard failure as an indictment of themselves. (Dweck, 2000). I often observe that the design process guidelines we endorse to steer students' design process seem to be distorted by students into a string of achievement goals in their own right —they often tick boxes without regarding their conceptual

correlation. In this correlation, however, lies the essence of finding their way through an inherently iterative, uncertain process.

Vocational media education level 4, in conjunction with this age group I teach, is a very particular field of education with its own (pedagogical) questions and a with a set of differentiated and sometimes contradictory goals. Students who graduate on this level of education are destined to work as novice designers —they start their own small businesses or need to be able to independently function in a professional environment— or they need to be able to successfully make the transition to further higher education, such as art academy. We need to facilitate a framework for our students' creative process to be flexible enough to connect to both these main 'cultures'; one being more driven by the commercial value of the end result, and the other more defined by the autonomous artistic process itself.

How do we align various juxtaposed interests like exploration and qualification, personal development and development of vocational practice, enthusiasm and demand? These are important and 'big' questions, and they are quite current as well. A qualitative teacher-student relationship (Stevens, 2015) has turned out to be essential. In a school system that focuses on input, output and excellence this relationship is not very much 'quantitatively measurable', and as far as I know not explicitly 'described' in any curriculum. Can we define this 'qualitative relationship' with our students, which facilitates a *mastery-oriented mindset* (Dweck, 2000), a valuation of self-esteem and trust, and a joy in effort? How can we as teachers let students *"become an actor in their own development?"*. I hope to modestly contribute to some of the answers by doing this research. [...] *"The best we can do is help them to become self-confident, self-disciplined, self-propelled autonomous learners."* (Stevens, 2015). ◉

This thesis is about exploring didactical and pedagogical approaches to assist vocational media design students to feel at ease with the uncertain outcome of the design process, and to encourage them to engage in this uncertainty, to boost their self-confidence and self-direction.

1.2

CENTRAL RESEARCH PROJECT THEMATIC



THE ESSENTIAL INFORMAL ASPECTS OF (DESIGN) EDUCATION

During the research process a very preconditional 'mainframe' concerning students' underlying personal strategies became clear to me. Although certainly linked to the nature of this specific design education, my research emphasis shifted from critically examining the current design process structure and its didactics to exploring more circumstantial, preconditional strategies that summon and/or affirm students' creative confidence. Central topics that arise are about communication, trust, and opening up the 'hidden curriculum.' At first I was weary about this, because I felt the thesis content shouldn't be too generally pedagogical, and seemingly getting too much detached from actual design education. However, the uncertain nature of the design process actually induces many socio-psychological issues which are to be influenced by means of more pedagogical 'instruments'.

Perhaps especially in vocational education, tensions can arise where practice and education meet and translations have to be made to and from a pedagogical climate. Often there is focus on the factual performance and technical abilities in regard to design practice such as software skills and research skills. Other important factualities, such as motivation and creativity often remain to be 'implicitly' expected from students. Gert Biesta, an internationally renowned and influential professor in educational pedagogy, states that communication is the foundation of education —not just factualities, but the way these factualities matter in social activities (Biesta, 2015, p. 52). Communication is an open, practical, generative and creative process.

I stumbled across the notion of the hidden curriculum. *"The hidden curriculum lies enclosed in those activities where students take part in during their time at school, while the official curriculum is a far more artificial addition to the real 'life at school' (Biesta, 2015, p. 53). As I will elaborate in*

this research, many of the essential aspects of design education are in essence not even restricted to a school environment. I therefore took the freedom to assimilate and stretch the —in some cases activist— notion of the 'hidden curriculum' to incorporate all factors, inside as well as outside of school —a sort of 'includiculum'. In addition to assignments and other 'regular' curricular activities, these issues involve a wide spectrum of more informal aspects and social dynamics of design practice and education. These aspects often remain undisclosed or not openly acknowledged. Personal rituals and circumstances essential in a design process —ranging from getting ideas while showering, drinking tea before doing your homework, the importance of music, or regarding school break time a disturbance of workflow—, but also doubts and vulnerabilities surrounding occasions such as showing your work and being assessed are examples of these aspects. Having the actual dialogue with students on all these subjects, many of which are far from always visible or organizable in a classroom context, turned out to be pivotal in how to make students feel more at ease with the uncertain nature of a creative practice. Linked to this, delving into the essential pedagogical and didactical issues concerning feedback turned to be a key shift or at least a widening in paradigm.

All these concepts —essentially matters of democracy and emancipation— centralise the need for a *qualitative [student teacher] relationship* coined by Stevens in Chapter 1.1. The word 'quality' implies the pedagogical

notion of being aware of [students] as a fully-fledged interaction partners. *"[Many] programs focus on psychological functions such as perception, language and thinking; they see [students] as 'to stimulate' or 'to instruct' [...]. The focus is on competence from the outset. But that only becomes [of substance] if the 'bearer' [of competence] experiences themselves as a 'bearer'. [...] No one can take over from it: the child owns his development and is competent for that."* (Stevens, 2015). 'Hoarfrosting' or 'materialising' this metacognitive awareness and in a sense the attribution of the students' own agency is another central element throughout this research. *"[Metacognition] refers to the processes used to plan, monitor, and assess one's [own] understanding and performance. Metacognition includes a critical awareness of a) one's thinking and learning and b) oneself as a thinker and learner. They do this by gaining a level of awareness above the subject matter: they also think about the tasks and contexts of different learning situations and themselves as learners in these different contexts."* (Chick, 2020). →

THREE MAIN FIELDS OF RESEARCH

In my research project I have examined several didactical and pedagogical methods and methodologies that may assist and facilitate vocational design students to engage in a more diverse, flexible and fertile design process and to provide personal agency and control in the face of an uncertain result. During the course of the last months my research effort included workshops, interviews, surveys, critical examination of and reflection on various student assignments and didactical methodologies, various forms of feedback and assessment settings including scheduled portfolio conversations, one-on-one feedback, self grading, group tutorials and group assessments. This body of research can roughly be categorised in several main fields of interest, labelled as 'demystifying' creativity, attribution and circumstance. Demystification, a word loosely borrowed from Biesta, in this sense implies students to be able to substantiate, and metacognitively comprehend. It summarises the various strategies to frame students' expectations and assumptions.

Demystifying creativity - The first field, to be discussed in chapter 2, revolves around the conception of didactically directing students towards a mindset with which they actively attempt to find solutions for a design problem —a (problem) mastery response (Dweck, 2000)— and bring the 'mystical occurrence' of creation within their realm of control, instead of expecting to be struck with the most original idea at once. To my knowledge, making the actual process *behind* the forming of ideas tangible is not part of common (vocational) didactical habit, and mostly remains an implicit expectation. I suggest that 'being creative' is something that can be trained and developed, especially when students are made metacognitively aware of the effects of decisive (thinking) effort. Moreover, a period of concentrated effort followed by distraction is likely to induce the forming of ideas —it is not a question of 'if' but of 'when' and 'where' alternative ideas will pop up. Finally, I am going to make a suggestion by claiming we should stop talking about creativity altogether, if we want to boost self-confidence and self-direction.

Demystifying attribution - The next field of interest involves the qualitative dialogue between teacher and students on learning expectations. Important in this case is the interpretive process by which students make causal assumptions on their behaviour and agency —attribution. When students attribute internally, they seek cause and consequence within their own control and responsibility instead of placing it externally —outside their realm of influence. In this chapter (3), I introduce the concept of '*negotiation*' within learning, and I test and reflect on various feedback settings and ways of

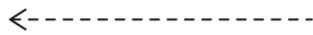
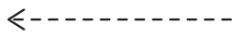
(self) assessing and presenting work. I also reflect on methodologies which revolve around self-direction within the learning process through students' metacognitive reflection, to let them be an actor in their own learning.

Demystifying circumstance - As I pointed out earlier, recognising personal creative methods, strategies, 'rituals', conditions and circumstances facilitates experimental effort and contributes to self-confidence. Instead of this recognition being a transparent and integrated part of design courses, sharing these issues normally remains mostly 'underground' and implicit. Within this part of my research effort —chapter 4— students testify about becoming more aware of these strategies and circumstances by discussing them and getting them affirmed. They feel empowered by telling their stories and recognising themselves in each other. I reflect on workshops that helped to incorporate the 'informal' into the 'formal'. Subsequently, rethinking and discussing the function but also the limitations of the school environment in relation to (design) education is very much part of the metacognitive thematic and the evaluation of current vocational design didactics in this research.

In the final chapter of the thesis, I will discuss the implications my research for me, my school and a possible larger context.

Firstly however, I will introduce some essential and preconditional social, cultural and behavioural concerns of this particular group of vocational media design students our education caters to. Since qualitative communication, trust and risk are at the core of my research, understanding key issues surrounding student conduct is crucial. ◉





1.3

OUTLINING STUDENT CONDUCT: CONFIDENCE, PERFORMANCE, EXPECTATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION OF CONSEQUENCE

—Recorded: INTERVIEW WITH DAPHNE AND JOYCE VD B., 4TH YEAR STUDENTS,
ONE MONTH FROM STARTING THEIR GRADUATION INTERNSHIP.

From 23'22": What is creativity?

Joyce vd B.: "You want something new, something original all the time. I can get lost in that..."

Daphne: "I always thought —just last week so to speak— How am I going to make something original that other people like? What will surprise others?"

On trying to stop thinking about being judged by others: Daphne's new, what she calls, "mindset":

Daphne: "I wanted to change that. That I wouldn't think: "Alright. How am I going to impress people with this?", but that I would think: "Alright. How am I going about this assignment the right way?"

Joyce vd B.: "Doing things for yourself."

Daphne: "For a long time, I've made my work for others. I kept thinking: are others going to like this?" "I think people nowadays —I don't know if it was always like this— have such a strong opinion. Of course it's good to hear the opinions of others, but, I feel, you're being judged so fast."

As to the social-cultural aspect of my research framework, it touches on issues involving 'the youth', or in particular my students, that I've seen reflected in literature. Many of these can surely be led back to neoliberal issues —so-called 'snowflake'-behaviour, performance culture, fear of failure, school-consumer behaviour (Merieu, 2009), lack of tenability, symptoms of burn out at a very young age, etc. In particular Carol Dweck (2000) mentions many forms of student behaviour I've outlined in the introduction, that are very recognisable to me.

Of course any good didactics and pedagogics are of great help, but I hope this research provides very particular advice for teaching these students within this field of vocational media design education and will give more of a thorough foundation instead of 'flying by the seat of the pants'. In this age they evolve from puberty to young adulthood. They have to choose their profession at a young age, especially on this vmbo-mbo vocational route through the educational system. We're situated in a neoliberal education system within a culture that increasingly emphasises on individual performance and success. What framework of social forces can be outlined and what questions arise?

THE HELPLESS RESPONSE IN RELATION TO SELF-THEORIES AND GRADING

My students have been brought up in a (school) environment where abilities are supposed to be reflected in performance, mostly measured by grades. In my perception, in for example secondary education —our main supplier of students—, these 'tokens', often tend to get detached from the intrinsic value of the body of knowledge, effort or skill they represent, or at least in the minds of many of my students. This could be of negative influence on self-esteem. Dweck and Juwah et al. provide insight in these mechanisms.

According to Dweck, so-called 'self-theories' —meaning systems— are very important in the shaping of thinking. Students' helpless response in face of difficulties —as I've pointed out at the very start, is likely to be the result of their belief that they can't improve their intrinsic ability or intelligence —a 'fixed mindset' caused by an entity theory^[1]. Focusing on (high) ability or praising intelligence is all but effective, and it makes people question their ability when they are confronted with problems they feel they can't solve immediately or that seem to be out of their initial reach (Dweck, 2000). I feel this resonates strongly with current social and educative idiom where individual talent and high achievement are centralised. Furthermore, the important document 'Enhancing Student Learning Through Effective Formative Feedback' by Juwah, C. et al (2004) I reference here joins up with Dweck's self-theories, and provided me with additional terminology involved in students' apprehensions about grading

and its influence on their intrinsic motivation: "Butler (1987) has [...] argued that grading student performance has less effect than feedback comments because it leads students to compare themselves against others (ego-involvement) rather than to focus on the difficulties in the task and on making efforts to improve (task-involvement). Feedback given as grades has also been shown to have especially negative effects on the self-esteem of low ability students (Craven, et al., 1991)." (Juwah et al., 2004, p. 12).

In the research body (Chapter 2-4), I will put forward some strategies to go about these issues and stimulate a more incremental mindset and task-involvement. These instigate a mastery response instead of a helpless response in the face of problems or difficulties (Dweck, 2000). They revolve around praising effort rather than accomplishment in order to tilt their self-confidence by assisting them to re-attribute agency.

[1] Dweck draws important conclusions when it comes to people that endorse a fixed opinion on intelligence. She states that the personal notion of intelligence is not about inherent measured IQ, but about how one attributes intelligence to one's own (intellectual) ability. People with a notion of fixed intelligence and thus (their) ability she calls entity-theorists. They are likely to display a helpless response to difficulties [and failure]. In contrast, people with a notion of malleable intelligence, she calls incremental theorists, are likely to show a mastery response, because they see overcoming difficulties as an opportunity to enhance their abilities (Dweck, 2000)

EXPECTATIONS —THE 'DUTY OF BEING SUCCESSFUL' AND THE CENTRALISATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL. WHO DARES TO BE VULNERABLE?

Other current social forces can be outlined. To start, there are 'Generation Z' issues. "You can achieve anything in your life if you want." It is a sentence that most millennials [and Gen Z] ceaselessly are imprinted with. [...] It also brings pressure. Work *must* be fun and a career must be flashy.' (Meester, 2019). This so-called *attainability ideal* affects the millennial generation —Generation Y, born from about halfway the 1980's to the late nineties— and is retained in Gen Z —born in the late nineties, early 2000's (Deloitte, 2019).

Youth have to pose a more or less constructed 'successful' image of themselves all the time. Online culture may only amplify this need of a successful social posture. You can 'make it or brake it' in a split second. A supposedly fun, fast road to success, where everything has to be exiting, combined with the attainability ideal may affect students' vision on how they define success and the role education —or school for that matter— has in that. Additionally, to a various extent, many of our students to incorporate some codes and aspirations (remotely) rooted in 'socialisations' which centralise materialistic success by any means, for example a 'secondary' socialisation 'flirting' with street culture as a fashionable trend, a game, an urban lifestyle (El Hadioui, 2011), opposed to the 'old fashioned' [Gen X, 'boomer'] laborious road of investing in education and studying your way towards success. Furthermore, the expectations of personal expression, a lifestyle, the internal force

or drive to be a creative, artistic —or even original— personality, versus the actual 'real life' professional requirements can sometimes be a factor of extra tension for some students.

Some students, and sometimes their parents as well, have their own individual definition of success and how that might be achieved, and even what specific parts of the curriculum they find useful or not. Some students and parents behave like school consumers, reckoning "What is necessary for me?" (Meirieu, 2009) and "What do I find fun?" I often notice an entanglement of tasks being 'fun' or 'useful' —not even in a negative way, it just seems to be one inclusive attribution (Chapter 3). The values of more working class cultures, where many of my students are raised, can also be of influence in the development of students' domestic identity. Where the school system tries to emphasise self-expression, self-exploration and self-development, these upbringings may foster values that emphasize hard work, a tough attitude and show of character without lamentation (El Hadioui, 2011). However, I encounter the opposite as well —overbearing parents, who find it difficult to accept confronting didactic feedback their children might receive. Too much or too little attention invokes helplessness. Overprotection does not accommodate learning how to deal with setbacks (Hopman, 1999).

In a newspaper article on millennial issues, the author speaks with Thijs Launspach, writer of the book *Working with millennials* in which he proposes how to approach this generation in professional settings. Launspach states that the millennial [and generation Z] often "[...] finds it difficult to ask for help. There is a taboo on failure." (Launspach in: Meester, 2019) This actually represents the most common cultural consequence and the main didactical issue I encounter constantly: there is an apparent 'taboo' on *asking things at all*. I feel students often mistake feedback for assessment or judgement. Also, students tend to only ask feedback when they are stuck, and not if things run smooth in their minds, in which case they often confuse feedback with 'help' in the sense of expecting to be handed a *solution*. Attracting or inducing a constructive discussion on students work for the sake of conversation and exchanging information can be tough in some cases.

Launspach furthermore states how these 'generations' could be best coached. "They are allergic to an authoritarian leadership style and need positive feedback and recognition." So providing agency is very important; "[...] What do you think is a good way to solve this?". Because this generation generally feels they have to be very 'successful' individuals, a little expectation management therefore will not hurt. "Set a good example", he states. "Show that even if you are successful you can make mistakes. Dare to be vulnerable." Here Launspach entirely meets my personal experiences and many of the conceptions I centralise in this thesis. Sharing vulnerabilities and strategies, and choosing feedback techniques that rely on qualitative dialogue is at the very centre of my findings, and during this research, I also came to realise they also have defined me as teacher and pedagogue during my career.

THE PEDAGOGICAL CLIMATE IN OUR SCHOOL —A CONDITION TO THE RESEARCH

Our particular school department seems to be able to create a socially pluriform and personal school atmosphere. In every survey, we get fairly high student recognition for being a safe and free environment. Bullying is almost non-existent, many subcultures are present, sexuality and race are of almost no importance. A student mentioned: *"In this school the teachers don't really feel like teachers."* At first I found that a nice or even funny compliment for our school, but it was actually quite a sad remark as well. What experiences must have contributed to the students' generic image of a teacher? Fortunately students apparently feel our teachers and their conduct are different in a positive sense.

Students at this age feel empowered and become very enthusiastic when they are asked to take part in a discussion when having the same 'status'. This also relates to the future professional 'profile' of the students: teamwork, consensus, discussion, reflection. Within this atmosphere, I am delighted by the way my students wanted to help me with my research. They were voluntary partners in experimentation, questioning, opinion, experience, discussion, etc. Our school's vision on how to provide agency to our students is reflected in an important methodology we endorse. It consists of recurring 'portfolio conversations'. These are coaching conversations where every student discusses their development with their mentor four times a year. During one of these conversations and during a scheduled research interview as well, two students shared their view on our pedagogical climate.

—*portfolio conversation*: CONVERSATION WITH JOANNA, 1ST YEAR STUDENT

me: "In the beginning you seem to have a sort of 'bitchy attitude', but now you work really hard and you do things that are really amazing. How is that possible?"

Joanna: "You're right. But here I see other people working and I think: "I can do that as well", I'm capable of doing that. I see my nephew's work [he is at this same school, but in the fourth and final grade] and I see him as an example: I can do that as well."

me: "I can also see you getting more open and more friendly to other people and to me. How come?"

Joanna: "Everybody in this class is very friendly. It is totally different than my other school. I was on a school where some people had knives and stuff. There were many bitchy girls as well. This school is totally different. People help each other, and everyone is very friendly."

—*recorded interview*: CONVERSATION WITH JOYCE V. P., 3RD YEAR STUDENT.

Being herself is very important. She thinks she changed a lot. She used to be quite 'silent', but now if she doesn't like it, she is quite capable of letting people know and standing up for herself. It's because it's a different environment, it feels more 'safe.' →

me: "Funny that you talk so much about being yourself when you compare schools [her secondary school and this one], and not so much about what we learn, here."

Joyce v. P.: "Yeah, true. But I always sort of did struggle a bit with that, what other people think of me I was always very occupied with this... I still feel that way, but it certainly has become very much less."

me: "Is this of influence on your work? That you think about the fact that you have to finish it and that others will look at it?"

*Joyce says that especially presenting is (still) very frightening. "When I hear it will have to be presented I think: Oh f***..."*

These topics Joanna and Joyce bring forward are closely linked to the importance of the informal preconditions of education, I will address particularly in Chapter 4. Relating to Joyce's last remark: assessment and having to expose your work to other people's opinion remains a difficult topic, part of the central research thematic. Presenting your work is a possibility to talk about what you've made, but at the same time it's a very vulnerable moment, especially when it is regarded as an assessment setting (either official or formative). This issues will be discussed in Chapter 3.

SELF-CONFIDENCE AND TRUST —STUDENTS' ATTRIBUTION OF ACTION AND CONSEQUENCE

In several workshops I conducted with own students and with my fellow students and tutors at this masters' programme Master of Education in Arts (MEiA), I explored factors that affect self-confidence. Regarding social and cultural influence, the workshop participants mentioned the major importance of the trust of parents and friends and its implications on self-confidence. This external trust is deprived of pressure and expectation; it is unconditional. *"It nevertheless remains one's own choice, or so it seems, if a situation is defined as a situation of trust."* Trust presupposes a situation of risk. *"Risks, however, emerge only as a component of decision and action. They do not exist by themselves. If you refrain from action you run no risk. In other words, trust is based on a circular relation between risk and action, both being complementary requirements"*. (Luhmann, 2000). This needed unconditional trust from people close to you might just be the needed confirmation when things get difficult in a (school) culture where students are seemingly expected to excel elegantly, without providing space for finding things out 'the hard way', or because assignments are only regarded as a means of grade production instead of a means evoking intrinsic action and development.

There is a distinction to be made between *trust* and *confidence*. It is also matter of *attribution*. Attribution is the assumption to which extent you are responsible for your behaviour or actions. *"[...] People are less apt to attribute their discomfort to their [own] behaviour when alternative explanations for it are viable"* (Wyer & Carlston, 1979, p. 194). In other words, people—and many of my students in particular—have a tendency to

attribute discomforting situations like failure or problems externally. Here, trust and confidence become different notions. Do you put 'faith' in the hands of others close to you, (or other preconditions and circumstances for that matter)? Do you *confide* in people that they won't let you down, no matter what? There is no risk in this. Or do you *confide* in yourself and therefore attribute the possible consequences of your actions to yourself —*internal attribution*— no matter if you do or do not succeed?

"[...] Lack of confidence and the need for trust may form a vicious circle." Trust is an important condition in situations of uncertainty or risk. At the same time, (systemic) circumstances may erode confidence and undermine one of the essential conditions of trust (Luhmann, 2000).

A major part of this thesis is about finding (communicative) strategies for students and teachers alike to reduce the feeling of taking risk and bring it to an 'affordable' level. *"People will [...] attribute their failure to a lack of ability only if no other explanations for this outcome are viable."* (Wyer & Carlston, 1979, p. 198). Taking risk is translated into being able to 'attempt' and failure is diminished into a more automatic collateral effect of experimenting. To link up with Dweck: in this way failure will be less personal and less an indictment of students' self-worth. Thus, confidence may be more 'tactically reduced' to within the negotiated boundaries of feedback, making it less about a general 'feeling' or 'value', but conditional in a positive sense—to be discussed in chapter 3.

This philosophy scaffolds the essence of how I would like to define the qualitative student-teacher relationship within this research body. It is about students being emancipated to value themselves as actors in their own learning. ◉

RESEARCH BODY: —DEMISTIFYING CREATIVITY, ATTRIBUTION AND CIRCUMSTANCE



CHAPTER 2 -4



2

DEMISTIFYING CREATIVITY
—ATTEMPTS TO STIMULATE
A CURIOUS MINDSET THROUGH
EXPERIMENTAL EFFORT

3

DEMISTIFYING ATTRIBUTION
—NEGOTIATION AND FEEDBACK
AS STRATEGIES TO PROVIDE METACOGNITIVE
SELF-DIRECTION AND AGENCY TO ACT

4

DEMISTIFYING CIRCUMSTANCE
—AFFIRM AND SHARE
PERSONAL STRATEGIES
AND VULNERABILITIES:
WHERE AND HOW DOES WHAT HAPPEN?



2

DEMYSTIFYING CREATIVITY — ATTEMPTS TO STIMULATE A CURIOUS MINDSET THROUGH EXPERIMENTAL EFFORT



—Recording: WORKSHOP CREATIVE RITUALS_LPADO17MB_MINIMOCK_15
OCT. 2019.M4A,
Starting to talk about the large amount of reactions displayed on the sheet about 'inspiration'.

From 23'00": *"Have we found a law of nature?"*, I ask. After most students claim they mostly get ideas all of a sudden, and Raúl says he thinks you can't force creativity, I say: *"That's a s**tty conclusion! You've chosen a profession where you need inspiration, and now it seems you can only wait for it...! I don't believe that!"*

Nobody picked 'creative or experimental methodologies' to share strategies.
From 0'48"

Me: *"Does nobody have a method on creativity?"*

Jeffrey: *"I think nobody is really aware of it, nobody can really describe it"*

Larissa: *"I don't have a method. If I'm working it just comes"*

Me: *"Isn't that a method? Don't you do it the same time every time again?"*

Larissa: *"Yes, if I would have to describe it, it maybe would be: get to work!"*

More students agree on calling that their method:

Jesper: *"Just 'do', is it"*

To many of my students 'creativity', in the sense of getting ideas, is not the result of an activity, but something that might or might not 'happen'. The dictionary^[1] defines it as *"the use of imagination or original ideas to create something; inventiveness"*. The synonyms^[2] for creativity on one hand resonate with a 'mystical occurrence' or a (fixed) ability and intelligence: cleverness, genius, ingenuity, inspiration, originality, talent —idioms I've evidently argued to steer away from. This though, might quite easily be the notion most people and particularly my students have of the concept of 'being creative'. However, other synonyms tend towards a more tangible, experiment-driven, and constructivist effort I try to endorse. The words 'imagination' and 'imaginativeness' imply notions of 'image' and 'imagining', construction of view. Inventiveness implies 'inventing': finding out, experimenting. Finally, 'resourcefulness', implies making (re)use of, or combining (multiple) sources.

This part of my research, although interlinked with the other areas of interest, is centred around explaining to students some basic notions involved in the 'creative act'. I've come to realise that, strangely enough, this is almost never talked about in (design) courses. To my knowledge, making the actual process *behind* the forming of ideas explicit —the 'how'— has not been part of common didactical habit, nor on our school, nor during my own education. Except for maybe the somewhat open ended instructions to 'brainstorm' or 'sketch' it mostly remains implicitly 'expected' —the 'what'. The actual 'happening' of getting ideas stays in the shadow of *reacting* on products or processes already there to be examined or reviewed, such as sketches, 'finished' ideas. In this chapter I will elaborate on how I have tried to infuse theory and didactics surrounding creativity. Informing students on how the mind actually works, and the actual usefulness of a deliberate thinking effort —a

metacognitive instruction— makes the 'occurrence of creativity' much more centred around an explicit experimental act and much more in the realm of control.

[1] Online dictionary used EN-EN:
<https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/>

[2] Online Synonyms:
<https://www.thesaurus.com/>

'DEMYSTIFYING' THE CREATIVE PROCESS (1)—THE EFFECTS OF A DECISIVE INVESTMENT IN FINDING ALTERNATIVES

The part of the conversation I quote at the start of this chapter illustrates that a lot of students very often don't feel there wasn't a sense of metacognitive 'control' over creative processes or inspiration—these are signs of them regarding it a 'sudden' occurrence. In his, in my opinion, very interesting and critical book *'The Beautiful Risk of Education'* (2015) Gert Biesta examines the genesis of 'creating' in relation to education, which he considers a creative act. However, his educational view on creation might well be also projected on creation in the context of design or conceptualisation in art and design practice. He first establishes that creation can be regarded as a powerful, metaphysical occurrence of 'bringing something into being' —a shift from 'not being' into 'being'. However, he offers and endorses a second, much 'weaker' notion of creation. It can also be regarded as breathing life into what already is there — giving meaning to, and confirming elements that already exist (Biesta, 2015, p. 40). De Bono, in his book *'The Five Thinking Hats'* (1993), describes the meaning of the word 'creativity' as to establish, or to create 'something new'. He refers to 'something new' as a complicated notion, because 'new' can be a true novelty —a concept or invention that didn't exist before— or something existing in a new application. Biesta here, from a totally different perspective, joins up with De Bono's latter proposition of the notion of 'creating something new'. Biesta and de Bono offer an important proposal with their less mystical notion of creativity. Can the demystification of creativity provide students with a more graspable and tangible notion of creation, instead of them only hoping their inherent talent will deliver them spontaneous and original ideas time and time again?

De Bono (1993) states that if we do not make the effort of developing the skill that is called creativity, it can *only* be a matter of talent or personality, which resonates with the current neoliberal culture I outlined in chapter 1. *"[...] Good design results from 'the unexpected relevant solution, not wackiness parading as originality."* (Lawson, 2006). This is may be harsh remark to students without a slight touch of irony, but what is a student's idea of being creative? →

"Clients do want designers to transcend the obvious and the mundane [...]" (Cross, 2015). Does that mean finding the right solution for a design problem, or being original all the time? If the latter is a student's opinion, it's an unrealistic strive. When people have to think of someone being a creative person, they often do this by using judgement values like 'intelligence' or 'talent' [for the intuitive]. De Bono disputes this 'passive gift' and expresses the need to create a self-image, as an act of skill, to think of yourself as a 'thinker' and to make the *act of thinking* as a chosen 'intention' (De Bono, 1993). De Bono, Lawson and Cross, state that the 'occurrence' of creativity may very well be facilitated by a decisive effort. I therefore suggest a more tangible understanding of the 'value' of creativity, not as a fixed ability, talent or goal in itself. I state that design didactics should be based on the notion that 'being creative' is something that can actually be trained and developed. For our students, 'creativity', or even 'originality' may become regarded a *side-effect* of committing themselves to find a design solution, especially if they are made metacognitively aware of this by promoting (re)searching and associating. Centralising effort helps to address the tendency of students to cling to their first idea as well— a suppressive tendency surrounding the creative process: the primary generator. "[...] We do have a tendency to look for definitive, 'smart' solutions." (de Bono, 1993). Both Cross and Lawson write about this tendency in terms of a 'primary generator' in the early stages of the design process. It narrows down the range of possible solutions and helps to construct and analyse a scheme: analysis through synthesis. "[...] It can be difficult to reject these early thoughts, even against insurmountable odds. That's when creativity gets really important." (Rowe, 1987 in: Lawson, 2006). There is a noticeable awareness of 'risk' of the primary generator in all interviewees —especially the 'older' students claim that they certainly know that the first idea is quite often not the best. Actively 'freezing' the primary generator and engaging the next 'step' in the design process is considered important to get to other ideas. Many designers draw upon a repertoire of precedents, of images and recollections of other objects that help them to make analogies (Cross, 2015). This is where often a challenge lies in training students

on this level of education; although at first it seems time consuming —especially under pressure— widening your scope is filling your head with possibilities and experience to help you associate and reconnect to concepts —even unexpectedly. The acceptance of the fact that there can be more alternatives, is a fundamental part of creative thinking (De Bono, 1993). Only whilst in this process students can start to evaluate ideas by rerunning them by the design brief and design parameters. Students and teachers can now affirm or discard where to put effort next by negotiated argumentation instead of 'sheer taste', a personal gut feeling of 'originality' or intuition —also very large concepts.

Furthermore, at the very centre of my argument, a change of focus after intense thinking effort —incubation time— very likely leads to ideas. Incubation is a period of relaxation following the hard work, preceding the appearance of a good idea: illumination —the sudden, 'magical eureka'. The incubation period drew my attention, because I don't remember it explicitly mentioned anywhere in my own design education and processes, let alone in the processes of my students. This incubation period doesn't have to mean you do nothing, but you can also put a particular search to rest and work on other things (Kneller 1965, in Lawson 2006, pp.148-150). During my research I found that for many students and fellow MEiA-students and tutors it comprises of 'letting go' or at one point freeing yourself from 'serious' intentions or limitations. The 'aha-moments' and the circumstances under which they appear were confirmed by my students, as well as by myself during this MEiA course. I can fairly say that ideas popping up (for example a-ha's, shower thoughts) is not a question of 'if', but of 'when', if preceded by investing in a concentrated thinking effort. It is even a quite dependable occurrence. The only thing that remains an uncertain factor is the timing of this occurrence.

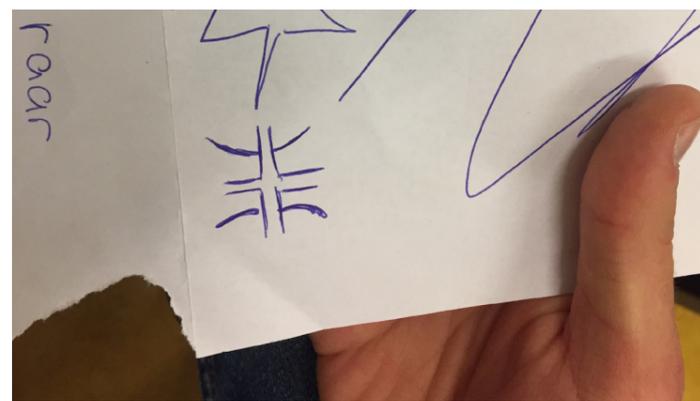
—Recording: WORKSHOP CREATIVE RITUALS_LPADO17MB_MINIMOCK_15 OCT. 2019.M4A

'Definite signs (Yeah!!!!) of the theory that good ideas arise after breaking away from the work after a period of intense work!'

(24'30") Merel de Waal and Marieke (24'52") start to talk about things they heard about working hard on something and then leaving it to rest. "Your brain can process it." says Merel, "Than you can link things". I ask: "Who can recognise themselves in this?" Almost everyone: "Yes!"

—Photos: BLOCK TEST, PERSONAL SYMBOL, 1ST YEAR, NOVEMBER 2019

Alan: "I just got this idea on the toilet!"



I asked Nanne to send me an e-mail testifying of his 'night sleep': "I woke up this morning and I had an idea. When I fleshed it out I thought: This is it."

ochtend inspiratie



Nanne van de Wege

Wo 6-11-2019 09:02

Rob Wieringa



Ik werd vanmorgen wakker, en ik had een idee. En toen ik hem had uitgewerkt dacht ik: "Dit is hem."

'DEMISTIFYING' THE CREATIVE PROCESS (2)—'EXPERIMENT' SHOULD REPLACE 'CREATIVITY' IN DESIGN DIDACTICAL DISCOURSE

Next to the decisive 'thinking posture', I suggest a 'decision' to put in *experimental effort* as well. I've pointed out that centralising how one will regard the self-image of a creative thinker is important especially with judgement values such as talent and intelligence involved. Here Dweck's self-theories again become current (chapter 1.3). The complex uncertain

process of designing can be faced with holding out an 'incremental mindset'^[3], a (problem) mastery response (Dweck, 2000). In this case this comprises the (self-) instruction of (re)searching and students getting themselves informed, of finding and combining ideas, deriving, putting things together. Attempting without regarding errors as failure, but as an integral part of experimenting to find a solution is essential for students to confront the inherent uncertainty and failure. "John Baldessari advises his students: 'Art comes out of failure. You have to try things out. You can't sit around, terrified of being incorrect, saying 'I won't do anything until I do a masterpiece!'" (Le Feuvre, 2010, p. 14).

[3] Dweck draws important conclusions when it comes to people that endorse a fixed opinion on intelligence. She states that the personal notion of intelligence is not about inherent measured IQ, but about how one attributes intelligence to one's own (intellectual) ability.

People with a notion of fixed intelligence and thus (their) ability she calls entity-theorists. They are likely to display a helpless response to difficulties [and failure]. In contrast, people with a notion of malleable intelligence, she calls incremental theorists, are likely to show a mastery response, because they see overcoming difficulties as an opportunity to enhance their abilities. "[students with a master-oriented response] were not seeing failure as an indictment of themselves, and so the risk for them was not great."

[The mastery-oriented group] didn't blame anything. They didn't focus on reasons for the failures. In fact they didn't even consider themselves to be failing. (Ch. 2, p19-20).

[...] Nothing in their words or actions indicated that they thought this was anything more than a problem to be tackled. [...] Almost all of the students in the mastery-oriented group engaged in some form of self-instruction or self-monitoring designed to aid their performance; almost none of the students in the helpless group did this. (Ch. 2, p21)

MAKING STUDENTS METACOGNITIVELY AWARE AS A DIDACTICAL METHODOLOGY

—Iteration: ASSIGNMENT '1+1=3', INFORMING ON CREATIVE EFFORT, 3RD YEAR STUDENTS, 27-11-2019 THROUGH 11-12-2019

I started to regularly disclose my theories on experimental effort to the students and colleagues and have conversations and discussions, but one cluster of assignments turned out to be pivotal in regard to this area of interest. These assignments were part of the third year design course curriculum. It is the assignment '1+1=3' in combination with a logo redesign assignment and the Block Test^[4], running in the period from roughly medio November to the end of January. Especially in this phase of their education they are to develop their conceptual skills, now they usually are quite far in terms of practical and technical skills. In all these exercises I put emphasis on conception and research, more than end result. It turned out to be a magnifying glass for the creativity issues I've sketched in this chapter.

I started to use the metacognitive instruction on creativity and experiment in the so-called '1+1=3' assignment, Students in this exercise should combine two self-sought images/ concepts to form a new, third media design with a semiotic

that "shocks, provokes, stimulates or excites"—just a 'funny' combination of two concepts is not enough. It should contain a new, deeper message. Overall students were positive and liked the assignment,

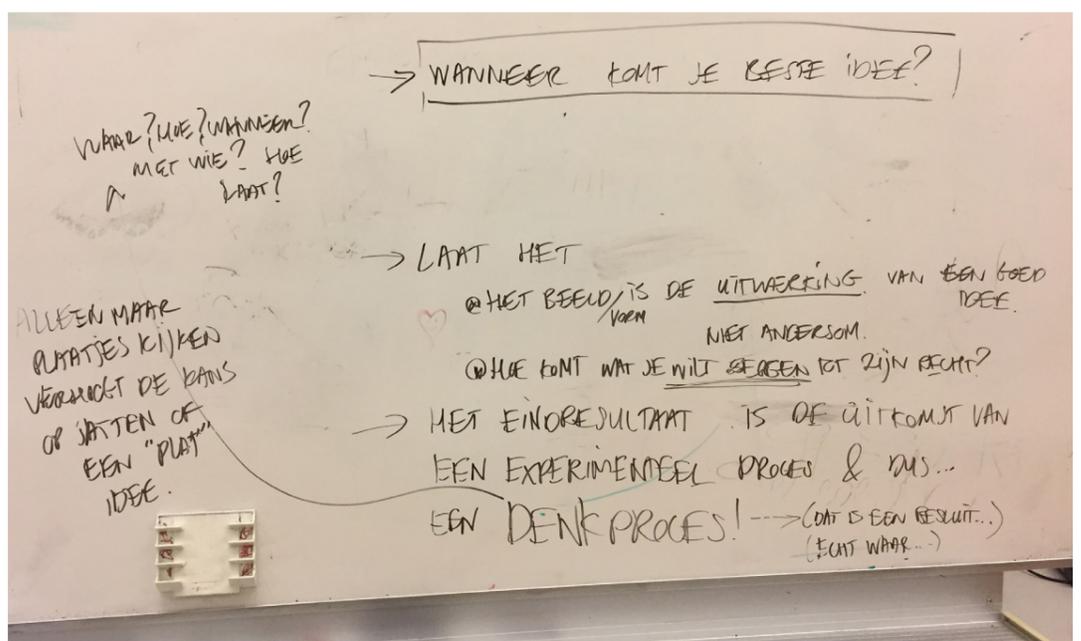
[4] A so-called 'Block Test' is a large assignment at the end of each quarter (a 'Block'), where students can use the skills and knowledge they've gained during the design and software courses. The assignment therefore contains many of the aspects covered in the 'regular' courses. Although assessed, the goal is essentially about repetition and (self) diagnostics. Students are stimulated to ask feedback and technical aid. Block Tests are usually very popular and students' motivation is high during these periods.

I state that *experiment* should overall replace 'creativity' in design didactical discourse to stimulate effort and investment in finding alternatives. Where 'creativity' to students might resonate with a more mythical and sudden occurrence—not in the realm of control—, 'experimenting' has a more controlled, iterative, laboratory-like connotation, an investment in effort. Even more important, experimentation implicitly leaves room for failure as a natural consequence of trying. It incorporates the search for alternatives and fleshing out until you've arrived at the best option.

Shifting discourse from 'creativity' to 'experiment' is gradually being adopted by my colleagues as well. This for me implies that they subscribe this discourse. Unfortunately in this research trajectory I haven't been able to see the direct effects of introducing this new discourse on students' feeling of freedom and a investment in effort—something I maybe expected to 'measure' at the start of my research trajectory. I however like to regard it not only as a literal change of words, but more a general didactic intention; the actual underlying goal. In that sense the replacement certainly is taking effect.

but they also testified of finding these semiotics very difficult and often they ran aground and even sometimes lost their motivation when they got stuck. I noticed many students became stressed, because they couldn't think up a concept immediately that was both satisfying and original. Many of the first ideas and concepts proved to be 'shallow' combinations. In this case it was frustrating for them, because of the examples I provided and the 'depth' of ideas that was asked.

I then decided to rigorously inform them of my research through a lecture on how ideas form, and what the use is of investment in thinking and effort. I said: "I've noticed that many students want the fastest idea, to feel relaxed and have SOMETHING. It might however not be the BEST idea!" Unfortunately I didn't record it but below an impression of my schoolboard notes (translated on the next page) framing the group discussion we had. →



—group discussion: TWO GROUPS, +/- 35 STUDENTS IN TOTAL

When do you get your best idea?

Just before going to sleep, whilst showering or being in the toilet

We established that intentional effort is necessary. I informed them of the primary generator. *Getting a first idea and clinging on to it is quite natural occurrence, it is called the primary generator.*

How can you expect from yourself to get your BEST SUITABLE IDEA

immediately time and time again? That's not how it works. Do not panic if it doesn't work immediately.

Realise where, how when with whom, how late do you get your ideas?

[take time to] let ideas 'ripen'

Let school have its function, and let other circumstances have their own function as well. (I here referred to the workshop creative rituals I gave with one half of this group. I'll come back to this in chapter 4.)

The image [the assignment product] is the developed result of a good conception, not vice versa; how do you make your message 'shine'?

The end result is the outcome of an experimental process, a THINKING process. To think is a decision, truly.

'Just' looking at images [of other designers on the internet] alone [without rethinking], may lead to 'stealing' or a 'flat' idea.

Students really tried to invest thinking-effort before 'making'. They were positive and liked the assignment (see examples at the end of this chapter). The fact that this assignment dares students to make a statement that is provocative really helped the effort. Also in coaching students in this assignment, I've really tried to stimulate a mastery-orientated mindset and deliberate thinking. It seems it worked out. There were definite signs of a metacognitive shift towards 'decisive thinking', away from the pressure to be 'original, immediately'. In comparison: my direct colleague, of whom I know that he didn't really didactically steer on this decisive effort of experimentation, told me that the results of his group were of less quality.

Below some of the reactions I've received on this methodology.

—Anonymous survey: 3rd YEAR STUDENTS ON THIRD YEAR DESIGN COURSE METHODOLOGY

"During a number of lessons you told about how your brain works when you want to come up with an idea. I found this interesting and also

helped me not to immediately expect myself to have a fantastic idea."

"[...] I have thought a lot about your assignments, some of them also discussed outside of school with family and friends [...]"

"Certainly something has changed with me in coming up with ideas and this is mainly due to the daring to drop good ideas and to look further into whether there are more."

—Iteration: ASSIGNMENT 'VISUAL RESTYLING' 3RD YEAR STUDENTS

Another assignment for these students was to redesign the logo, visual identity and photography used by an existing company. After analysing it meticulously first and relating it to the target group and company history, they then first had to think about arguments why and how to improve or redesign these products. Only then they could start to make the actual redesign. Although essentially an assignment based on the didactical concept of 'reversed engineering', I emphasised that I would assess particularly the (thinking) effort and argumentation and deliberately postponing the 'immediate making'. This way I tried to induce a metacognitive perspective and to stimulate the act of researching. Quite some of my students mentioned this restyling assignment as having been very instructive. Some remarks also indicated that they transfer their 'acquired' strategies to other assignments and courses.

—Anonymous survey: 3rd YEAR STUDENTS ON COURSE METHODOLOGY

"Yes, the assignment whereby we had to restyle the corporate identity of a company [stood out for me, this Block]. Because of this assignment I started designing logos differently. I especially noticed this during my 'Artotheek' Block Test. I see in myself that I have grown into making different sketches for a logo. I still had trouble here in the first year."

"The assignment of restyling a corporate identity was an instructive assignment for me. This because I was forced by this assignment to figure out the choices of another designer and to see which choices I think are and are not good. In addition, the assignment 1 + 1 = 3 has also led me to work in more experimental way."

Hence, I can witness some positive effects of the importance to make students metacognitively aware of the use of decisive thinking effort. I also feel that, if sustained, these methodologies can shift basic design strategies of students.

STIMULATING EXPERIMENTAL EFFORT INSTEAD OF CREATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENT

During my research I hoped to find a link between a notion of fixed *intelligence* (Dweck, 2000) and students regarding *creativity* as a fixed ability, as a part of their personality or as a fixed talent you're born with. Although I've theorised about it in the 'ground work' leading up to the research, this coining, however, yet remains inconclusive. One senior student, for example, thought that [creative] talent was a fixed ability, and only recently changed her mind. However, in the surveys I've conducted in my first year group there seemed to be no immediate signs of them regarding creativity a fixed 'trait'. Although many students regard creativity as a 'mystical' occurrence, they think that matters such as (general) creativity and talent are nevertheless malleable, and able to be developed. I therefore didn't detect a very direct relation between Dweck's self-theories and *creative* self-theories.

In any case, the basic recommendation of Dweck certainly remains. Next to only informing students on the use of experimental effort, it remains important to coach students on this mindset throughout their work. The helpless response of fleeing and freezing is a continuous lurking danger. Praising effort and therefore self-esteem evokes a mastery-oriented response: a persistence, linked to the notion of a malleable intelligence. The implications are also really recognisable in the motivational approaches and tactics I myself often use,

but wasn't really substantively aware of until now. During the course of my research I've tried try to emphasize on praising effort even more than usual. It already sorted positive effect to a point of reaching Dweck's next step in incremental thinking: self motivating instructions. In the third year student surveys I had, to gather comments on my methodology, I could definitely mark out signs that students start to self-direct a creative process, and actively start to engage the primary generator.

—Anonymous survey: 3rd YEAR STUDENTS ON DESIGN COURSE METHODOLOGY

"I guess I wanted to work for this [course], so that automatically there will be progress in terms of creativity and stuff." "[I now] just read the assignment first and let it sink in without immediately expecting [myself] to get a good idea, but keep working on it."

Effort as a condition for result instead of only focusing on the end result: *"Certainly something has changed for me in coming up with ideas and this is mainly due to the ability to drop good ideas and to look further into whether there are more."*

To motivate experimentation (and to name it cautiously: curiosity), you have to praise the effort, rather than the result. This informs the way how teachers should formulate goals and give feedback. In general, this approach joins up with coaching students towards task-involvement rather than ego-involvement (Juwah et al., 2014). The next chapter, about demystifying attribution, links these notions mentioned here to the practical realm of negotiation, feedback, assessment and self-instruction. ◉



Religion is (force) fed from a very young age -even unintentionally (the look on the mothers' face isn't 'angry')—Ivan Lette



Wargames —Vera Benders

DEMISTIFYING ATTRIBUTION —NEGOTIATION AND FEEDBACK AS STRATEGIES TO PROVIDE METACOGNITIVE SELF-DIRECTION AND AGENCY TO ACT



3

In my field notebook I recorded a 'negotiation' between me and a 4th grade student. Student 'L', talked about what makes her feel uncertain when she is designing and what degrades her self-confidence. The fact that she knows that eventually she will have to present her work, keeps her from feeling 'free' throughout her entire creative process, even in the very first stages. This explained to me some of her behaviour during the last years at school —much procrastination, not discussing her work, missing many deadlines, always regarding her work as 'not good enough' compared the work of others. I was very happy she finally felt our relationship was trustworthy enough to address this problem. I decided to lift the source of her pressure, and suggested an opportunity to her to make the end result subordinate to her personal design process and idea development: I offered her to not present her work. She ended up with a satisfactory result, which in the end she even voluntarily presented after all.

Inspired by this sort of situations and the first step in the 'cycle of Korthagen' I came across in a coaching course^[1], I introduce *negotiation* —and subsequently *dialogue* and *feedback*— as a way to reduce 'large' concepts (such as 'creativity') within the realm of control and agency of students. Through dialogue sources of (external) pressure become tangible, isolated and redirected into realistic opportunities and goals. By making expectations explicit and mutually established by both student(s) and teacher, especially when it comes to the experimental stages of the design process, '(self-)trust' is less dependent on 'general' confidence and more on students attaining agency to try things. This actually opens them up to taking risk within this mutually agreed, specific 'framework'. The dialogue, both in class as in one-on-one coaching and tutoring has a stimulating effect because it invites students to act, or feel able to control aspects they attributed externally before. It underlines the need of a 'shared control' in order to make students an actor in their own development.

[1] *The cycle of Korthagen is a methodology for systematical reflection in coaching situations. It aids to reflect on learning in regard to behaviour, competences and actions. In a coaching dialogue following the 'cycle of Korthagen', the first step is making a so-called 'contract' between the coach and the coachee at the start of a counseling session, what the subject(s) of the coaching dialogue will be. It defines the mutual purpose and expectations of the conversation for the participants. Both coach and coachee have influence on this contract.*

I came to realise the central position of feedback within this shared control. In many cases, however, instead of an exchange of information, feedback is regarded by students as either a convenient 'medical pill' for receiving ready solutions when 'you're stuck', or, even worse, as a moment of assessment only to receive when 'you're finished' to a certain measure. Focusing on assessment or grading tends to induce *ego-involvement* instead of *task-involvement* (Jawah et al., 2004, p. 12), which can restrict students in attempting to master an intrinsic problem or skill. Simultaneously, very often there seems to be a taboo on asking things. Students are shy, feel stupid or are too much used to teachers that say: "Try out yourself first". There is a complex and sometimes contradictory mix in attribution involved —as a consequence of the performance issues I've mentioned in chapter 1.1. 'Good' feedback therefore is crucial.

By turning these students' conceptions inside out I've intended to 'demystify attribution'. "What do you do for whom?" "What do you expect to learn and how does that relate to assessment, presenting, exposing or exchanging information?" These are essentially questions that stimulate metacognition and internal attribution of responsibility and action. Even very 'direct' feedback is totally acceptable for students as long as the feedback is based on sound argumentation and a setting and content that allows for dialogue and meaningful debate. This setting, especially in regard to this age group and level, holds an equal 'status' of teacher and student —a qualitative relationship.

Apart from reflecting on methodologies which revolve around self-direction within the learning process through students' metacognitive reflection, in this chapter I also reflect on various feedback settings and ways of assessing and presenting work. In these situations pressure to succeed, agency, judgement, attribution and confidence may become a delicate mixture.

(SELF-)ASSESSMENT AND GRADING, A MATTER OF OBJECTIVE

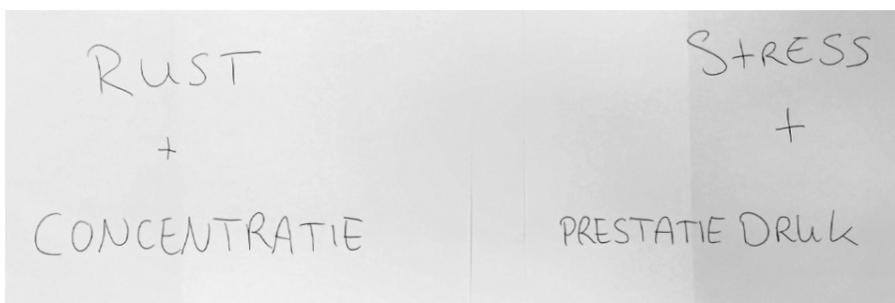
How do these particular students define their own success? 'Sheer' assessment or grading perhaps came to be regarded as a 'one way' conclusion or judgement of success or performance. This might partly explain why some students who focus on performance, for example generally experience less pressure during internships: there are simply no day-to-day assignments that will be graded. Internships are much more a matter of longer term development and getting 'embedded' in your work. Sadly enough, these students become stressed on a very 'deep' level when they return to school, in spite of their very positive feelings towards our pedagogical and didactical atmosphere —it is *school*, an embodiment of all these students' intrinsic associations with a system of judgement of performance (chapter 1.3). Although students know exactly how much effort was put in, the actual assessment for some students is a moment of reckoning they seem to regard beyond their control. It's something they 'receive' and they hope the teacher will 'aim right or too high'. Even giving high grades to stimulate students —being too nice?— can have an averse effect, especially when they are still inexperienced, as one of my students testified to my surprise:

—Recorded interview: INTERVIEW WITH JOYCE B., 4TH YEAR STUDENT

"Because you had a string of successes, I thought: next time I have to get a high grade again! And if you get it again, you want to get one again the next time...

During the course of the years it of course starts to [get very exhausting]" (Joyce)

She claims lower grades, especially at the start of her education, would have been better because she'd feel they could [still] improve. Constantly striving for high grades is very stressful.



Above: a note from student Amber, comparing internship (left: "rest + concentration"), and school (right: "stress + pressure to perform"). This note was part of her brainstorm for a design assignment where students were asked to visually compare school and internships

—Field notebook: ONE-ON-ONE FEEDBACK SETTING, ASSESSING TOGETHER WITH STUDENTS, 3RD YEAR STUDENTS, TECHNICAL GRAPHIC ASSIGNMENT, 09-10-2019

'Chayenne and Joyce v P. are almost incapable of self-assessing their work. They found this very strange or uncomfortable. "I am not the one to judge. It always is possible to improve, so how can I tell if it's good?" Me, responding in these conversations in words like: "Have you experimented to an extent, that you can say: I did my very best?" ... "So how isn't this a 'good', then?" ... "Oh shall I give a lower grade then? Why? Or why not?" ... "Is this too low?" We ended up with a grade that was satisfactory.'

My responses in this assessment conversation reminded me of other positive experiences I had in the past with portfolio conversations. I realised that I have been practicing self-assessment already for years, although in a more general, reflective manner. Already for a long time it stood out to me that in most cases there is at most a marginal difference between what the student thinks of their work and the grades or assessment you had in mind as a teacher.

—portfolio conversation: MICK ON SELF-GRADING, SELF CRITIQUE AND MOTIVATION, 1ST YEAR.

Reflective conversation concerning low grades for some language courses. Me: *"It is not my job to repeat the fact that you got a higher or lesser grade for something. In your case: you know where it came from. You have quite high grades except for the courses you weren't interested in. We've also established that it was a matter of choice, and not of capability. So I have nothing to do, except pointing it out."*

—recorded class conversation: STEPHAN ON SELF-GRADING ASSIGNMENT 'AM I THERE YET?', 4TH YEAR.

"You don't want to hear all the time: 'You have still have to do this and this and this.' [...] You know it yourself. Of course you know yourself what you still have to know [and learn]."

Students are perfectly capable of 'judging' their own invested effort. Why need a redundant and estimated guess in the form of a teachers' grade?

However, students tend to attribute their incentive for effort on 'ideal effect' only, especially in regard to the generation Z-issues I've mentioned (chapter 1.3). A little overstated: if success is not easily attainable or perhaps seems a too long term investment, a task has at least to be 'fun'. This is in essence an external → attribution (also chapter 1.3). I here want to coin that being very

clear about the assignments' intent actually helps to induce effort by intentionally blurring the line between fun and useful —'marrying' a task's function and objective. As long as I point out the specific 'use' of certain assignments, it seems students 'like' assignments better. Even when I'm frank about an assignment being a rather 'dull', difficult or tedious exercise, but I emphasise that it is essential for training purposes—for example repetition, meticulously looking and researching—students in the end tend to call the exercise more 'fun', when they actually have the feeling they did something 'useful'. Amongst others, student Mick and I talked about my thoughts about the difference between fun and useful. He actually thought I was right. Mick also points out that by mastering something 'difficult' or less 'fun', the feeling of finishing or mastering it—or even just being able to put it behind you, for that matter—is a positive experience and thus can be a resource for motivation. This remark clearly resonates with Dweck's 'mastery response.

Though (all!) students apparently can assess their own effort, teachers, however, most certainly have to coach students in the way they distribute or prioritise their effort. This is where negotiation, feedback and self-assessment become of essence, maybe even more in the dynamic design practice.

In most cases assessment goals are provided by the teacher. It is important to share these goals up front, so that students know what to adhere their effort to (Biesta, 2015). Going a step further by involving students in the 'fabric' of the assignment concept by informing, negotiation, (self-) assessing and feedback I found to be very fruitful. Also, providing elements of choice for students within assignments is something that really starts to pick up in our school. This resonates seamlessly with the suggestions made in *Enhancing Student Learning Through Effective Formative Feedback* by Juwah, C. et al (2004), a document I've already referred to quite often, but particularly of major importance to me regarding this thematic. A metacognitive dialogue, and not a cognitive monologue, stimulates students task-involvement.

Finally, I suggest flexible feedback settings to provide a democratic learning process where possible and room for resubmission of improved work on the basis of this qualitative feedback—the latter not a very common practice in our school, yet. *"The only way to tell if learning results from feedback is for students to make some kind of response to complete the feedback loop (Sadler, 1989). This is one of the most often forgotten aspects of formative assessment. Unless students are able to use the feedback to produce improved work, through for example, redoing the same assignment, neither they nor those giving the feedback will know that it has been effective (Boud, 2000, p158)."* (Juwah et al., 2004, p. 9). Unfortunately, let alone some minor exceptions in some design course assignments, I wasn't able to substantially iterate this aspect within this research trajectory and our current curriculum.

The next paragraph is fundamentally based on using these notions to let students take control of their own learning. In a course methodology me and a colleague developed we very much try to close the gap between the intended *function* of the assignment and assessment goal; mapping out where you are at this point in time and what you think you still need to learn.

Right: the pictures show some slides from the "Am I there, yet" presentations. Above a student explains the projects that have been important in regard to her development. The quotes in yellow respectively say: 'Never had this much consultation' and 'the process is more important than the end result'. In this case she refers to an assignment mentioned in chapter one where she had to redesign a logo (reversed engineering).

STUDENTS' SELF-DIRECTION IN DESIGN EXERCISES — ANALYSING SELF-PROPELLED PROCESSES

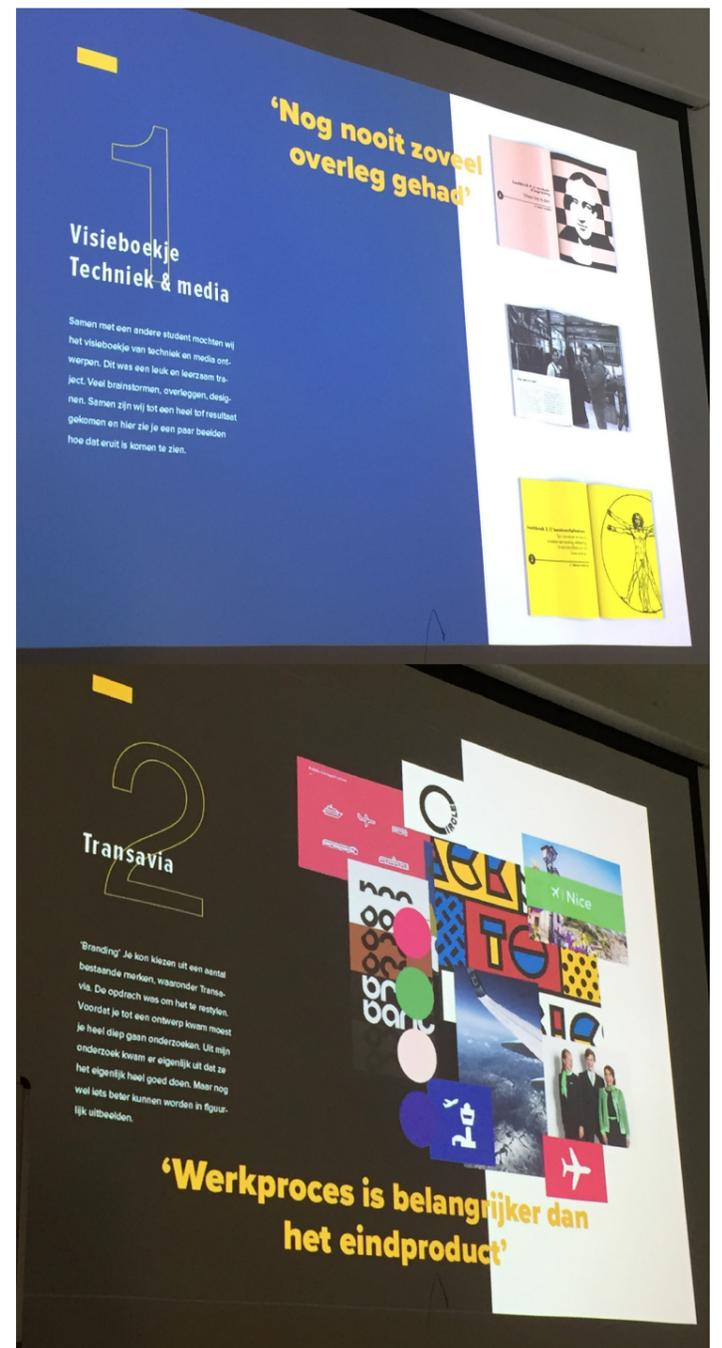
—Iteration: 'INTERACTIVE' PRE-EXAM COURSE METHODOLOGY, 4TH GRADE, OCTOBER TO FEBRUARY

Firstly, I would like to bring forward the specific didactic strategy me and my colleague Diny van Rosmalen applied during the course 'Graphic Design Differentiation' in 2018-19, which involved 4th grade students in their last half year at school, before they go on their final internship. It is a methodology that consist of a 'string' of assignments where students metacognitively 'shape' and choose their own emphasis. We provide an aspect of dialogue, negotiation and personal control to the assignments we gave, guided by questions like: "What do you still need to learn? What assignment of choice do you think would aid you to accomplish that?" This school year 2019-20 we've continued this methodology with a larger number of colleagues, and now including all media design students—not only Graphic Design, but also Interactive Design, Audiovisual and Applied Art.

The tone of voice of this course is that we equip them for their final exam and that we explicitly want to make them feel secure in regard to their abilities. The approach was initially directed around two assignments; the first was about *defining* the personal didactic need students had, and the second about *practicing* this specific need. After these two assignments students have a large pre-exam training exercise, where there was also much attention for personal trajectories.

The first assignment was called "Ben je er al?" (tr. "Are you there, yet?"). In this assignment they had to present a number of products they made during their education so far, they were 'proud' of. At the same time we asked them to reflect on abilities they still regarded as not entirely developed, or stages in the design process they still felt insecure about. The second assignment consisted of a number of possible exercises for the students to pick from. Originally, these excersises were developed by Diny and myself— they were directly informed by the students needs expressed in the first assignment. Some were more directed towards conceptualisation, others more about the divergent phase of the design process, etc. It was a deliberate act to give them this choice to pick a certain excersize, although based on their own reflective arguments. A natural consequence was that this self-control also provided students with personal *responsibility*. By mapping out what they felt they still have to learn, students don't only choose what they 'like', but also think about what they *need*. It is therefore not an opportunistic choice, but a metacognitively induced one, based not only on 'fun' but also on 'usefulness'. As teachers we also had an advising role, for example when students weren't sure which exercise to choose.

In regard to my research, I was looking for the following signals: are there indications of a mastery response, feeling more at ease, etc., etc.? How did they feel about this self-direction of learning goals? The course played out very well. The result was that the students felt free to explore options within their self-directed assignment. They were focused on their own self-formulated learning goals and generally put a lot of effort in it. It helped in creating a very positive (peer) group atmosphere. The class attendance was high and some effusively remarked: "These are actually the only lessons we like to come to school for." I however can't distinguish if our strategy was the only factor in achieving this positive result. It is an important course, at the core of their profession, especially this close to their final exam. Also, the already existing (positive) relationship we have with these students could have been of influence. Nevertheless, it seems to have induced task-involvement. In this next anecdote testifies of how this self-directed effort helped to combine motivation, having fun and doing something useful. These and other students claimed it brought them back to why they've chosen creative education in the first place, before it became an issue of performance.



—Recorded interview: INTERVIEW WITH DAPHNE AND JOYCE B., 4TH YEAR STUDENTS, REFLECTING ON METHODOLOGY; 'REINVENTING' FUN AND USEFUL

Both Daphne and Joyce testify of the positive effects of the fourth grade methodology:

Ben ik er al?

Daphne: "If 'Am I there, yet?' hadn't been there (the first assignment to direct your choice for the second 'interactive' assignment), I wouldn't have chosen the [experimental, free] assignment. [... I would have thought:] "That is artistic! I will just go and do a graphic design"

In other words these girls (and many other students) would have chosen along the path of what they know and "play it safe".

Me: "Should we implement this methodology sooner in this education?"

Daphne: "Yes and no... Maybe in one way it is good that you learn things this way [by hitting your head]."

I've discussed the methodology of the last half year with students on several occasions, discussions, interviews and surveys. They all noticed the positive effect on their learning. Other signals I detected were more search for dialogue with teachers about the experimental process, and more 'attachment' to work. In the next paragraph I will elaborate on these and other feedback conversations.



On the left an introduction slide from a student, which nicely visualises the central thematic of the assignment, with words and phrases such as: 'Yes? Yes![] Is it right like this, Approval, Delete and Ready'.

FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT SETTINGS —CREATING DIALOGUE ROUTINES

For many years in our school we have portfolio conversations. These conversations are part of our regular curriculum. I've mentioned these quite often in this thesis. These are one-on-one coaching sessions, four times a year, where a student's development and motivation is discussed with their mentor. Students are also very aware of this essential routine in the process of becoming self-directing in their learning. In my opinion these dialogues are at the very core of education, and I can not imagine having to do without these moments of absolute pedagogical quality time. Much of this chapter might well be

informed by my positive experiences^[2].

[2] I've worked in other school systems where portfolio conversations played a central part in the pedagogical and didactical vision. I first came into contact with these conversations over a decade ago in a secondary school endorsing the 'natural learning' methodology. In this case students were around 13 years old, VMBO-LWOO level. Although I'm not a 'convicted believer' of the overall methodology, having these conversations with pupils on their development were really inspiring, and it certainly influenced my own pedagogical views.

In this paragraph, however, I want to review some other settings I've iterated during design courses. I started to see that these settings started to 'draw in' students. In the cases below I even noticed students becoming assertive about getting feedback, probably because of the routine, setting and nature of how these conversation structures were embedded in design course didactical methodology —students start to internalise feedback routines. These signals resonate

with the signals I hoped to find in regard to students seeking dialogue, a mastery response and acting in their own learning.

—Field notebook: MEREL, ANECDOTE ON FEEDBACK AND NEGOTIATION INSTIGATING SELF-PROPELLED PROCESS, 20 AND 22-1-2020

Merel and I were (finally) talking about that she always tries to avoid discussing her work. We set out discussing her work and the process behind it and she loosened up quite a bit and started to talk very openly about her motivations. Halfway through the conversation we got into why she avoids talking with teachers. Merel: *"I always want to try things out myself. Unfortunately the result always is disappointing (!), but I want to try myself."* It seems she think that talking about your work (with a teacher?) threatens her autonomy, or that asking for help means being 'offered' ready solutions that aren't hers, but she feels she must accept. Me: *"I understand that, but the one thing doesn't have to rule out the other. You could discuss the 'trying' itself."* She agreed. After this we went on discussing her process. We had a very open conversation and I constantly focused on *negotiating* what she felt contributive steps to take next and we constantly referred these steps to the logic of design methodology. The nicest thing happened, because the next class meeting on the 22nd she voluntary asked for a next feedback session. In the end she finished her project with a result she found very satisfactory.

Another feedback setting iteration was one a colleague of mine introduced. We gathered in groups of about 4-5 students and one teacher. These students discuss their work together and with me. Although some students were a bit reluctant at first, they later on became quite used to it and presented their work with more ease. Some groups were befriended already, some groups I formed with students that didn't know each other that well. I like to think that it didn't really matter in general. Perhaps in befriended groups students responded with slightly more ease in conversation. In other groups they however presented slightly more serious.

—Field notebook: PEER-TUTORIAL IN SMALL GROUPS (4-5) ON ASSIGNMENT 'NORTH SEA JAZZ', 4TH YEAR STUDENTS, DEC 2019

"Today three students voluntary sought feedback on their assignment. (I was in another class, but shortly stood in for a colleague). They gathered as a group! (normally they waited their turn: 'in and out') Now we sat down as a group immediately. Even the most (formerly) reluctant student (Johedy) stayed in this group and presented his work! New in this group was Tyrese, but last week (5 december) he was also part of another group-session.

First up was Merwe. When she was finished, she stayed in the group. They decided themselves to make it a group discussion and learn from each other. I asked them to think about why they like this way of working, even though some didn't at first. When we still were sitting down, Dara also wanted to join the group voluntarily, but I had to go..."

—Field notebook: PEER-TUTORIAL IN SMALL GROUPS (4-5) ON ASSIGNMENT 'NORTH SEA JAZZ' 4TH YEAR STUDENTS, 23-1-2019 GROUP.

It was a recurrence of the groups session earlier reported (present: Tyrese, Louisa, Donovan, Timo, Johedy, Peter (teacher) and me.

The group was used to this method from the other session. Timo and Tyrese noted that they were actually there to 'just' listen in, just to be part of the session (!)

[...]Johedy was reluctant the rest of the year, but he now actually to centre stage with a terrific presentation. His argumentation was very good, and he showed how he used the design process. Also Donovan exchanges his concepts. We reacted on this together and I could explain the difference between concept and look 'n' feel.

What I very much like about these settings, I that is combines the relative safe and less confronting small scale atmosphere with the sharing of multiple opinions. In compiling reciprocal and complementary group combinations there are endless variations in conversation emphases possible. Also, when the circumstances allow for it, these small group settings can very efficient in respect to both one-on-one conversations as large scale classroom presenting and feedback.

—Iteration: ASSESSING TOGETHER WITH STUDENTS, 3RD YEAR STUDENTS, TECHNICAL GRAPHIC ASSIGNMENT

Some one-on-one feedback conversations turned into self-assessments when I was going over the submitted assignments in class while they were working on the next assignment, and I wanted to clarify my findings and remarks to individual students. I needed to point out some technical details to some students that were easier to show and discuss than 'just' grade. Also I asked them to clarify decisions and their general method on how they approached the assignment. In the end I was going over it with most students and some started asking for a 'session'. I noted in my fieldbook for example: *"Esther asked: "Can you review my work with me as well, please? It hadn't been my turn, yet, last week."* In quite a few cases I started to let them grade themselves to attach the grade to how they themselves feel they had approached the assignment and how they felt their effort had been. I now grade and assess more often together with students.

—Anonymous survey: CLASS SURVEY ON ASSESSING AND FEEDBACK, 3RD YEAR

Quite some students apparently noticed an increase in critically reviewing each others' work, both individually and in a group. The first question of the inquiry was: *"Have there been any issues in my way of teaching in the past six months - classically or individually - that have brought you anything?"* By far most respondents were positive on these didactical methodologies.

"Personally, I have not noticed much [change in your way of teaching] compared to other years, only maybe the class is more involved in things and personal opinions are discussed more. I like this very much, because I have the feeling that school is about more than just submitting assignments." "[...] Also I think it is great that you usually discuss all assignments in class, so that we as students and the teacher can discuss each other's work and give feedback."

"More often, together with the entire class, we look critically at each other's work, where you learn a lot from each other"

THE **VULNERABILITY** OF HAVING TO
PRESENT WORK:
IS IT **COMPARING** OR IS IT
SHARING?

One student remarked in an interview: *"I thought it was nice that you called your students one by one for assessing the assignments made. This really gave me peace, because sometimes I don't like it when others see my work."* Showing your work, and 'disclosing' it to others is the essence of both every feedback and 'official' assessment situation. Seeing other students' work and having to show your own work, however, has an important downside as well, depending on the specific situation and implicit expectations. Exposing is probably the most vulnerable moment of designing, especially for my students. Although a minority of students says it thrives on the competition, on many other occasions during my research a majority of the students testify presenting your work to be quite intimidating. Seeing other peoples' progress, 'better' ideas or products make many students feel insecure and they claim it to be of negative influence on their 'performance'. This is the negative side of public 'assessing': it is also a matter of *comparing* and it thus induces ego-involvement instead of task-involvement—see also Chapter 1.1. In some cases it even disrupts their creative process to a point that

creativity diminishes. *"Such is the process of wrestling with ideas –self-censorship often defines a creative act as a failure before it has been released into the unpredictable realm of the public."* (Le Feuvre, 2010, p. 13). As I noted, many students very much hesitate to show their work even to a teacher in a one-on-one situation, when they feel it is not up to a certain standard. Again, I imagine it being the result of students being used to feeling they have to perform instead of allowing themselves to be in a complex experimental process. That is very worrying, because these moments of exchanging information is of the most importance, especially when you're struggling.

What is the function of presenting your work? How is 'just' disclosing your work different than having an actual presentation? Is it only that the setting and the implicit intention varies? These issues, I reckon are important to think about. I have not unravelled the 'mystery' yet within this research framework, but I can to a certain extent reflect and philosophise about these settings.

I promote to underline to students the function of sharing. By making it a metacognitive act to exchange information about your process or product and emphasising space and safety for dialogue,

presenting may become less about judgement and more about mutual opinion and learning. In fact, it will be more about the effort itself and less about a person being 'put on the spot'. I explicitly promote the same for *assessment* situations. Before and during my research I've iterated collective assessment presentation settings. Every presentation is followed by a group feedback dialogue, and I try to grade collectively as much as possible. In the end I always take the final responsibility to grade myself, to 'lift' the responsibility from personal students opinions. I always ask if the person being graded and/or the group if they feel my grades represent a shared opinion. To make it even a matter of negotiation, I often use the phrase: *"Always feel invited to discuss it if you think I've graded you 'unjust', but use sound argumentation to substantiate it."* This way I provide agency to link a grade to the intrinsic effort a grade represents. I've been doing this for quite some time, both well before and during my research, and I feel it makes people less concerned and about the presentation itself, and is generally positive in regard to self-confidence.

TIMO 4TH YEAR

Forgot designing was actually fun to do instead of 'just school assignments'.

The assignment where he chose a very experimental and free subject (he had to visually express a piece of music) helped him to 'open his mind' again.

RECORDING, BO 4TH YEAR

Always 'fled' from discussing her work with teachers. She regarded the taught design process as a threat to her own creative strategy. We talked about it for a long time, and we managed to draw parallels between her strategies and the actual process she has to show during her exam.

We also came to recognise a deeper fear of failure at the base of her 'rebellion' against the taught process. The conversations were very helpful, and lifted her self-confidence towards her exams

RECORDING, MANAR, 4TH YEAR, CLOSE TO THE EXAMS, BUT WAY BEHIND 'SCHEDULE':

She has lost all her motivation. She has become quite a successful tattoo artist, something she aspired even before she came to this school.

I say: It's your own choice: do you want to tattoo with or without a diploma? Both is essentially okay.

Maybe we should invent some steps to bring you across the finish line'. You don't have to excell, let's just find out what brings you there.

SOME OTHER FEEDBACK AND NEGOTIATION SITUATIONS

RECORDING

Me and my colleagues tried these kinds of resubmissions in the first year and fourth year on a few occasions. Student reactions were quite positive. Here is a short transcription from a discussion on collective grading and resubmission during a 4th year design assignment "Am I there yet?"

me: "Actually, the most important question might be: When can you move on? Or: when do you still have to complement things?"

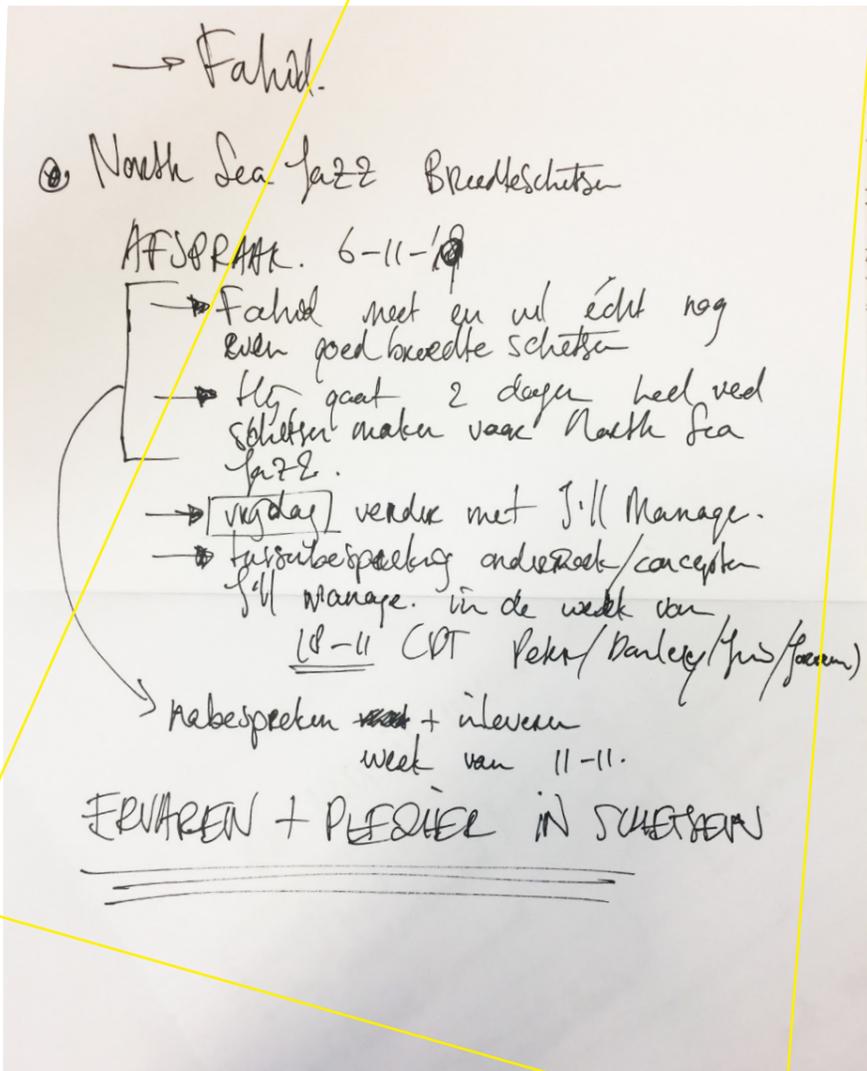
I introduce a GO/NO GO grading [with feedback]

reactions: "Intense!", "That's the best idea", "Quite a good solution", "Challenging"

me: "What do we agree upon, when [we define the work to have] a NO GO [grading]?"

reactions: "That we try everything to make it a GO". "That you can improve [the work]"

I noted all the negotiated learning goals together with students. They received a copy. This helped them to make it more of a mutual agreement and make the agency explicit. Also we used these notes for the next session, to see if the 'goals' turned out to be realistic.



PEDAGOGICAL NEGOTIATION

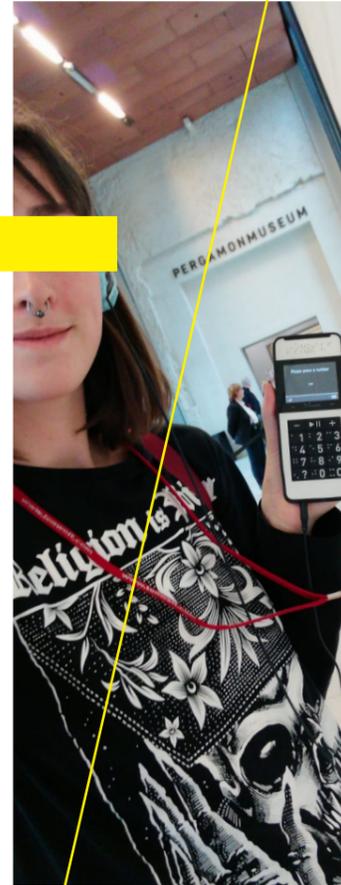
C. could be regarded as a 'complicated' student. She has a history of attending classes quite badly, and also not being really precise in meeting deadlines. Quite some teachers, including me, sometimes came into conflict with C. because she is quite 'headstrong' —I always felt these kinds of conflicts aren't a bad thing (with any student), because they are about detecting and negotiating borders of conduct. Moreover, as in many of these cases, her personal situation is much more complex than 'just' being 'stubborn'. On a few occasions, the team of teachers however was in doubt of telling her she had to quit this school, because of bad results because and teachers were not able to detect or discuss 'progress'.

Last November we went to Berlin. We programmed our trip in such a way that the students also had quite some 'spare' time to explore the city. Already leading up to this school trip, C. mentioned that she wanted to explore the underground night life scene. Simultaneously she added that she didn't have many friends coming along with this trip. In fact: none of her friends came along on the Berlin trip. She constantly expressed her quest for autonomy in Berlin. This was a concern for us as teachers, because C. can be someone who just evades 'rules', and may just take off on her own, and yet in this case she is our responsibility. We made very clear to everyone, that they could do as they please in Berlin in their spare time, but no one is allowed to do things on their own; in fact nobody can let anyone else go by themselves. C., of course, was very grumpy about this, but reluctantly came along.

Following our arrival in Berlin, the second day C. asked me if she could visit the Pergamon museum with ancient art, which wasn't on our schedule. Nobody wanted to join her, but she made it very clear that this ancient art was really something she was very interested in. I decided this was a perfect moment to make a calculated exception to the 'stick-together-rule' and let C. 'act out' her autonomy.

I explained C. she could be the exception to the rule: no one but she could do this on her own. She was elated! The nicest thing happened. I guess, in a way to show me how well she handled this responsibility of autonomy, she sent me a picture of her in the museum with the tour guide headphones on, looking very satisfied. It felt very right for me, to let her exert her quest for autonomy. I believe these types of negotiations are the very basis of pedagogy.

In the end it actually made a difference in class as well. After the Berlin trip, in my design course her attending raised noticeably, and she met her deadlines. Apart from that, I felt she was much more open to sharing and discussing her work than before. C., like many students, is someone who always tries to be 'the' exception. By allowing her to negotiate the very edges of this frame that marks out autonomy versus restriction, C. was able to 'bring' the didactical goals within her reach. We were able to bend the classical and general 'school' vs 'young adult' conflict towards a dialogue based on content and autonomous exploration within an educative setting. In this case I picked C. as an example, but the positive side effect of these kinds of pedagogical situations I've noticed to be widespread.



THE RECOMMENDED POSITION AND DISPOSITION OF A VOCATIONAL DESIGN TEACHER

The next phrase summarises this chapter quite well: *"A key [concept] that differentiates it from commonplace understandings of feedback is that the student is assumed to occupy a central and active role in all feedback processes. They are always actively involved in monitoring and regulating their own performance both in terms of their goals and in terms of the strategies being used to reach those goals."* (Juwah et al., 2004 p. 4). However, there actually are (still) many teachers that wait for students to come to *them* for questions. It is my belief, and it has been for a long time, this is not the right way to teach, especially in a vocational school environment. In my opinion, and I hope I've made my argument in this chapter, seeking these feedback settings and bringing these metacognitive moments of sharing to their 'front door' is essential. It means teachers have to break students' taboo on reaching out to teachers and forming it into a mutual established situation of both safety and agency—an invitation to respond and act. It touches upon the tips Launspach (2019) gave in regard to this generation, asking them: 'What do you think?'. By using negotiation to close the feedback loop (Juwah et al. 2004, p. 4), teacher and students constantly align their expectations and teachers challenge students' attribution of consequence, including the inherent vulnerabilities involved.

It does not mean that students do not need to take time to struggle, or that frustration shouldn't be part of this feedback process. Letting students figure things out by themselves by asking them the right questions, 'luring' them out of their comfort, is at the very core of learning. The valuation of this experimental effort is very important, especially when it is unfortunately expected by the institution to grade—the grade should transparently represent the intrinsic effort to promote students' task-involvement.

I feel privileged to have had the agency within my school to engage these kinds of dialogues and negotiations with students. In the last chapter I will emphasise the importance of teachers being trusted when they have to make pedagogical decisions to redistribute pressure and provide room for students to act within their immediate needs, even within a school system that is largely rigidly structured around measuring and result. Teachers, in my opinion, constantly toggle back and forth between formal and informal needs of students.

In these and many other circumstances of negotiation situations, it is very important that as a teacher you are able to create a group atmosphere, in which it is possible to defend these one-on-one decisions towards the group. It can be difficult when the group targets these decisions or students feel maltreated in regard to other students, for example 'teachers' pet'-situations. Therefore, there always has to be a founded argument at the base of these decisions that can be communicated to the group, without violating the personal agreement with each separate student and the underlying reasons for that. The answer lies in clarity and transparency; a transmittable objective. I don't encounter these difficulties often, not to say almost never. In my case I hope this is the result that I always try to create an environment, where each student can be critical of my decisions, as long as they found this with reasonable argumentation. In this way I mirror my own approach to their work and behaviour and regard them as equal.

This all sounds very basic. However, I find that especially less experienced teachers don't automatically tend to be flexible or bilateral in their tutoring—consciously or unconsciously. This may have to do with them wanting to be in control, or trying to have a uniform structure to adhere by. Other vocational educators may have entered education from a practitioners' environment, and might embody some professional deformity in relation to an educative setting—the pluriformity, level of skill and numbers of young students in a single classroom. My proposed approach however does never mean teachers can't be strong and decisive as a teacher. It means the fundament of all criticism is clear and based on equality within the teacher-student relationship. This relationship develops over time in causality with students' age and knowledge, and it has to be constantly be adjusted and redefined.

In feedback and dialogue actually lies the essential function of a school environment. I've taken this principle to open up another important field of interest, the actual formal and informal circumstances under which students actually 'perform' their 'creative magic'. In the next chapter, I plead for facilitating moments for students to share what normally remains 'hidden' or deemed 'inherent'. ◉

4

⊕ DEMYSTIFYING CIRCUMSTANCE —AFFIRM AND SHARE PERSONAL STRATEGIES AND VULNERABILITIES: WHERE AND HOW DOES WHAT HAPPEN?

"Productivity is personal. The first step is having an honest conversation with yourself"
—pinned on pinterest by a graduated student, original: Apple.

—Recording: CREATIVE RITUALS_
LPADO17MB_MINIMOCK_15 OCT. 2019.M4A,
45'06"

-Me: "How did you feel about having this conversation?"

-[Some reactions]: "Nice", "Relieving, ...yeah really!",

"We could really just say what we want [thought of it]."

-Me: "Does this conversation belong to the Design Course [curriculum], you think?"

-[Multiple students]: "Yes", "I think so, yes."

-Jesper: "Once a month."

-Shania: "Once a month therapy."

-Me: "Design therapy?"

-Shania: "Yes. design therapy!"

-Raúl: "I think it amplifies your development. [...] You also learn from others."

-Riko: "If your doing it in a group, you get another view from everyone."

Can metacognitively recognising personal creative methods, strategies, 'rituals', social and behavioural conditions and circumstances facilitate experimental effort and contribute to self-confidence?

The answer is yes. Students testify about being more aware of these strategies and circumstances and they feel empowered by telling their stories and recognising themselves in each other. Feeling at ease in the design process is stimulated by the act of sharing both (design) strategies and vulnerabilities. Like the 'mystical occurrence of creation' in chapter 2, many of these conceptions normally remain 'underground' and implicit. The mostly neoliberal sources of pressure acting on our students seem perpendicular to more pedagogical views of for example Biesta, I myself adhere to as well. As I parapsred before in chapter 1.2, communication is the foundation of education —not just factualities, but the way these factualities matter in social activities. (Biesta, 2015, p. 52). Communication is an open, practical, generative and creative process. Some of the feedback settings I've mentioned are examples of this, but in this chapter I delve more into other iterations, especially two types of workshops, I've undertaken in regard to how students perceive themselves in respect to their work and environment.

When I first conceived these workshops during the first year of MEiA, I've 'used' them to research, map out which forces act on our students and how students engage a design

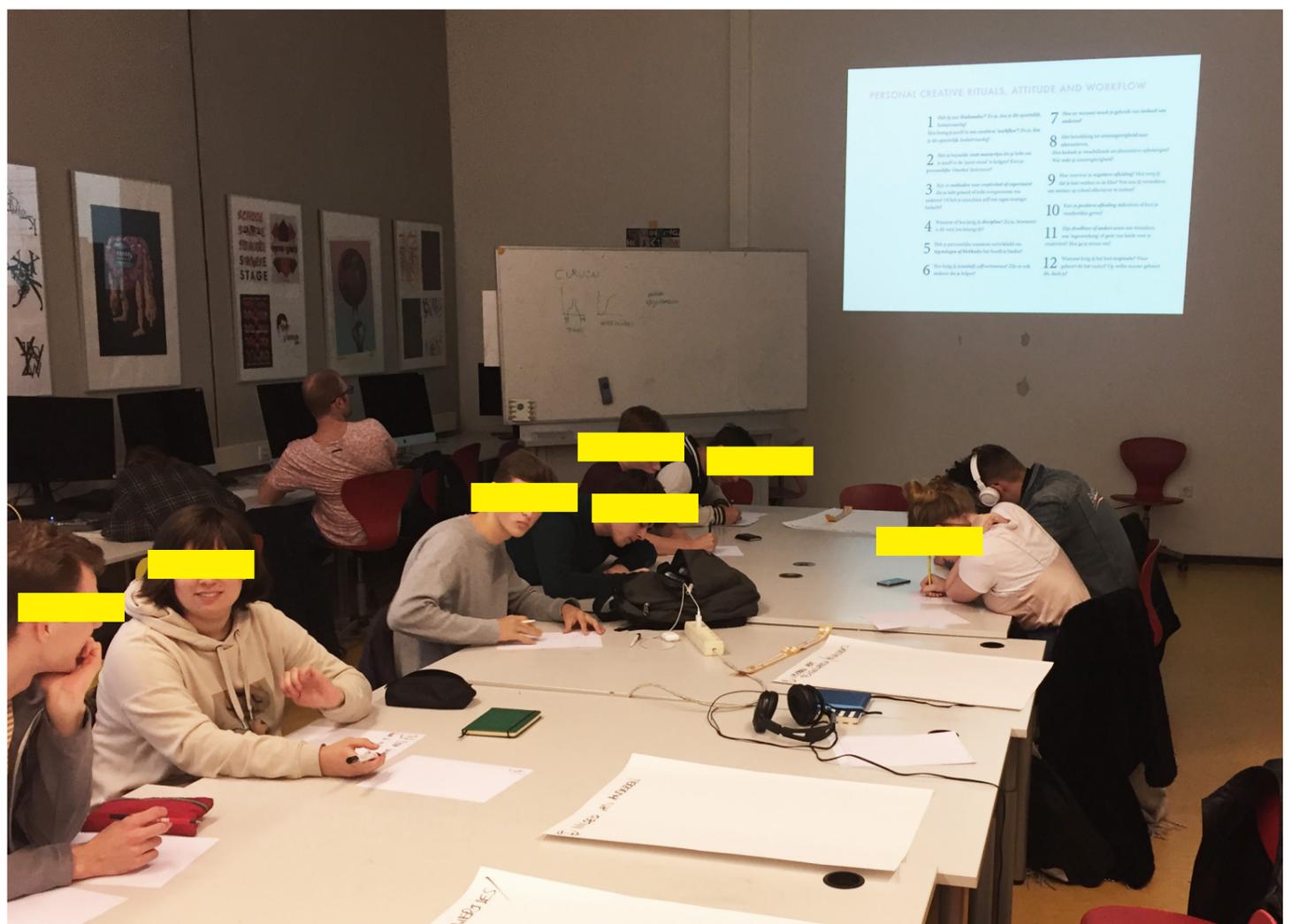
process. Many of the findings, I've already distributed throughout the thesis. In this chapter however I will focus on the second main service these workshops got to cater to. They turned out to be not only a research method, but *didactical method* themselves. It was affirmed by many students and my colleagues, that these kinds of workshops are regarded as very useful. They aid to build students' self-awareness and self-confidence. It shows them that others may have the same opinions as themselves and may struggle with the same obstructions, but is also provides them with alternative possibilities, tips, and opportunities. These workshops suggest a way of incorporating 'the informal' into 'the formal', to include in the curriculum something that is normally out of sight.

I will first introduce these workshops and illustrate how they unlock circumstances an strategies that 'normally' remain implicit —of pivotal importance in regard to my research thesis. Both workshops have their somewhat own emphasis. The first workshop '*Personal Creative Rituals*' is intended to share mostly hidden methods and methodologies surrounding design processes, inspiration and workflow —the practical design effort. The second workshop is much more directed towards students mapping out and discussing aspects of social and didactical agency, motivation and self-confidence.

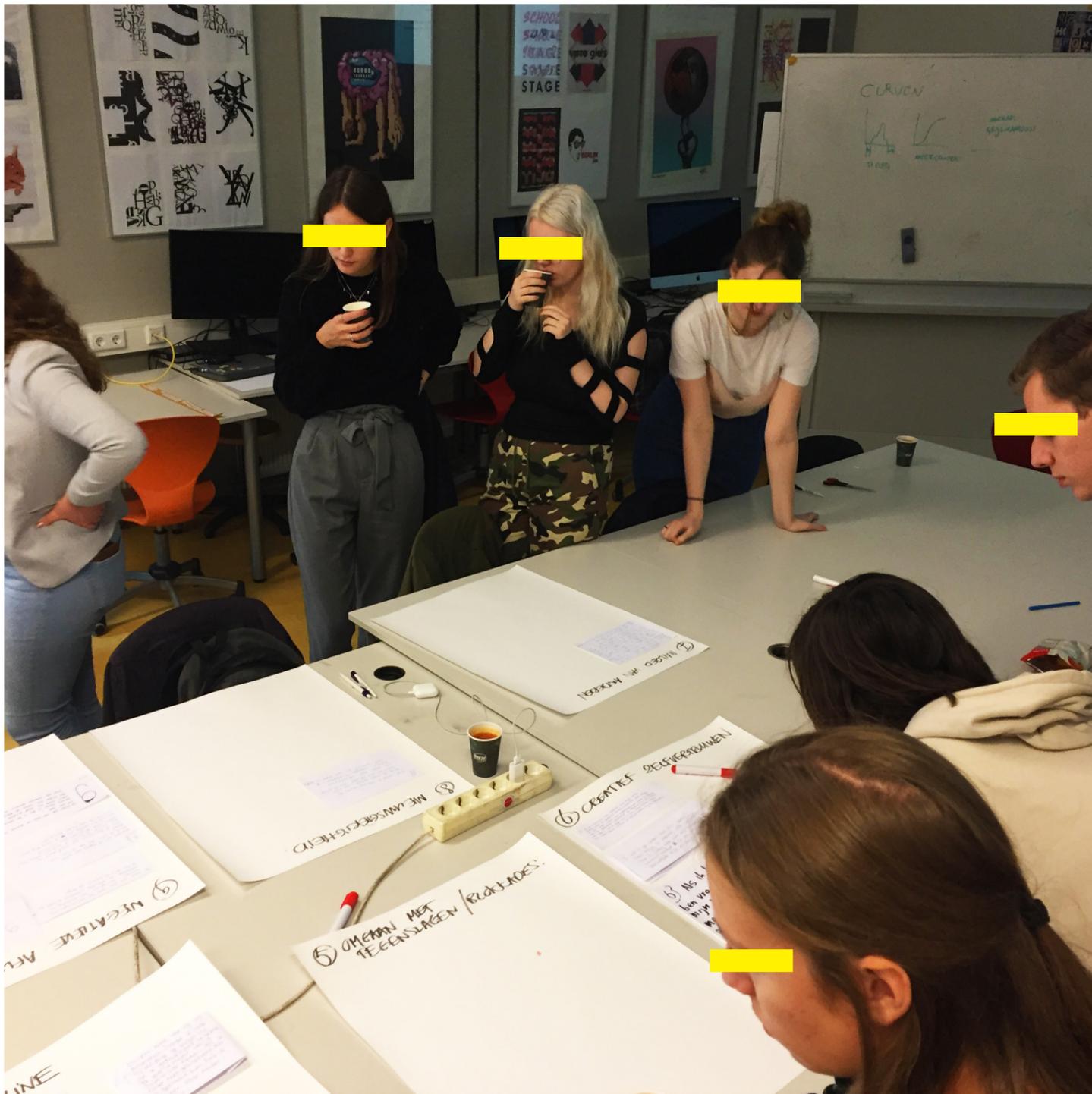
After that I will try to summarise some of the implications these methodologies have for our students and I will try to define the function of school in relation to other factors that became apparent.

BASIC WORKSHOP PROCEDURE AND ACTIVITIES

Each workshop is built around a group conversation, ending in a collective conclusion. I've introduced a more structured approach towards the conversation than just 'talking'. I've made use of variation of methods to fit this groups' needs for keeping them involved for the whole duration. There are several activities within these workshop such as thinking alone, writing, and creating a collective 'visual wall' of reference. The group conversation was to induced by this visual collection of written statements of students to react on. This method was loosely and half-subconsciously inspired by a method named: 'Thinking-Doing-Sharing' (translated; 'DDU' –Denken-Doen-Uitwisselen), where group thinking and discussion is chopped up in taking personal time for every student to think about a subject/issue/question first and write it down before sharing. This is to make sure every student is 'involved' and has their answer digested and formulated, instead of the students with the loudest voice and 'fastest' expression taking over and dominating the discussion. The teacher can now, by giving turns, involve all students without putting them on the spot in formulating and expressing their thoughts immediately.



Right: the questions were projected for all to see. Students were supposed to pick at least two subjects that appealed to them, or that resonated with their personal experiences. Their remarks provided a point of entry for the group discussion.



Above: students could use a red marker dot to point out subjects they found surprising, important or recognisable t.

WORKSHOP: 'PERSONAL CREATIVE RITUALS'

—workshop: 3RD YEAR STUDENTS OCT 15 2020, PRESENTED OCT 18 2020, REFLECTION NOV 17 2020.

REWORKED AND ADAPTED FROM SEMINAR WORKSHOP DISCUSSION 7TH JUNE 2019

RECORDED ON DISCUSSION AND PHOTOS OF COLLECTED NOTES ON SHEETS

The central line of questioning for this particular workshop was: “What methods work for you, where or in what situation? How do you create circumstances in which you can be inventive or experimental? Can you deduce a personal strategy?” I first held this workshop as part of the *Practice and Research* seminar at MEiA in June 2019^[1]. This workshop at MEiA was 'solely' a group discussion led by questions surrounding personal creative rituals. The MEiA workshop was more specifically meant to gather 'intelligence', whereas this workshop I wanted to have a more equal emphasis on the educative component, and its implications for the 'behaviour' of the students involved.

In October 2019, I've revisited the recordings of workshop, and in the seminar *Making Things Public*^[2], I 'reworked' it in terms of language and didactical activities to cater to my own students group. Like the first time, the questions were projected on screen for reference. First, students answered or reflected on two questions of choice in writing and then visually shared their results on several large sheets that corresponded with the questions. The sheets were gathered on the large central table where everybody could walk around. During the walk around I provided red markers to let the students point out noticeable quotes and reactions, helping them to remind what they've seen. The discussion, like the one at MEiA, was recorded for archiving and reference/citation. I certainly think the overall didactic approaches I used were successful.

Throughout the workshop they resonated with the actual conversation and purpose; formulating and sharing personal creative strategies through dialogue, analysing differences and commonalities and educating each other (and me). The students were (very) positive, both 'on and off the record'. They said they felt 'heard'. Normally personal creative rituals are not part of 'official' class conversation, so this was something unexpected and new. Also I noticed that there was much recognition in commonalities. Also often there was surprise on students' creative strategies, myself included. I noticed the metacognitive effect I set out to achieve. They, sometimes for the first time, thought in depth about their own rituals and perceptions on their personal processes and could relate to others'. This 'announced' a self-propelled effect, even eagerness —actually the effect I was hoping for.

[1] Within the masters' programme, the *Practice and Research* seminar holds a central position in the development of the research methodology and trajectory.

[2] This seminar, is designed to assist MEiA students in developing and testing strategies and settings to involve or address specific audiences in research and dissemination.

WORKSHOP: 'WHAT HELPS YOU TO FEEL AT EASE WITH THE UNCERTAINTY OF DESIGNING?'

—workshop: 3RD YEAR STUDENTS, DESIGN COURSE, 18

DECEMBER 2019, 8:30

In december 2018, I first held this workshop as part of the Practice and Research seminar at MEiA, to test out it's procedure and to gather both research information and comments on the method from my tutors, my own students and fellow students. Since, I've repeatedly iterated the workshop with my own students.

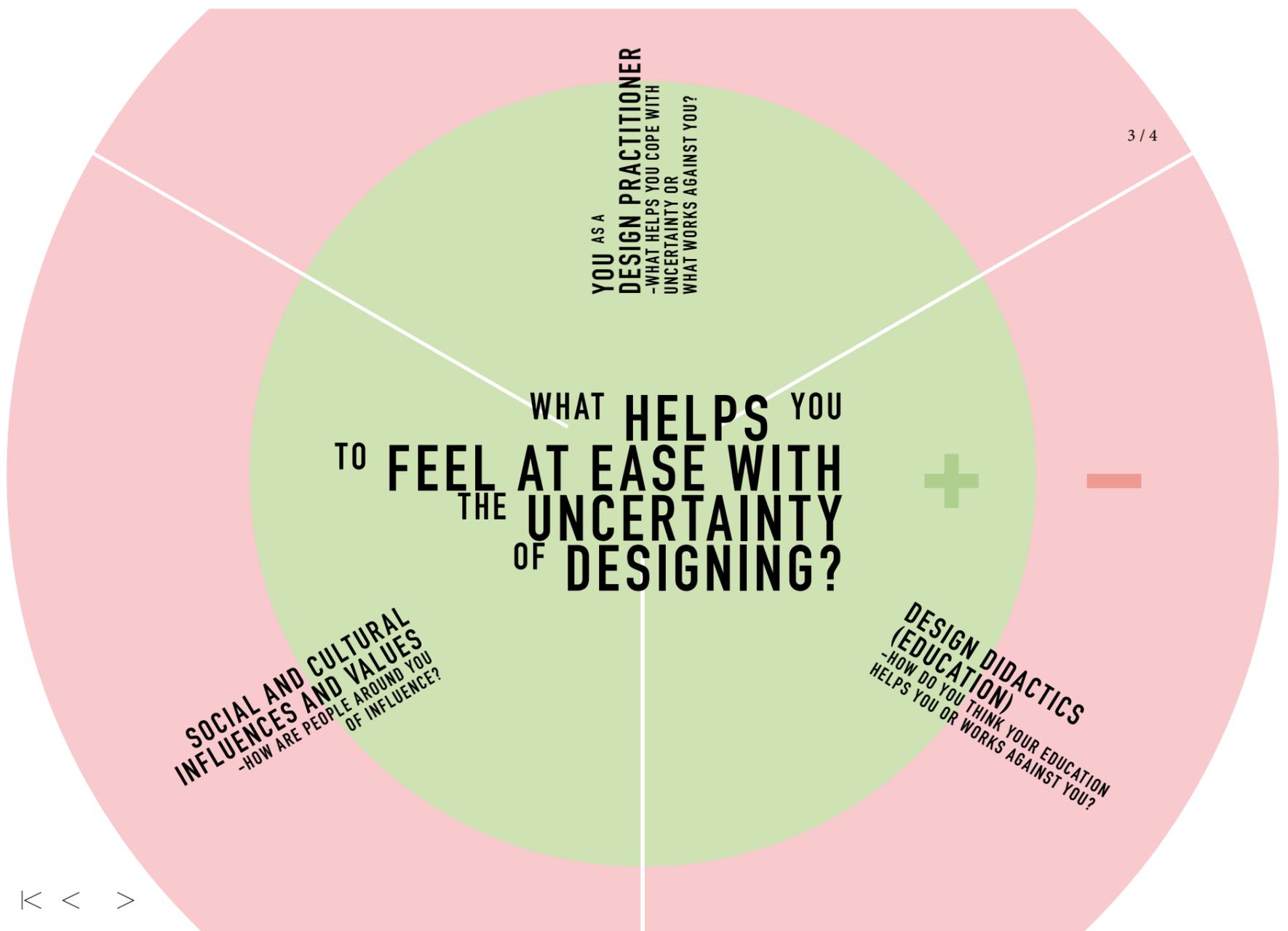
For this workshop I embedded the feeling of creative (un)certainty in three fields of interest, respectively: the social and cultural influences and values, the practice as an artist or

designer, and the pedagogics and didactics they encounter (student) or endorse (teacher)

^[3]. The workshop partitioners chose a perspective and shared positive or negative factors and or experiences. They discussed in pairs, wrote down their conclusions, and finally shared their results with the rest of the group. I thought on all various occasions the workshop really worked out well, also according to the different settings they took

place in. As to the gathering of research framework 'intelligence', in the first few sessions prior to the actual → research project there were many similarities between the MEiA-group and my own students. This information led me to quite a few metacognitive research topics I've adopted in my

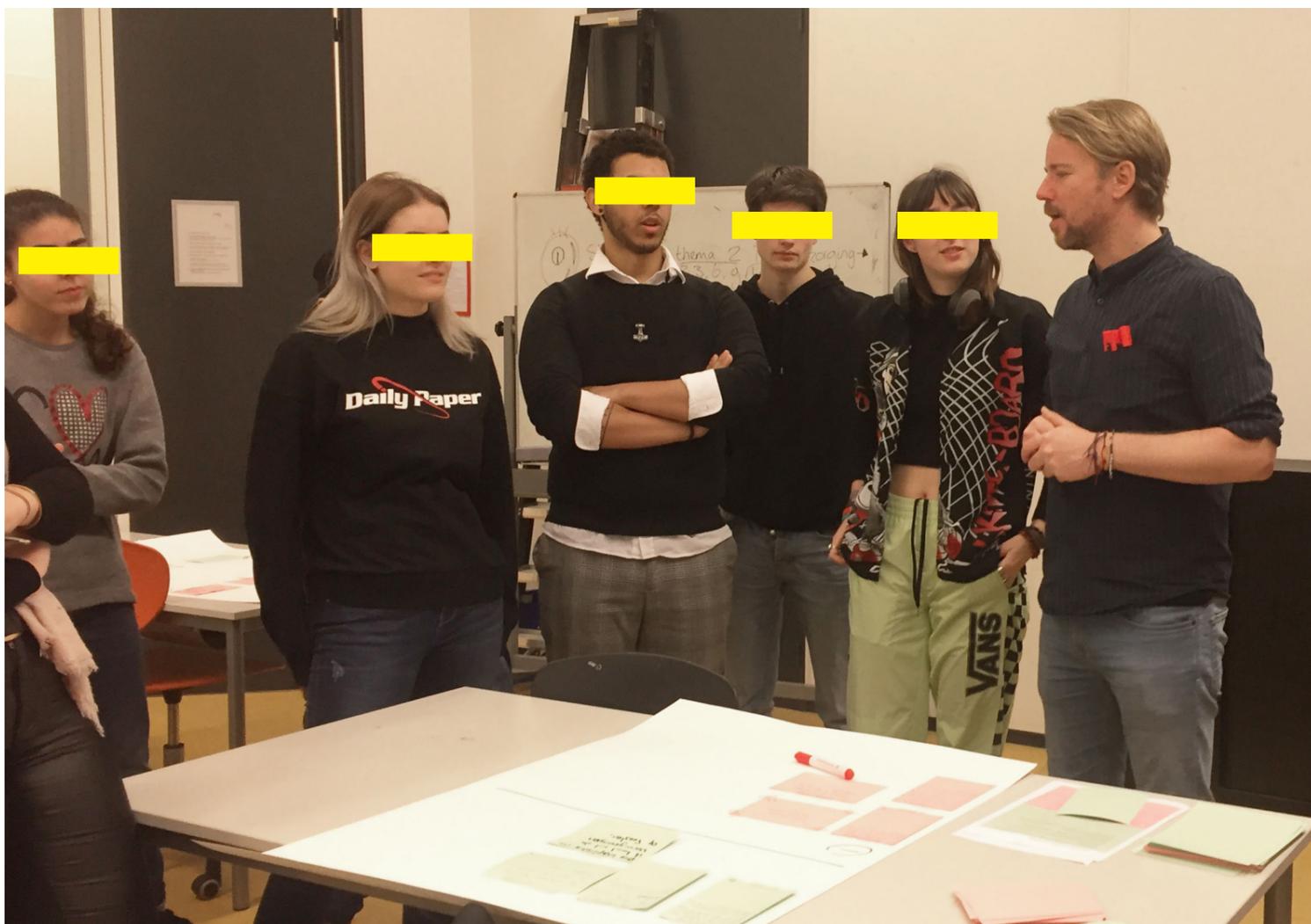
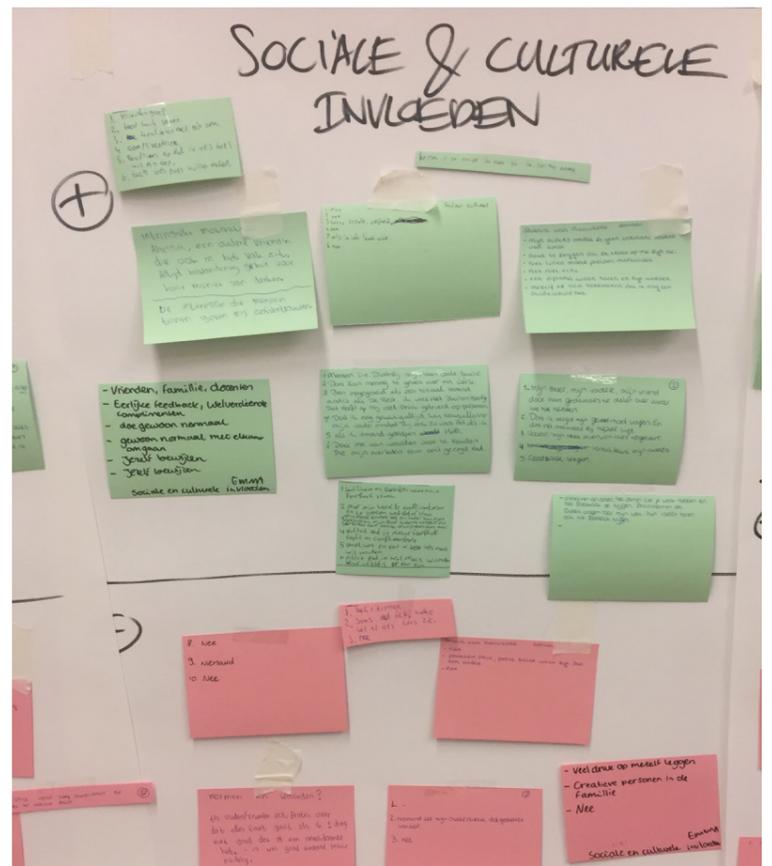
^[3] These three fields of interest found their origin in the first scope of research I undertook between september 2018 through roughly december 2020. They were scaffolding my initial view on this research thematic. Although still current and probably roughly recognisable, these topics have somewhat organically dissolved an distributed themselves throughout this final research project thematic. They can still be recognised within the friction between the creative design practice versus the social-psychological on one hand and cultural sources and values involved in students feeling (un)confident with the uncertain nature of designing on the other. The third field is the didactics and pedagogy to be 'used' to attend to this friction.



Above: a slide from the workshop presentation. It show the fields of interest form which the workshop participants can choose to reflect on the central workshop theme.

final thesis arguments and that remain very valuable to discuss within a group setting or in one-on-one feedback conversations, for example: In what way do *limitations* and *restrictions* sometimes help, or are counterproductive? When is *perfectionism* a positive thing? When is it counterproductive? What ways of *distraction* are positive or negative? Next to this, these workshops helped me to investigate and confirm concepts such as investing in effort, the primary generator, incubation time, trust, confidence, discussing your work with 'others' (peers, but also family or other friends) etc.

Following the previous success of these sessions, I was able to make this workshop part of this years' 3rd years design course curriculum. This meant that some of my other colleagues also gave this workshop to the other two of three 3rd year media design students groups. In order to promote this workshop as much as possible, I provided my colleagues with a presentation/instruction, the needed coloured cards for the students to write on and with the large sheets to present the results on. Both the students and my colleagues claimed that they found these conversations to be very positive. Students felt 'heard' and there were feelings of recognition and surprise.



USING THESE KINDS OF WORKSHOPS AS A METACOGNITIVE DIDACTICAL METHOD*

The first goal I had formulated for the workshop on creative rituals was *educate; [students] self-educate and share [knowledge, experiences involving students' personal creative strategies]*. Particularly, this goal was actually met more than I had expected beforehand in both workshops. In the interview I had with third grade student Joyce, she also expressed how the other workshop suited her. *"I [...] liked the lesson about self-confidence, just to be open and to tell my story, but without being too focused on me."*

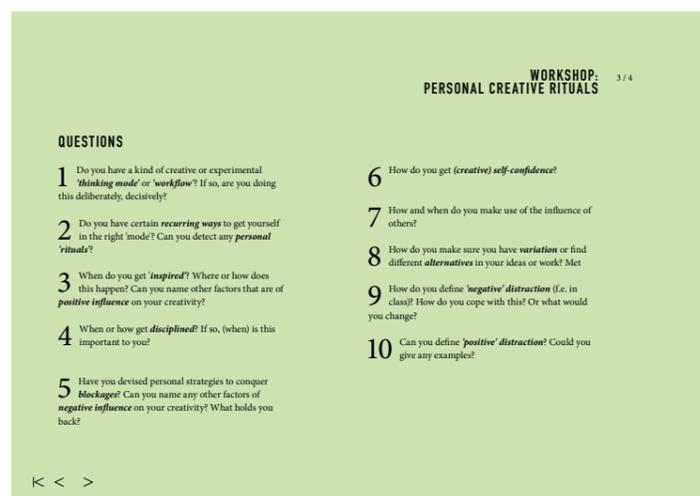
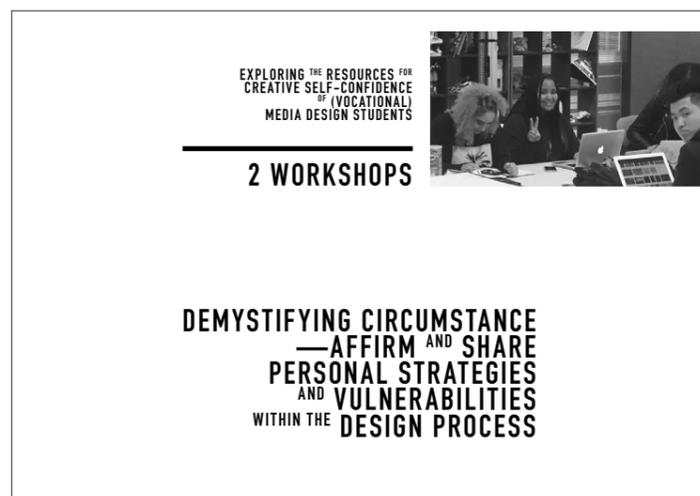
I held an (anonymous) survey on the design course, in which I also asked students' opinion on the workshop sessions. The positive effect of talking about these issues, I think is best described by these students: *"Nice, very nice just to be honest. I struggle with this quite often myself and just to say it to others and to find out that others also [commonly] have this is nice. I am not alone."* *"Instructive, because we normally never talk about this in class and it is actually super good to take a moment to think about such topics, because you do have to deal with them."* *"It was quite instructive to see that there are several people like me with sort of the same uncertainty."* *"I found it interesting to read how other students deal with uncertainties."* It really seems students got something out of this workshop. They actually said they would really like to have more of these reflective conversations, within this theme and on other subjects as well, illustrated 'design-therapy' quote at the start of this chapter.

In these workshops, I used the following didactical approaches: *Affirmative*; students informing each other about their personal strategies; inspiring each other and providing new strategies; *Reproductive*; exploration through dialogue —explore possibilities that fit personal needs. The written curriculum doesn't mention creative circumstantial strategies. *Deconstructive*; metacognitive view on personal 'positive' creative strategies; critically assessing classroom (versus home) environment/circumstances. *Transformative*; analysing commonalities and differences, and possibly incorporating tactics into personal creative effort.

In my opinion these kinds of workshops provide a pedagogical and/or didactical methodology for my students to have sustainable conversations that make them feel heard, which could have subsequent effects on our school's (design) education in general.

* — *In order to make these workshops available for others to try out, they are to be distributed for free use. Please feel welcome to request a free copy of this digital method. The file consists of an interactive pdf containing both workshops, including presentation slides and printable instructions.*

Please find detailed contact information in the aft section.



Right: three pages/ slides from the interactive pdf



THE 'INCLUDICULUM' —WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF SCHOOL IN THE DESIGN EFFORT?

From the workshops, and from the various interviews I concluded that the immediate classroom environment and curriculum quite often doesn't actually provide the place or timing where the 'magic happens', due to the specific nature of creativity. The ever changing social navigation between distraction, friendship, concentration, having fun and discipline produces a very complex pedagogical structure. To bring into memory: *"Questions about the curriculum should be 'engaged' in terms of the representation of activities within the school environment and not in terms of the representation of formal abstractions of these activities."* *"The idea that students learn from the activities they take part in at school, is [...] useful to understand why the hidden curriculum is so effective and often [even] many times more effective than the official curriculum. The hidden curriculum lies enclosed in those activities where students take part in during their time at school, while the official curriculum is a far more artificial addition to the real 'life at school'."* (Biesta 2015, p. 52, 53) The way the content of the formal curriculum is constructed and the way assignments are structured and timed are the fabric of taxonomy for our students. It however should be flexible to provide room for these extracurricular, intercurricular or even anti-curricular circumstances and opinions, especially in design education. The hidden curriculum and the visual or formal need to coincide. For teachers it's essential to go back and forth between hidden and formalised.

I would like to define an 'includiculum' as all communication and circumstances part of activities and methodology. This includes peer and home environment and socialisation, the (qualitative) student-teacher relationship, the social climate and even the 'physical' climate or space. This 'includiculum' exists both on and away from school, and also for example during internships.

We should very much separate what the function of school is in the creative process of our students and discuss its place in each student's personal ritual and development. In the workshop 'What helps you to feel at ease with uncertainty when you're designing?' various personal factors are mentioned by the participants, some of them even contradictory; positive and negative consequences and connotations regarding communication, working with deadlines, perfectionism, etc. Through my research iterations I can outline two related main elements of metacognitive debate and dialogue, that in my opinion should be a fundamental part of design courses.

—The function of school and the official curriculum; respect and affirm personal opinions. Both students and teachers being frank about weaknesses and strengths of a classroom environment in this case in relation to the 'creative' effort is empowering for students. For example, students were able to share and affirm that school might function as a place to be informed and ask and receive feedback, and not per se the place to be creative. Furthermore, I was struck by how very personal, and in many cases contradictory, interests students have in regard to the (overly?) regulated school environment. We —students and teachers alike— should be able to discuss the sometimes deeply cemented conceptions (read: implicit and explicit school rules) that surround a classroom environment (in the mind of both teachers and students). These emancipating debates fit their age and quest for both autonomy and clearly argued 'restrictions'. Juwah et al. (2004) explicitly mention this exchange as one of the elements of a effective feedback structure; *"[it] provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching."*

—The function of all other circumstances surrounding the design process; 'the hidden curriculum' or informal realm: When and where and with whom does what work for you? What holds you back? What affirms you? What do you need? How do you create these circumstances? Aha-moments, a cup of tea, travelling, music, discussing.

It is an important opportunity to let students and teachers and coaches recognise circumstances and behaviour that are essential for the experimental effort. I tend to conclude that this way of sharing and the possibility to be open and transparent about the most vulnerable elements of the design process creates a sense of security for students. Also, it may have positive effects on group dynamics. The semi-anonymous sharing followed by a transparent and metacognitive conversation induces a sense of equality. Students can recognise themselves in other students they may normally don't talk to about these subjects.

Normally topics on studying, personal development and study methodology in general are considered to be part of the separately organised SLC courses. Now, these workshops took place during both design courses as SLC courses. If I were to choose in which course I would integrate these workshops, my gut feeling tells me to choose the first option, actually to didactically 'un-separate' personal development and general studying strategies from design process development. Quite some students agreed with me on this point of view when I asked them. Another solution could be to really integrate both courses and their separate curricula in respect to this topic.

Finally, making these very personal circumstances and rituals part of 'normal' conversation made me aware of having a new way of reaching more deeply rooted issues involved in self-esteem, self-direction and motivation, not only via workshop setting but also as part of every day coaching. My experience is that this layer of communication therefore can seamlessly be part of all the various negotiation and feedback settings —one-on-one, small group, peer, and class dialogue situations— I brought forward in chapter 3. ◉

REFLECTION AND PERSPECTIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5



Above: a few years ago, a student couldn't stop making sketches of his personal symbol on his way home by bus, but he had no paper... In his presentation of this second year design assignment, he shared this picture of the sketches he made on his arm.

In the workshop about personal creative rituals I gave, no students chose to share a strategy on “Creative or experimental methodologies” and “How do you overcome setbacks or obstacles?”. There could be a number of reasons why these ‘gaps’ occurred, ranging from ‘we don’t equip them for this’ or ‘students don’t perceive our didactics on these matters as clearly as we set out’, or because students felt other questions in this workshop were more urgent/answerable/embodied, to that my choice of words didn’t resonate with their feelings/experiences. In any case, however, and whatever the origin may be, I think here lies a clear message for our education. The research I’ve undertaken, in my opinion, opens up ways to close this gap in essential skills for young vocational designers and the main connecting cultures they will need to operate in —commercial practice and art academy.

In essence, a major part of my conclusions are drawn within a framework that heavily rests on sheer pedagogy. In many cases it boils down to the qualitative student-teacher relationship that is regularly quite independent from the actual design educative content. Referring to me being weary about conceiving a thesis leaning heavily pedagogy, the general conclusion about centralising feedback and dialogue made me joke to family and friends: “The outcome of my research is quite obvious —talk with your students. I’m so sad that obvious conclusion took me 1,5 years.” However, this notion is of course composed of various complex interactions when unpacked within my research framework. Argumented communication in all design phases and educational settings helps to metacognitively materialise objectives and intersubjective conceptions for students to ‘hold on to’ or to deliberately push against, like buoys or little islands. Teachers should demystify where they ought to, but let students find things out for themselves where they need to, in order to let students be an actor in their own development.

In my research there are also quite specific design educative components. Opening up the informal strategies and making “where and how does ‘creativity’ happen?” a metacognitive *effort* and sharing it, is a dialogue between *designers*, not per se between a student and teacher. It does have a huge socio-psychological aspect, but that is most certainly essential in feeling at ease with the uncertain nature of the design process in a performance focused society and commercial environment. It deepens and opens up the ‘normal’ (design) pedagogics and didactics to the actual ‘layer’ where doubt and vulnerability exist. I hope these strategies may become appreciated as a more regular and explicit part of the design educative methodology or curriculum.

I’ve become much more aware of my position, of my vision as a pedagogue and of the way I communicate and act with students and how I relate to them. Yes, all pedagogical parts on for example feedback are quite general. But most of it confirms, deepens and provides terminology on conceptions and methods that I recognise myself to have developed over quite some years, and that I want to share, because I have found it to be pivotal and successful in my work. I feel it is now transmittable and transferable.

As I stated in the chapter about negotiation and feedback, teachers must have the agency to make these sorts of decisions. I feel that a school and a team of teachers must be aware that these pedagogical decisions, to redistribute pressure and provide room for separate students to act within their immediate needs, are indeed important. I also plead for teachers to be trusted, or at least stimulated to engage these kinds of dialogues and negotiations with students. These negotiations have to do with a long term investment in a learning relationship, which may not translate in better grades immediately or all assignments to be made according to the school's wishes. Being flexible doesn't

translate in students never meeting requirements in the very end of a school career, or that teachers are 'too soft'. Some of my colleagues sometimes fear that.

One other colleague of mine sincerely asked me if I expected our students to be able to gain such a metacognitive control over their own development. I was a bit amazed by this remark. On second thought I think it illustrates the level of self-control that some in teachers in vocational education expect from students from the outset. Education is something we 'offer' to our students. *"No one can take over from them: a [student] owns their development and is competent for that."* (Stevens, 2015). If we want our students to act on intrinsic level, we need to provide them with the space to learn how to develop trust. Only then we can expect them to take risks such as engaging in an uncertain process. It is a matter of pedagogy that 'fits' this particular group of students: we are dealing with young adults. Provide room for that. Just as we should be trusted as teachers, we should trust our students and we should help them to trust themselves. Engaging a creative process can not only be a matter of creative intuition for our students, at least not to start with. It starts with finding trust in effort, being curious, in argumentation and intent. Intuition may revitalise through metacognition, practice and experience.

FUTURE RELEVANCE

During my master's programme, it became clear that the current design process will become obsolete soon and will be replaced by a much more iterative and research-based process. As of the next school year 2020-2021 a new central qualification structure will be introduced for every vocational media design course throughout the country^[1], making it

[1] *Our curriculum and final qualification assessment is also informed by the so-called 'qualification dossier'. Qualification dossiers (tr. 'kwalificatiedossiers'), are nationally determined frameworks for all separate vocational studies —ours included. These dossiers define the professional competences students have to qualify by.*

possible for students to have more of a flexible design approach, dependent on the media products to be designed. This is quite a positive development in

my opinion, and I think it will provide new opportunities for media-design didactics —a new topic on its own.

In the light of where my research took me this was not a bad thing for my graduation project either. The announcement coincided with the shift in emphasis that I made towards the more preconditional thematic that is about the pedagogy of agency and autonomy. As I mentioned, when I started the master's programme I expected a substantial part to be about critically examining creative techniques and reflecting on the taught design process in our school. However, my research also deviated me away from investigating more practical methods surrounding creative techniques and brainstorming. I reckon a next step could be to test and broaden the variety of techniques for our students to choose from to fit their personal needs, especially now vocational design education is becoming much more open structured and has to cater to a wider variety of media products and subsequent design processes.

All in all I feel my research project has provided quite some contributions to fill in some parts of my original question: what didactical and pedagogical approaches assist vocational media design students to feel at ease with the uncertain outcome of the design process, and to encourage them to engage this uncertainty, to boost their self-confidence and self-direction? Moreover, now that we are in the extraordinary situation of the COVID-19 outbreak, the urgency of the research thematic is now visible more than ever. The variety of functions of school interacting with students' personal space and time in some aspects has been magnified and in other ways has totally deformed for students and teachers alike. Many students miss school. They miss their friends, the social structure, the feedback opportunities. Many miss working together and hearing and seeing each others' opinion. Some students experience the opposite: they very much like working on their own —having control over distraction, being able to choose when to be visible, when to work. Some testify they've managed to convert boredom into a working spree. In any case, Biesta more than ever proves right when saying that skills only matter in how they are translated in a social situation. Affirming and sharing doubt itself, but also ways of reinventing agency and control has already turned out to be essential over the last few months.

One final subject that seems to be omnipresent throughout this research process is vulnerability. Much of the problems students face are locked within this apparently dangerous state of being. I want to bring in remembrance the suggestion of Launspach I fundamentally recognise myself in. Dare to be vulnerable as a teacher to the same extent we expect from our students. They are our future colleagues. ◉

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WEBSITES OF IMPORTANCE

- Stichting NIVOZ —Nederlands Instituut voor Onderwijs en Opvoedingszaken (tr. Dutch Institute for Affairs regarding Education and Upbringing)— Affiliated are: Biesta, Hadioui as well as Stevens. <https://nivoz.nl/nl/S-BB>: <https://kwalificaties.s-bb.nl/Details/>
On this website the qualification dossiers for vocational education are published.

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