

***Echoes of Creativity:
Bridging Pedagogy and Innovation Through a Real-World Design Project***

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Abstract

During the second semester of 2022/23, a pedagogical practice was implemented at Porto Lusófona University for second-year Communication Design undergraduates. The rock band *Squeezos*, consisting of five young musicians from Porto City, challenged the 2nd-year Design class to create a graphic image for their upcoming album cover. This request came from one of the band members who was also a student from the first-year course. In response, the students generated design proposals, and the band selected one for the album cover. The project followed the *Design Thinking* methodology, from problem definition to project ideation, prototyping, and implementation. The article is structured into four sections: Introduction, literature review, work methodology, and conclusion. This initiative was mutually beneficial for the musicians, who are university students and cannot afford to pay professional designers. Design students are allowed to participate in a real-world project and apply the tools and methods acquired during their coursework; it exemplifies a successful initiative, where pedagogical activities converge with collaborative involvement as a motivational force for students; it was an excellent way to prepare graduates for the professional sphere by fostering engagement through innovative practices; engaging in the design process for an actual music album cover lets students to gain hands-on experience, equipping them with valuable skills and insights beyond traditional classroom activities; furthermore, provides a tangible learning opportunity and enhances the practical value of students' academic endeavors by allowing them to showcase their work in the market, thereby improving the quality of their portfolios.

Keywords: Pedagogical Practice, Lusofona University, Communication Design Students, Design Album Cover, *Squeezos*

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Introduction

During the second semester of 2022/23, a pedagogical practice was implemented at Porto Lusófona University for second-year Communication Design undergraduates. The rock band *Squeezos*, consisting of five young musicians from Porto City, challenged the 2nd-year Design class to create a graphic image for their upcoming album cover. This request came from one of the band members who was also a student from the first-year course. Since the band members are university students and cannot pay for the album design, they asked one of their colleague's band, a Design student, to develop a graphic proposal in the class, and the best solution would be selected and printed. The student whose project was selected applied it to the vinyl cover and prepared the documents for the printer. As a prize, the winning student could attend the rehearsals, and receive an album, and a ticket for the concert, in addition to their name in the album credits.

The *Squeezos* have been wandering around since 2004. A group of friends and neighbors would jump from house to house and from cellar to cellar, trying out music and taking breaks from rehearsals to pool games, darts, and pinball. The purpose was to do what they like and thus have access to more of the world: what is reserved for the stars. The rockstar dream never awoke. However, many others were happening to the size of the country and what was possible. The world did not open up, but they forced a gap. Their music can be generically called Rock, but they do it because they need to get closer to what has been done. They like freedom of expression without having to call them any names; the band's name itself is ambiguous but partly means sketch. This sketch gradually gains clearer contours.

In 2005 they presented the first model of 8 songs in English, which allowed them access to several concerts, some television appearances, and participation in band competitions. In 2007, they presented two singles, "Independence Day" and "Teach Me How to Fish", which earned them dozens of concerts and won 5 band competitions, one European. Académica do Porto and Step into Europe Art Contest). They also had the privilege of opening shows by artists such as David Fonseca, Trabalhadores do Comércio, Ena Pá 2000, Blind Zero, and Mesa. In 2013, they promoted their first work in Portuguese, the EP "Homem Nu", whose single "Coisas da Lei" was shown in several countries through a television production with which it was associated. During this period, the band's lead singer was among the 12 finalists in RTP 1's *Voz de Portugal* program, and some of the musicians became residents at Galerias de Paris in Porto. Since 2016, the *Squeezos* have had 3 songs on the soundtrack of national television productions. Currently, they intersperse the concerts with studio sessions where they are producing the new album "Mais Perto de Acabar". With an evident intensity of feelings that fill their lyrics and melodies, *Squeezos* present songs of war and peace, of love and its opposite. They are the antidote to expected music and the antithesis of themselves: ugly on the outside, beautiful on the inside, or *vice versa*.

This is an example of a successful initiative where pedagogical activities converge with collaborative involvement as a motivating force for students; it was an excellent way to prepare graduates for the professional sphere through innovative practices.

Literature Review

According to Moreira (2015), the presented complexity and a variety of design practices and design education approaches, accompanies the complex and fast world in which they operate, challenging designers and design educators in navigating such ambiguous waters.

The latest curriculum models in design education show a trend towards increased empathy and inclusivity (Fleming, 2013). Research indicates that higher education in design should be more flexible to accommodate evolving design approaches (Martin, 2010; McWilliam and Haukka, 2008) and should prioritize critical thinking over following set procedures (Tschimmel, 2006). Also, McAra-McWilliam (2007) suggests that a new model can better prepare future designers to embrace ambiguity in processes and handle complex and contradictory realities, leading to innovative solutions. Designers, as Manzini (2005) argues, should consider themselves as part of the communities they work with and collaborate closely with other members to develop meaningful cases, rather than just acting as experts. Empathy, defined by the Oxford Dictionary as the understanding and sharing of another person's feelings, has gained popularity as designers increasingly adopt a user-centered approach to product and service design. Design processes such as user-centered design (UCD), human-centered design (HCD), participatory design (PD), and co-design incorporate methods to elicit empathy from users. Perspective-taking is an important skill for designers to create more effective and enjoyable products and services. Empathizing with participants in co-design processes is essential to establish a culture of dialogic design (Manzini, 2016) and leads to the creation of relational goods.

Much of the education for Social Responsible Design (SRD) has been influenced by Papanek's book. He also asks, "In what real-world situations can students learn best?" (Papanek, 1985, p. 316).

To Greenbank (2014), in today's highly competitive job market, students need to be well-prepared for the recruitment and selection processes used by potential employers. However, even though students often cite obtaining a "good" job as their primary reason for pursuing higher education, many of them do not take part in activities that would improve their chances of success in the job market after graduation. Brown, & Hesketh (2004) emphasize that to effectively compete in the job market, students must showcase their "personal capital" to attract employers. This includes both "soft currencies" and "hard currencies". The "soft currencies" encompass skills, values, and personality traits that are highly desirable to employers, such as decision-making, leadership, teamwork, adaptability, enthusiasm, and confidence. On the other hand, "hard currencies" are the tangible evidence that students can use to demonstrate that they possess these attributes. This evidence can be acquired through participation in both curricular and extracurricular activities.

Methodology

The *Design Thinking* methodology guided the creative process in the following steps: problem definition, ideation, prototype, and implementation (Brown, 2005, 2009; Ideo, 2015; Lupton & Philipps, 2011; Tschimmel, 2011; Wyatt & Brown, 2010).

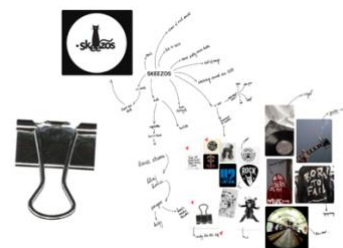
Problem definition: The process began with the briefing with goals taking into account the theme, available time, and a schedule with all relevant dates. In the first class of the project, students received a briefing with all the information needed for the project's development. In addition to the vinyl cover, the students would have to adapt the image to the CD cover and develop the book with the lyrics songs and the book card. In the same class, a student who is part of a band, presented to the class the band's background and previous albums and highlighted the characteristics of the old and new albums. They also shared the songs and video clips, so that the students could have a better understanding to develop the album cover (see figure 1). Additionally, a Google Drive folder containing all the necessary information

such as the band logo, previous albums, video clips, lyrics from the new album, the layout of the vinyl and CD cover, some mockups, and photos of the band’s concerts and rehearsals were created and shared on Google Drive.



Figure 1 – Starting the project: The design student, also a member of the band, presented the background of *Skeezos* and their previous albums, highlighting the characteristics of both the old and new albums.

During the *Ideation* phase, ideas were generated with tools such as words, images, colours and shapes through brainstorming, keywords, action verbs, brain dumping, a mind map and a mood board (see figures 2, and 3). During the creative process, meeting groups facilitate dialogue and share ideas rather than issuing instructions. Creating a collaborative class is a way to learn through engaging students, sharing insights, and gathering feedback from the group. A collaborative process where everyone involved benefits from a positive discussion where solutions are found and sometimes lost ideas are rescued.



Figures 2, and 3 – The creative process from the *Ideation* phase. Mind map from the French Erasmus student Manon Thomas (on the left), and the Polish Erasmus student Gabriela Osóbka (on the right).

In the *Prototype* phase, concepts were tested using an experimental approach. Students explored various materials and techniques to create the cover artwork and find the best solutions. Students developed ideas using resources such as words, typography, photos, colors, and forms. They showed their creative process and a range of concepts, starting with a divergent approach to generate different alternatives. This phase aimed to encourage creativity and open-mindedness, guiding students through an experimental process that encouraged innovative thinking and the generation of different ideas. Students used a variety of tools and methods in the early stages of design, laying the groundwork for future refinement and implementation (see figures 4, and 5).



Figures 4 and 5: The creative process during the *Prototype* phase, featuring initial notes and sketches by Ivan Vecerek, a Checquia Erasmus student.

This time around, students discussed the benefits and drawbacks of each possible solution in a convergent way after testing their ideas. From each critique, students were expected to analyse and consider all feedback to make progress on their projects. At this stage, there is a middle evaluation and the attendance of the students is mandatory, otherwise they are penalized in the final evaluation. This phase allows the teacher to speak out and that the student and the whole class can learn and correct the work in time. Sometimes colleagues also express themselves by giving valid opinions for the work progress. This procedure allows: (i) students assess their impact on the final evaluation, and prepare for the job market; (ii) presentation and defense of ideas (enhancing presentation skills, outlining the working process, and evaluating the benefits and drawbacks of various solutions); (iii) teacher Feedback and Guidance (teacher feedback in learning, identification, and correction of mistakes, improving knowledge with instructor insights); (iv) peer learning and collaboration (benefits of peer feedback, promoting collaborative learning, facilitating diverse viewpoints and solutions); (v) continuous Improvement and Iteration (learning from failures and improving ideas, the importance of iterative processes in creative work); (vi) skill Development (enhancing critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, fostering creativity and innovation, building confidence in defending ideas and receiving feedback).

The presence of Erasmus students in the Portuguese class, from various countries, including France, Poland, and the Czechia, provides several advantages. These include: (i) diversity in techniques (Introduction of new design techniques from different countries); (ii) varied perspectives (Fresh perspectives on design problems and solutions); (iii) cultural enrichment (Exposure to different cultural approaches to design); (iv) enhanced problem-solving (Broadened understanding of how to approach and solve design issues); (v) collaborative learning (Opportunities for collaborative learning with peers from different backgrounds); (vi) global networking (Building a network of international contacts and future collaborators); (vii) innovation boost (Increased innovation through the blend of diverse ideas and methodologies); (viii) cultural exchange (cultural experiences and practices that can influence design sensibilities).

In the last step the *Implementation (problem-solving)*: The ultimate solution was conceived, completed, and presented to the entire group using the creative process, with all phases justified appropriately. The final assessment emphasizes the creative process, dedication, student progress, and tight deadline adherence. In cases of absence, as expected there was a noticeable impact on the student's development and learning. Students have prepared a 10-minute presentation about their project (see figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11).

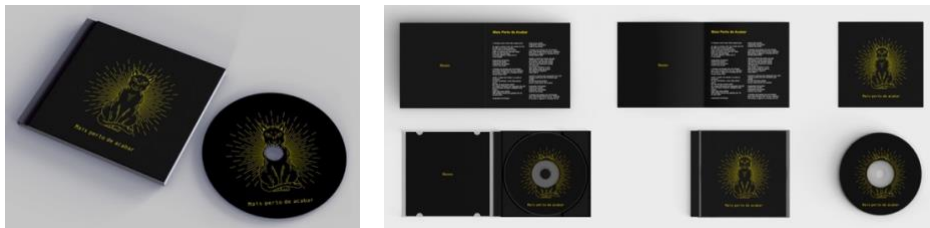
All projects presented were submitted to the band group for selecting the best proposal. The band chose the proposal from the Erasmus French student, Manon Thomas (see figures 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21).



Figures 6 and 7: *Implementation (problem-solving)*: The ultimate solution was conceived, completed, and presented to the entire class, with all phases justified appropriately.
Project from Ivan Vecerek.



Figures 8 and 9: *Implementation (problem-solving)*: The ultimate solution was conceived, completed, and presented to the entire class, with all phases justified appropriately.
Project from Gabriela Osóbka.



Figures 10 and 11: *Implementation (problem-solving)*: The ultimate solution was conceived, completed, and presented to the entire class, with all phases justified appropriately.
Project from Joana Oliveira.



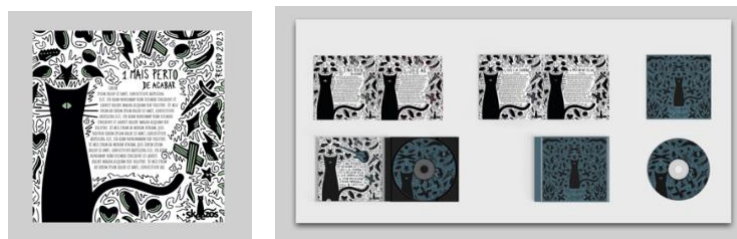
Figures 12 and 13: Manon Thomas presented the final solution of his project.



Figures 14, 15 and 16: CD and vinyl cover illustration evolution, from Manon Thomas.



Figures 17: Color study from Manon Thomas.



Figures 18 and 19: The final solution from Manon Thomas, and the selected one from the band members. On the left side, is the book containing the song lyrics, and on the right side, are the lyrics book, the CD box and the CD.



Figures 20 and 21: Vinyl cover front and back. Student author: Manon Thomas, Communication Design, 2nd year.

The Collaborative Practice and It's Value

The advantages for undergraduate Design students having the opportunity to design a vinyl and CD cover for a new album of a classmate's band are as follows:

- **Practical Experience:** Hands-on experience in designing real-world products.
- **Portfolio Development:** A tangible project to add to their professional portfolio.
- **Creative Expression:** Explore and express creativity in a high-visibility medium.
- **Collaboration Skills:** Work collaboratively with musicians, understanding their vision and translating it into visual design.
- **Understanding Client Needs:** Learn to interpret and fulfill client requirements and feedback.
- **Deadline Management:** Experience managing a project with specific deadlines.
- **Problem-Solving:** Tackle design challenges and find solutions that balance aesthetics and functionality.
- **Interdisciplinary Learning:** Learn about the music industry and how design intersects with other creative fields.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Build connections with peers and potentially industry professionals through the project.
- **Confidence Building:** Boost confidence by seeing their work used in a professional context.
- **Feedback Loop:** Receive constructive feedback from peers, instructors, and the band members, helping refine their skills.

Students love music, which is advantageous for motivating the class. These factors combine to create a motivating and enriching educational experience for the entire class. These are some of the benefits:

- **Increased Engagement:** Working on something they love, like music, makes the project more relatable and enjoyable.
- **Creative Inspiration:** Music can serve as a powerful source of inspiration, sparking innovative and creative design ideas.
- **Collaborative Spirit:** Shared interest in music fosters a collaborative and supportive classroom environment.
- **Personal Connection:** Designing for a classmate's band creates a personal connection to the project, increasing investment and effort.
- **Fun Learning Experience:** Combining music with design creates a fun and dynamic learning experience, breaking the routine of traditional assignments.
- **Real-World Relevance:** Students see the direct impact of their work on something they care about, reinforcing the relevance of their skills.
- **Skill Application:** Applying design skills to a music project shows students the diverse applications of their talents in various industries.
- **Increased Participation:** The excitement around a music project can lead to higher participation and collaboration among students.
- **Boosted Morale:** The joy of working on a beloved topic can boost overall morale and create a positive classroom atmosphere.
- **Positive Peer Pressure:** Seeing classmates excited and engaged can motivate others to put more effort into their work.
- **Enhanced Creativity:** The emotional and cultural connection to music can enhance students' creativity and expression in their designs.

Conclusions

As stated in the article, this educational project had numerous advantages and received excellent feedback from students. They were highly motivated from the beginning, and their final results proved it. Working on music-related projects makes tasks more relevant and enjoyable, serving as a powerful source of inspiration for innovative design ideas and fostering a collaborative and supportive environment in the classroom. This initiative was mutually beneficial for the musicians who still are university students, and cannot afford to pay professional designers; and also for Design students allowing to participate in a real-world project and apply the tools and methods acquired during their coursework; it exemplifies a successful initiative, where pedagogical activities converge with collaborative involvement as a motivational force for students; it was an excellent way to prepare graduates for the professional sphere by fostering engagement through innovative practices; engaging in the design process for an actual music album cover lets students to gain hands-on experience, equipping them with valuable skills and insights beyond traditional classroom activities; also it was a way to learn to interpret and fulfill client requirements and feedback. Furthermore, provides a tangible learning opportunity and enhances the practical value of students' academic endeavors and boost confidence by seeing their work used in a professional context, allowing them to showcase their work in the market, thereby improving the quality of their portfolios.

However, we have identified some limitations. The university currently requires additional studio space for practicing screen printing (serigraphy), engraving, lithography, and other techniques that are essential for developing alternative solutions. Fortunately, the university is planning to begin expansion work on a new building, which will provide a brighter future for Design course students.

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