



# The Value of Democracy in Arts and Education Research

Proceedings of ECER 2024  
NW 29. Research on Arts Education

Judit Onsès Segarra  
Fernando Hernández Hernández  
Eds.

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# **The Value of Democracy in Arts and Education Research**

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## **NW 29. Research on Arts Education**

Edited by:

Judit Onsès Segarra

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# NW 29. RESEARCH ON ARTS EDUCATION

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# How to respond to the Democratic Crisis through Arts Education

Introduction by Ana Tudela de Sousa, Ebba Theorell, Fernando Hernández, João Paulo Queiroz, Judit Onsès, margarida dias, Sofia Ré, Teresa Eça and Tobias Frenssen

## Introduction

This introductory chapter is the result of a conversation between NW29 convenors and some expert voices in the field of Arts Educational Research. From our situated knowledge and positions linked to NW29 topics of interest, and with the aim of thinking together about the world we live in, this gathering was envisioned to enrich the debate about the role of arts education and arts educational research in the European context and beyond. What follows is part of the conversation held online.

## Conversation

JUDIT: Hello, everyone. Thank you so much for being here. So, let's start. The topic is how to respond to the democratic crisis through arts education, but perhaps we can share some thoughts, consider this from our experiences, and also in our specific context.

FERNANDO: I think we can start with a journey to the modern origins of democracy. To think and understand where we are now, we need to revisit our past and previous crises.

The first revolutionary crisis took place after the second World War, when some politicians started to draw the initial idea of Europe as a collective, from which arose in 1951 the Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), followed by the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC), with the Treaties of Rome in 1957, as space for promoting economic cooperation to prevent future conflicts and rebuild the continent.

The arts played a significant role in these movements, with the artist and writer Herbert Read playing a crucial part. This contribution led to the creation of InSEA, which formally came into being with the adoption of its constitution at the First General Assembly held in Paris in July 1954, under the patronage of UNESCO. In this sense, from the very beginning of the modern history of the relationship between the arts and education, there has always been the idea of promoting democracy and contributing to the transformation of people's relationships through the arts. The arts are a field of research and inquiry that contribute to the creation of a more integrated and sustainable humanity, fostering more peaceful relationships with nature and with other beings.

However, we are facing a crisis where the notion of democracy is attacked by the leaders and/or political parties of some countries, in a particular effective offensive due to the myriad of camouflaged and populist strategies that aim to protect our rights and interests, which elect the 'people' as the centre of the system, without ever giving them any power, when in fact they are destroying one of the core pillars of our society. For this reason, the pressing question is how we could think about democracy in current times.

JUDIT: Thank you, Fernando. Oh, Margarida is here! Hi Margarida, good afternoon.

MARGARIDA: Hi! How are you? I'm happy to see you here. Sorry that I was in a traffic jam.

JUDIT: We were framing the topic, which is: how to respond to the democratic crisis through arts education. And Fernando proposed first to jump back to the previous crises to understand the current one. Considering Fernando's contributions, and looking back, I think that the Europe of the 20th Century is very different from current Europe. There is no doubt that educational contexts are more complex now than they were one hundred years ago, which makes the initial idea of democracy back then seem somewhat romantic and almost naive. We live in a globalised world where neoliberal economies and policies operate disarticulated from citizens' needs, and people are immersed in a frantic hyperconnection and overconsumption, which is supposed to fill up their lives and is nothing but an immense void. We need to consider how to respond to this and the role of the arts in addressing it. Art is very transformative, but sometimes our methods of understanding art or our approaches to understanding societies or communities can hinder these potentialities of art.

[At this point, the topic of time arose, as referenced in an interview of Roman Krznaric (2025) about his new book, 'History for Tomorrow', where he questions democracies and searches in the past for new ways to imagine the future. Hence, the need to revisit past crises and relate them to present times, to swiftly acknowledge the entanglement between the arts, education, and democracy, while also underlining how crises in democracy have propelled the arts and education over time. In the past, war tensions and dramatic changes in economic, social and political structures have fueled crises in democracy, making John Dewey and Herbert Read paramount examples of how the arts and education can fight back].

SOFIA: I would also want to bring to the discussion an expression that Ebba mentioned in the last meeting about "unexpected allies". I like that expression. And so I began to think about how we are addressing the current crisis and where we can look for unexpected allies. I don't know about you, but the emergency kit issue is a current concern here in Portugal. So, what would our emergency kit look like for dealing with this crisis?

And I ran into an interview with the philosopher Roman Krznaric (2025) (it's not easy to say it...), and he discussed how we cannot create a type of society in the long term, such as a democratic, post-capitalist society, without rethinking our relationship with time. And that was very curious because Fernando talked about looking back. It could be a clue that we need to look back.

As Arjun Appadurai (2022) said in another conference, we need to slow down to take things a little bit slower. The relationship with time may be another clue to address this issue.

JOÃO PAULO: I could take the words from Sofia. To recycle this concept of time, I think that time is crucial because we are in an era of monetisation of time. Time is monetised through the media sphere in what we call an era of cognitive capitalism, using a term.

It's exciting because the emotions are being monetised, and not all emotions are equal. Some of them have more value. Hate, for example, has considerable value in monetisation terms. It adds power, and it is very connected to power. It gives power and it gives money. And power and money, we know that they are connected.

And so, how do we place ourselves? Where is the place of art in the middle of this adverse context? Upon visiting the grounds of art, I argue that art should be emancipating. It's a tool for individual liberation. How can we help youngsters become more emancipated in an era where they are surrounded by a digital struggle for power that is overwhelming?

Because this is very demanding for all of us, for the museums and the institutions of artistic education. The context is always pushing art towards a utilitarian vision. Art should be helpful to and connected to productivity. We are in the era of cognitive capitalism in art.

And this is a deviation, but also attractive at first glance because it provides entertainment, including nice TV shows and reality shows. Making this connection between cognitive capitalism, this monetisation of emotions, of hate, of sex, of ...

ANA: Pathos.

JOÃO PAULO: Sorry?

ANA: Violence, I mean.

JOÃO PAULO: Yes, this coincidence between power and hate has never been so clear. I agree with Fernando: this coincidence was also in the years preceding the Second World War. We can understand this struggle to root art and democracy that was present in the years after the Second World War as a common sense between nations.

MARGARIDA: I would like to bring one more thing to the discussion. Discussing the standardisation and monetisation of emotions, I was thinking about the tendency to homogenise and standardise emotions, for example, through the use of emojis. We live in a world where even emotions have been generalised. I never find the right emotion when I want to write something. I've been reading about "Buen Vivir" (good living) from a South American perspective (Acosta, 2016/2018). And I think that's a very interesting point of view. We can learn something there about how to be and how to live in a community without generalisations. To be and live with nature, with each other and look at the diversity, in ourselves and the others. I think arts education can contribute to this specifically.

JOÃO PAULO: Taking counter-stereotypical as a statement, as a political position.

MARGARIDA: Yes, that is.

TOBIAS: Okay, maybe I can also add two terms or two words.

ANA: We cannot hear you.

TOBIAS: The first word I have noticed is kindness. How can kindness be an act of resistance in these times? Arts education can also be a meaningful aspect of this inquiry. And the second one, as noted by Dennis Atkinson (2017), is how arts education can be agrammatical in the grammatical current educational and political contexts.

ANA: Yes, I agree. I was listening to all of you. I think that this focus on emotion is essential, because we all face deep-seated fake news and increasing fear, fear of the other, and the differences. And this narrative of fear is making society progressively more insensitive and less empathetic. And kindness, I think, could be the clue.

[At this moment, Ebba tries to contribute some ideas. However, the connection makes her voice sound like Donald Duck, and we can't listen properly. Alternatively, we suggest that Ebba writes her comments in the chat and remain silent during the conversation].



EBBA: I agree that emotions are monetised and that hate and violence are more valued than more peaceful and complex emotions. This situation is linked to toxic masculinity and colonialism.

ANA: Yes, I think it's interesting because all of this is about communication and misunderstandings, through visual arts, images and videos. And so we can add this.

FERNANDO: To summarise what we have going through till now, first, we situated in the context moving back to the history and origins of Democracy; in a second moment, we talked about the current situation and things that need to be rethought; and now we would address alternative things that are necessary to do in response to the current times.

After the Second World War, the idea was to act against totalitarianism represented by Stalinism, Nazism, etc. Now, the present crisis extends beyond the new totalitarian regimes and autocracies. It's a new system of power relations that's unravelling before our eyes, something Yanis Varoufakis (2023) termed technofeudalism, where the relations are working in different ways and promoting alternatives. In this context, in the field of art education, we and our colleagues are using different terms to resist and respond to this situation. For example, some researchers don't discuss "Democracy". They discuss "Civic engagement" and how art education can foster it. Other people discuss arts education as a form of resistance. There are many issues and also there are people who are doing research and research promoted by the European Union, or for national programs that are connecting arts education with another way of understanding education, for example, not only to be pragmatic in response to critical situations, but also to think in political, epistemological or even ethical terms.

We are also discussing the necessity of an ethics of care here. In many cases, art education is not connected with the ethic gesture of caring. The arts can't change society, but they can certainly contribute to opening up some space in the conversation.

ANA: Everywhere, people are very concerned about their issues. For example, I'm a mother of an autistic young boy, and the group of people concerned with autism is very focused on this issue. Some of these persons cannot see that when we are arguing to have rights on this topic, this is not far away from other topics, such as racism or other things. Everyone is fighting for an issue and forgetting that others have other problems, and not taking a broader view of the issue of losing rights in Democracy.

FERNANDO: Well, we are coming from this situation in the last 30 years, the big issue addressed in arts education has been identity: sexual, gender identity, race identity, etc. However, we are not considering the commonality of how we live together, not just with me and my special group.

ANA: Yes. For example, when I'm close to one issue, some people say, 'But why aren't you fighting for this instead of fighting for that?'. It is the repetition of history, dividing to gain power.

MARGARIDA: I may be thinking about the fragmentation of interests because, as Fernando said, we have been thinking about our own identity in the last 30 years, which is a fragmentation. Could we put it together to think in common sense as a community? But do these independent voices reach common sense?

ANA: I understand. However, at the same time, this lack of empathy is related to the other problems of other identities. We can consider this because if one group loses its rights, the others also lose theirs. And all of us are losing rights. And we don't understand that this is a significant issue, not just for each group.

SOFIA: I was thinking about what you said, Margarida, independent voices. And I smiled. What independent voices? And I thought that maybe we could use this incident with Ebba's voice to think about how our voices are being modulated in recent times. And the solution here was to change the medium (she had to write instead). So, how can we change the medium of discussing our work in arts education?

JUDIT: For me, it's interesting. Listen to you, another challenge came to my mind. And it is how to move from homogenisation and heterogenisation. From minorities that claim visibility, attention, and respect, with the aim of commonality. How to operate from the common with heterogeneous minorities that claim recognition? In this sense, the arts can help students, as well as teachers and mediators, understand the complexities of reality, keeping in mind that each individual comes from a different context and has unique capacities, developmental stages, and possibilities. Arts can open lines of flight on how heterogeneity can enrich the creation of reality and the contours of the world we want to live in. This is quite a challenging task, but certainly a stimulating one. Seek ways in which the arts can help and enrich the inhabitants in this commonality in a kinder way.

MARGARIDA: Until now, education has been trying to inform a particular type of citizen, of a person, as if everyone has the same background, the same possibility to reach a specific model, a specific human. Now, we understand that we are all different and that we don't need to be equal to each other. And the change may be in the whole, in the type of education and society we want to build.

FERNANDO: This reminds me of when Benetton, 35 years ago, started using the United Colours of Benetton, and all the outlets were celebrating diversity. But what Benetton did was to create diversity as a trademark for both consumption and production. In arts education, education in general, and in political terms, this is very important. When we discuss diversity, it often becomes transformed into icons and products. And avoid completely the tensions of diversity. And sometimes, when I listen, I hear people in education, as well as in political terms, discussing how to avoid tensions. But diversity is a space for tensions. So it's not enough to recognise diversity. The thing is what we can do with diversity. Working with multicultural schools, we can see teachers who recognise diversity in terms of languages, culture, religion, and so on. However, they don't know how to leverage this diversity because when they do, tensions emerge. Teachers deal with tensions all day long, but most of them are not prepared, in the sense that they haven't yet developed the appropriate tools or strategies to work with this kind of tension, even though these tensions can be highly productive. We have been avoiding tensions all the time, but living together is living with tensions, so that we may address them.

EBBA: I also agree that arts education can (or should) challenge stereotypes and conformity and stimulate diversity. In Sweden right now, the right-wing government is unfortunately cutting all the funding to arts education in schools and universities. Art has a very low value in a conservative right-wing society, on all levels of society. So what can we do to change the value of art, empathy and arts education that is not dependent on entrepreneurship or productivity, but on solidarity?

ANA: I write something because...

JUDIT: Yeah, it's this, Ana. If you'd like to elaborate, I also agree with this, considering the ethics of care, which I think is a possible approach that some schools are adopting. So, yeah, Anna, if you can explain more.

ANA: In this regard, working from a perspective of an ethics of care can be an option. We need to feel like one; otherwise, we will not be working in the same direction. We don't realise that our differences

are different from the differences of others. Still, we are all talking about differences, and every group and every person is different from the others. So we need to fight for the right a long way, and not in competition with each other, because this divides people so much, and the politics and policies are gaining power through this division.

And in the faculty of Fine Arts, I work with students, and of course, I realise that we are all thinking the same, and arguing for the same, but in other contexts.

[Ebba writes she needs to leave].

JUDIT: Thank you, Ebba, see you, take care, enjoy the opening.

Returning to the ethics of care, it's an approach that invites us to shift the way we live with diversity in schools. I agree with Fernando that complexity and diversity entail tensions.

However, some schools are beginning to recognise the richness of diversity. So, despite the tensions, they are finding ways to embrace diversity, asking what they can learn from it. They are moving from a dichotomous perspective (right/wrong, positive/negative, etc.) to a more open and interconnected space for learning. Ultimately, all people want to be understood, recognised, and feel that they belong to a community.

JOÃO PAULO: I would like to emphasise that it is crucial to have a critical perspective in art education. To promote critical awareness in students, and also to preserve the autonomy of arts, of creation, of artists. And the autonomy of artistic thinking, artistic curatorship. And the inclusion and guidance of the public sector. It needs to be carefully examined because inclusion is a time-consuming process. And, of course, we are in a time, in an economy of time, where time is not measured in years. It's measured in seconds. And when democracy is ruled by the second in nano-monetisation, emotions are in control. It's a pathos economy of thinking. And that is very, very challenging. The changes are passing very quickly.

[At that point, we decided to end the conversation and decide together how to proceed.

In summary, arts education can foster critical perspective and awareness in students, enabling them to understand the complexities of the world. Moreover, it can also lead the way to celebrating diversity with full and effective inclusion from a care and creativity-based perspective. For those reasons, it is imperative to preserve the autonomy of arts, the autonomy of creation, the autonomy of artists, and first and foremost, the autonomy of what we can call an artistic thinking: full of freedom of choice; not afraid to take risks; constantly adapting to conditions, no matter how uncertain or fluctuating they may be; accepting change and dealing with the so called mistakes, failures and anything that deviates from the norm, with interest and the curiosity that underlies the learning process. Therefore, the journey to avoid homogenisations and capturings from the neoliberal powers will only be completed if we stay on track, resisting, engaging with each other, constantly vigilant, not losing sight of what is fundamental for us to live together, democracy, a concept too long taken for granted.

After this, and motivated by the stories that emerged in the conversation, we decided to share those inner resonances, which were materialised at some point from the thoughts exposed or the reflections that arose after this meeting].

## Echoes from some participants

### *Sofia's resonance*

There we were, all seven of us, sharing thoughts about an unfortunately pressing topic: how to respond to the democratic crisis in arts education? My head was spinning from last week, in my war of the everyday: juggling personal, family, professional, and academic demands, and all I could feel sometimes was defeat. Times of war, I tell you... at least some coherence with the news on TV.

I remembered Ebba's intervention in the last meeting, when she referred to "unexpected allies" to discuss the common effort that needs to be put into place to fight for democracy through arts education. Ironically, I brought "her voice" into this meeting, and suddenly Ebba's voice was being modulated through the computer, as if somehow she had inhaled helium or was hilariously channeling Donald Duck. We couldn't hear her properly, and at least for me, it wasn't easy to understand what she was saying. The funny incident was soon resolved: "I'll write it", she said on the chat, always one of my top two strategies to deal with problems, head to head with visualising. And so she did.

Listening to Fernando start the conversation, I immediately highlighted the word "War". Not a far-fetched interpretation of me, given the present context, where people in the European Union are being asked to assemble an emergency kit for at least three days. Relating the present moment to past times in the 1920s and World War II, Fernando outlined the entanglement of the concepts of Art, Education, and Democracy, underlining how crises in democracy have historically propelled the Arts and Education.

This analysis was in tune with what I read from the social philosopher Roman Krznaric (2025) in a recent interview about his latest book, *History for Tomorrow*, stating that "on a cultural level, what I'm trying to do is to open up our imagination a bit and ask questions. Do democracy and our economies have to be like this? History tells us that maybe there is another way."

By the way, does Arts Education have to be like this?... It is worth considering... still.

The keyword here is imagination, also mentioned by Judit right after, while explaining how we live in a different world, with hyperconnection. However, we seem to grow apart from each other more and more, I should add. As she said, communities are inevitably more diverse and complex, hence the challenge of finding new ways to address this.

Imagination is a term from the vocabulary of the Arts and Arts Education. Yet, it is also the concept that resumes the fantasy of a national collective identity, as I write in my thesis: *ImagiNation* (Ré, 2024), for assembling the image, the nation and the fiction in one word. Subscribing to Judit's suggestion of an ethics of care, I had to confess that I had imagined it differently, mainly because I fear that might not be enough. We are facing an immense challenge: our voices are being modulated just like Ebba's, because our thoughts and experiences of the world are constantly mediated, particularly by social media and consumerism. As João Paulo reminded us, nowadays everything is monetised, and we are part of a vicious cycle between money and power, where hate seems to have been rising in the stock exchange.

There is a general tendency to differentiate and generalise, as a way to easily grasp the reality of the world, which completely disregards the act of violence that is put into practice. In addition, as Ana thoroughly explained from the experience of her son with autism, society is becoming less and less empathetic with each other's needs.

Just as easily we are seduced (or induced?) with hate speech, we also seem to be developing an extraordinary resistance to emotions, to feel what others feel, just like multidrug-resistant bacteria, and this is taking place every day by numbing our senses to the atrocities of the present world.

Margarida recalled that even emojis (emotions in icons) are formatted, condensed, differentiated, and generalised, which makes it difficult for us to learn how to live in a community, in harmony with nature and with each other, if we continue to generalise and build stereotypes.

Kindness can be our resistance, Tobias suggested. That is to say that patience can be a strategy, to which I add the firm conviction that disobedience can also be a weapon, as the politics of non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi thoroughly showed us.

My middle life crisis has been showing me that the wisdom of maturing isn't knowing all the answers, but to put into question the eternal truths and to ask questions about increasingly simple, or apparently obvious, topics. So the answer to the opening question of how to respond to democratic crisis in arts education, could only be another question: how can we deal with the tensions of diversity, the drive to differentiate individuals among communities, the tendencies of homogenising collectives, and first and foremost, how can we awake our senses, our feelings, our global awareness to enjoy the good, but also acknowledge the bad and the ugly of this world? It is about time to take that responsibility on our shoulders.

How can we do all of that? Well, maybe Ebba may have brought us a clue. If our experience of the world is being modulated by technology, in a classic example of how Varoufakis's technofeudalism is the standard form of present-day dominance, which in turn directly benefits right-wing policies, then there is just one thing we can, and must do: change the medium.

The present introductory chapter aims to convert a conversation into a written text by gathering the perspectives of different scholars around a common concern, thereby articulating everyone's thoughts in a coherent and guiding thread. Not an easy task, but far less complicated than the task we are here to propose to those of you who move in the fields of Arts Education, wherever your current battles may take place right now.

How can we change the medium and make our voices heard? How can we ensure that others and our planet are heard?

Slowly, through constant effort, we can use art and art practices as tools for emancipation, as we have been doing until now. Still, this time to amplify the voice of each one of us to challenge hegemonic logics that are being imposed, sometimes even without our consent. Democracy is to grant power to the powerless, to give voice to the voiceless, to enable an alternative way out for those who feel captured. It takes time, care, emotional investment and moral commitment.

So, may we all rise to the challenge.

### *margarida's story: Acordai!*

The trend of globalisation in the world – at the economic, cultural, social, educational, political, and religious levels – gives preference to individualism, meritocracies, and unbridled consumerism, stifling what does not conform to generalist recipes (trends). The environment, people and peripheral cultures, surviving under constant pressure in the face of the violence felt, tend to be made invisible and unviable. Imagery and well-being follow the same aesthetic standards. The senses are reduced to *emojis* and *likes*, which, despite many expressions they may have, infantilise the gestures and hardly convey what they want to express correctly. Won't the *standardisation and normalisation* of everything surrounding us – houses, cities, landscapes, people, relationships, desires, tastes, words, leisure and work time – contribute to keeping people lethargic?

Norms and rules have always existed; however, what becomes real can easily cease to be. Borrowing the thoughts of Virginia Woolf (1917/2024) or Michel Foucault (1975/1997) and reflecting on the latest events closer in time and geography – the rise of the far right in the Portuguese parliament in May 2025 and the blackout felt for a few hours at the end of April 2025 in the Iberian Peninsula – we realise not only the fragility of the condition (the collapse of what was supposed to be *reality*), but also that we can take the opportunity to question the current anthropocentric models of Western society. What models have been followed, and what are the impacts of civilisation's actions on the past-present-future? How is it possible, for example, to condone the genocide of the Palestinian people (never forgetting others), to condone the extraction of Nature as if it were a resource to be exhausted without remorse, and to maintain an expression of a *smile*? Why does the same discourse of “development” continue to be reproduced, which reproduces “a structure of dichotomous domination: developed-underdeveloped, poor-rich, advanced-backwards, civilised-savage, centre-periphery” (Acosta, 2016/2018, p. 46)? Why are elections moving towards a transformation into (a)-(di)version, attracting and instrumentalising more and more populations with speeches of violence and hatred? Why do we feel that the past is in danger of being forgotten?

Let us stop being arrogant and be more humble: we are never separate from Nature. Situations of dictatorship and fascism invade societies, just as patriarchy, colonialism and racism have become naturalised. Let us *wake up*<sup>1</sup> to the lives of resistance! The arts, if they leave the pedestal that isolates them from the world, have in themselves the mobilising and transforming power. Let's stop focusing our attention on fashion “geniuses” and learn to appreciate and care for the diversity and interculturality that we are a part of. Let us collectively fight against human and ecological destruction, and recover other forms of knowledge, meanings, balances, and harmony. Let's reverse the trend towards everything that is *fast-fast food, fast furniture, fast fashion, fast architecture, fast emotions* –, and try to feel the fullness of the experiences of a “buen vivir”, as an alternative to “development”.

The result has been a tremendous loss of diversity. The planetary simplification of architecture, clothing, and the objects of daily life stands out; the parallel eclipsing of languages, customs, and diversified gestures, however, is less visible. The homogenisation of desires and dreams occurs deep in the subconscious of societies. (Acosta, 2016/2018, p. 81)

This monotony and monoculture infiltrate the spaces of education, with books (as objects synonymous with knowledge and truth) serving as vehicles for the normalisation of Western cultures. Take, for example, the case of textbooks. Being disposable books that somebody can use for a short period, intended for a specific age group, and to be worked on by teachers, what relationships and imaginaries

do they introduce and develop in students? What models of identities, genders, families, housing, jobs, cultures and stories have been transmitted, and which have remained on the margins and invisible? Is it possible to unravel the diversities of the cultures that make up a school class and relate them to the imagery exposed in the textbooks they use in their daily lives? Let's examine these books closely and reflect on their presences and absences. We find that it is increasingly complex nowadays to affirm that a particular school textbook originates from a specific region, country, or culture, because they often resemble (or seek to resemble) all of them in their proposals.

Everyone uses the same emojis, the same image banks, the same technologies, and the same recipe in search of the same educational development and a single ideal of life. But what happens in a society when it is cut off from communicating with each other and with other societies? In the case of the blackout in the Iberian Peninsula, the strangeness of isolation from technology and communication (like in my family's case) brought people together as families: time passed, sharing time through talking and playing emerged, and reminiscing was shared. With the blackout, time and doubt reappeared: what to do when we stop being overshadowed? Although it seems that this situation was not intentional, the results may be similar to those presented in an interview with José Mário Branco. This singer and activist suggested the experiment of turning off the television for some time, to expand the relationships outside the 'boxes'. This suggestion was made after a BBC TV show was presented on Portuguese TV (Branco, 1987).

However, the situation for the Palestinian people is entirely different. The intentional isolation and extermination that they are (have been) suffering cannot be solved in a few hours. The country, the families, the people and the landscapes cannot return to a previous (normal) state. When will the situation be solved? Will it be? How can we contribute to consciousness and to taking action that ends all types of expropriation, extractivism, and exploitation and recognise the rights of being on earth?

### *Ana's story*

With the increasing representation of extreme right-wing groups that jeopardise the hard-won rights of half a century in our country (Portugal), calling all initiatives for inclusion (of any differences, be they of origin, nationality, culture, sexual orientation, or simply ways of seeing and inhabiting the world) woke; we are witnessing a tremendous regression that is no longer only happening in hate speech that permeates interactions on social networks, but is now taking hold in the daily lives of citizens, and school spaces are not immune to the divisions that are growing outside (and inside) them.

In this context, teachers, particularly early-career visual arts teachers with whom we have worked in initial teacher education, have been endeavouring to find ways of transforming classrooms into democratic places that could eventually become educational cultural ecosystems, epitomising what they imagine and hope playgrounds and community life to be like.

Both the young artists attending Fine Arts degrees, who are beginning to take an interest in education and see it as a way of taking a stand and acting in social life, and the teacher education master's students, who are taking their first steps as educators/teachers, have voiced these concerns and an understanding of visual arts education. Not as the strict teaching of the visual arts, from a traditional or formalist approach, but as a possibility for them to work with their students on ways of seeing and perceiving the world and, consequently, an education not only in the visual arts, but also in the integral education of human beings, an education in what makes us human, to build together more democratic ways of being and relating in the worlds we inhabit.

However, depending on the context of their internships, their willingness and engagement can be well



received better or worse, appreciated as valuable initiatives or despised as naive ones, even considered inappropriate or downright abusive, in a growing push for the neutrality of teachers and schools, including within teacher training courses, where some academics have advocated an apolitical education.

At a time when, under the mask of “freedom of expression”, hate speech is growing exponentially not only behind the screens, but also in real acts on the streets and inside schools, this supposed (and impossible) “neutrality” is a considerable danger, which only amplifies the macronarratives, benefiting those who already hold absolute power, marginalising and even annihilating those who are fighting for their survival in an increasingly divided world.

Even if some, due to their unconsciousness or perversion, continue to defend “neutrality” in education, the question is no longer: Can education be apolitical? Education is a political act, and every teacher, whether they intend to or not, acts politically, more or less intentionally and more or less consciously, while practising their profession. Through the choices we make, in what is present and what is absent from lessons, the way we interact more or less democratically, not just with the curriculum, but with the people — our students — who are learning to be and act in community.

Therefore, we can't envisage anything more dangerous than teachers who believe themselves to be or claim to be neutral and, in essence, present their unique view of reality as absolute truth and irrefutable fact, omitting, ignoring and silencing any perspectives that don't fit in their closed view which, although not assumed to be political, is nonetheless political. In this context, the question is: How can education be apolitical? How can education abandon its mission to present the diversity of views and approaches that comprise the socio-cultural worlds in which we live? How can teachers deny their students the chance to explore different worlds that will allow them to exercise their freedom to choose different paths?

The arts as human activities that reflect a plurality of ways of being and living, which represent different narratives of human history, expressing the subjectivities of peoples and cultures; and art education as a way of interpreting, questioning and proposing different approaches to the arts, centred on current, relevant and sensitive issues for all of us as humanity, can play an active role in this regard.

### *Ebba's story: Strengthening the position of the arts through connections and accessibility*

Art in education should not be treated as a peripheral luxury reserved for special occasions or privileged groups in society. Rather, it could be described as a central pillar of human development – if we give it enough space. Art brings people together, fosters social cohesion, builds community, supports personal growth, and offers various expressions for various human needs and rights to freedom of speech. In this sense, the arts are not supplemental – they are foundational to a functioning society. Here I reflect upon how we as educators, artists and researchers can become more open to the transdisciplinary fields of the arts and how we can pay more attention to the thresholds between different expressions, research fields and subjects. Recent policies enacted by Sweden's far-right government have resulted in substantial cutbacks in arts education across schools and universities. Also musical rehearsal spaces, youth centres, and community-based programs have been shut down, and financial support—once a crucial lifeline for artists—has been drastically reduced. These changes have led to the closure of numerous educational programs, independent art groups, and cultural activities. In this period of time this financial drain hits many levels of artistic practices at the same time in Swedish society. As a result, the arts are increasingly becoming accessible only to the upper class, a process that strongly nurtures cultural inequality. Across many sectors, a form of “Trumpist” cruelty (Butler, 2025) is being prioritised among Swedish politicians and values. “Strong leaders” who seek to define a masculine and authoritarian leadership.



Policies include proposals of incarcerating ever younger children, stricter deportation measures, and large welfare cutbacks, including cuts to arts education. The connection between these measures, the areas they represent, and the broader political vision of a society devoid of solidarity is unmistakable. From the perspectives of economics and efficiency, these areas—particularly services centered on citizens who are more dependent on a strong society (for ex. children and the elderly)—are continuously controlled and pressured to save money and to conform to profit-driven models. However, these are all areas that should and still are upholding solidarity and values that transcend profit.

In one regard, the arts still receive some level of support in contemporary Sweden, primarily due to their perceived ability to foster innovation and productivity. Certain politicians recognise this utility. However, for many arts educators, artists, and researchers, this perspective is deeply uncomfortable. It creates a dissonance—a friction—because it stands in stark contrast to our foundational intentions of our artistic practices. I find myself grappling with these contradictions, seeking constructive ways to confront, question, and engage with them.

As art educators and researchers, we continuously strive to have our voices heard and to assert the intrinsic value of our disciplines. Yet, this advocacy often feels ineffective, particularly in the current political climate. Despite repeated verbal and written efforts to emphasise the significance of the arts, we still see few schools or universities (apart from those dedicated specifically to the arts) where artistic subjects are given the same status as mathematics or languages, for example.

What can we do, then, as educators and researchers in the artistic fields, to contribute to a process of profound change and displacement of these values? I believe there are many possibilities. A suggestion is to deepen our collective reflection, even more than we already do, on how the arts connect with other disciplines and fields, thereby fostering stronger connections and more resilient communities where the arts have a less exclusive, more central and democratic position. One example is the numerous studies that have shown that listening to music, painting, or dancing has profound and measurable effects on mental and physical health (Theorell, T. et al. 2015, Theorell, T., 2021; Horwitz et.al, 2015), on groups and individuals. This is a field that I think we could be more actively curious about and strengthen collaborations with. Physical and mental well-being is also strongly connected to how we collaborate, express ourselves and how we learn. Learning is what I will focus on further in this text, mainly around the different subject matters in schools, and how they can become more connected and less isolated from each other.

### Aesthetic Spheres and Aesthetic Learning Processes

In Sweden's national curriculum, issued by the Swedish National Agency for Education, there is a directive to incorporate *aesthetic learning processes* (Häikiö, 2007; Emmeroth, 2024) into educational practice. These processes involve dance, visual arts, handicraft, or music—either as standalone disciplines or integrated with subjects such as language, mathematics, or science. The concept of aesthetic learning processes is mainly encountered with positivity in various fields and institutions.

However, some teachers are less enthusiastic and don't want to "confuse" students involving artistic dimensions in their subjects, but also artists or arts teachers tend sometimes to be worried about "exploiting" the arts for other purposes than for its own sake and value. From the artistic point of view, this is an important sensibility, that, amongst many aspects, can be described as a fear that these

transdisciplinary collaborations might run the risk that the artistic expression becomes inferior in such a relation. A concern that the aesthetic expression can be forced into becoming too instrumental, technical, complex and not experimental and playful enough, for example, by using simple models and templates or short processes where there is only one answer. However, this suspicion against the benefits of involving aesthetic expressions can also lead to an unintended isolation of the arts...

I suggest we can try to approach these transdisciplinary connections with greater curiosity and ask ourselves how they can become even more relevant and of higher quality. Hopefully, these processes can be further explored collectively and we can ask ourselves how we as artists, teachers and researchers define quality in transdisciplinary aesthetic learning processes. How can we avoid simplification and instrumentalization, and how can we experiment with them further together, both nationally and internationally?

A curiosity towards the multidimensional nature of the arts, I believe, can create new paths forward. Such openness means acknowledging the inherent interconnectedness of all disciplines: the way subjects coexist, inform, and enrich each other (Vecchi, 2010). There are *aesthetic spheres* (Theorell, E., 2025) in each subject that we can pay more attention to, antennas reaching out from one discipline to another. As educators and researchers in the aesthetic artistic field, I believe that by strengthening the quality and visibility of connections between the arts and other fields to a greater extent, we can develop new transdisciplinary dynamics while simultaneously making artistic expression more accessible in our everyday lives. This, to me, is a “show, don’t tell” mission: to demonstrate examples of interconnectedness, to elevate the presence of the arts in more spheres of life, and to make art more central than peripheral, creating a solidaric, artful approach to life.

## The Contents of this eBook

This book presents a compilation of nine contributions presented at ECER 2024. Although all of them share research and experiences from different countries and fields, we have decided to group them in three thematic sections with three papers each.

**1)** In a time of transformative pedagogies centered in care, well-being and cultural diversity, facing digital technologies from both their potentialities and dangers, in this section, entitled *Arts, education and digital world*, we find three papers that approach the mentioned issues from different perspectives. From the field of dance in Hungary, Agota Tongori investigates the creation of educational environments in the theoretical courses for dance university students where students feel individually recognized and cared for, promoting mutual care and respect. In addition, she examines how the digital and AI-powered tools applied contribute to dance students’ success in developing their research skills, critical thinking and creativity.

Starting from the idea that discourses produce social realities, and taking a non-deterministic perspective on technology, Sara Pastore investigates the discourses in digitalisation from educational field. She presents a study in which she uses Critical Discourse Analysis to demonstrate that, although in the dominant educational discourse, digital technologies are used to reinforce competitive, financialized and individualistic models, there is still room for other uses. Thus, she explores the chance to engage with other discourses of digital education into art and museum education as epistemological and methodological repertoires to work upon the way we think about and enact digital education. The study unveils a crucial potential of art education linked to the use of digital tools in learning environments. In front of the massification of higher education, which includes low attendance, social isolation,

and educator burnout, Sohpie Ward, Teti Dragas, Laura Mazzoli Smith, Kirsty Ross, and Zhijing Miao, investigate the use of Digital Storytelling (DS) as a mode of pedagogy that aligns with an ethics of care. Through a study with university students that involved workshops about (DS) and focus groups, they presents the potentialities of this artistic educational tool to promote students' engagement, social confidence and raising well-being.

2) This second section, entitled *Visualities and materiality*, groups three papers that reflect in different ways about images and materiality linked to arts education. In the first paper, Margarida Dourado Dias and José Carlos de Paiva, based on *[in]visible* project's insights, invite us to enter in the controversial world of visualities in textbooks through anti-colonial and anti-discrimination lenses. From critical perspective, they present a part of the study in which Master students of Illustration, Edition and Print struggle to imagine alternative visualities for some textbooks beyond stereotypes. The study concludes how powerful these images are, specially for primary school children and, therefore, the responsibility illustrators have to create more inclusive and non stereotyped images.

The second paper, based on a research about Agro-Ecological Transition (AET) placed in the little village of Florac in the middle of nowhere in the mountains, involving artists, agronomy engineers' students and teachers, Corinne Covez explores the potentialities of Documentary Theatre to foster Agro-ecological transition and, also, teachers' transition in terms of transforming the ways they teach AET to reduce Eco-anxiety in their students. The research brings light in terms of the importance of providing place-based practices and learning experiences at university, both for students who felt more engaged and improved in some emotional and personal dimensions, and for teachers who experienced the educational transition in a more meaningful way.

In the third paper, Tobias Frenssen examines possible roles of materiality in bridging the gap between arts education research and teaching in a university context. Through practical examples, such as shared learning environments and interdisciplinary seminars, the study illustrates how materiality facilitates innovative interactions between students, teachers, and researchers. It also addresses challenges such as balancing practice and theory and managing conflicting needs in shared spaces.

3) This last section, entitled *Playing with boundaries*, addresses presented papers at ECER 2024 that have in common the fact that authors entangle disciplines and concepts in their research. In the first paper, Mário Azevedo and Paulo Nogueira present an essay about otherness in music, about how we can bend the boundaries of already known in sound, and they invite us to project it towards the infinite, towards endless sound, towards that which is yet to be known. To do so, they share fragments of a meditative discourse that includes concepts such as nomadic listening and post-music linked to arts education. Still in the field of music but from different approach, Ana Luísa Paz and Ana Paula Caetano present a cartography of existence of the Portuguese pianist José Vianna da Motta (1868-1948) as a participatory and interdisciplinary proposal under the premises of the History of educational ecologies (HEC). The paper shares the experience of the workshop held in ECER 2024 in which participants created their own interpretations and questions about how the cartographies presented could evolve towards the assemblage of Vianna da Motta as a human piano, and what hecological approach can bring to arts-based research.

Finally, Judit Onsès Segarra and Ebba Theorell explore the notions of care in arts education through presenting the results of a workshop carried out. After introducing some research cases, attendants reflected together about the importance of care in arts education and research, what it means and how researchers can foster care in their educational practices and research. Some concepts linked to care

arisen were materiality, space, and users and practitioners expectations and imaginaries.

## Notes

1. “Acordail” (“Wake up!” in English) is a song by Fernando Lopes-Graça created with verses by José Gomes Ferreira. The song was made during the Estado Novo dictatorship (1946), appealing to the anti-fascist resistance movement.

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# 1. Arts, education and digital world

# Dance University Students' Perceptions and Experiences during Theoretical Course Activities Supported by Culturally Responsive and Care-Based Methods Incorporating 21<sup>st</sup> Century Digital Tools: A Qualitative Approach

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## Abstract

This study addresses the increasing need for transformative pedagogies in higher education, particularly in the context of growing cultural diversity and global uncertainties. The research emphasizes the importance of compassionate, culturally responsive teaching methods that foster student well-being and engagement. This approach is in line with both intercultural and care-focused new pedagogies. The study's objectives are twofold. On the one hand, to investigate if it is possible to create educational environments in the theoretical courses for dance university students where students feel individually recognized and cared for, promoting mutual care and respect. On the other hand, to acquire information about students' perceptions of whether and how the digital tools applied contribute to their success in developing their research skills, critical thinking and creativity. The sample involved dance artist and dance coach university students in BA theoretical courses relating to host country culture, students' home country dance culture and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The applied teaching methods incorporated individual and group projects utilizing digital and AI-powered tools to enhance artistry and imaginativeness as well as analytical reasoning. The student activities included independent research, digital product creation, and peer assessments as well as feedback on course activities, all within a supportive, culturally immersive environment. The outcomes based on the qualitative approaches of teacher observation and student feedback analysis indicated that such pedagogical approaches significantly improved student engagement, collaboration, research skills, and overall well-being, highlighting the effectiveness of care-based, culturally responsive education.

**Keywords.** Care-based, Culturally responsive, Digital tools, Intercultural, AI-powered tools, Projects

## Introduction

Incorporating the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy and the pedagogy of care, the objective of the activities to be introduced was to create educational spaces where learners feel seen as individuals and cared for, fostering reciprocal care for others. The integration of indispensable 21<sup>st</sup>-century digital and AI-powered tools provided avenues for creativity and developing critical thinking. The aim of the research is to reflect on the care-based practices proposed (Tongori, 2024).

In addressing the need for transformative pedagogies, the research questions formulated are as follows: Is it possible to achieve the development of student engagement, collaboration, research skills, critical thinking, and creativity through cultural information exchange in a caring environment? Additionally, do care-based, culturally responsive methods integrated in activities embracing digital, AI-powered platforms and tools contribute to the well-being of the dance university students involved? These questions aim to explore the effectiveness of the implemented pedagogical approaches (Tongori, 2024).

Based on the literature, it was hypothesized that a caring environment (Bali, 2020) could be created in a higher education setting as well, which would foster students' collaborative and individual research skills development. It was also presupposed that with a course design allowing for students' choice of sub-topics, with various ways of scaffolding – from a learning management system (LMS) having an abundant supply of demonstration and support materials accessible 24 hours a day seven days a week, to ways of offering constant, individualized help during the teaching-learning process both synchronously, in-person and asynchronously, online –, students would feel safe and assisted but also inspired to make their own, well-informed decisions regarding their project products. The amicable manner of interacting with students, to the regular expression of interest in students' well-being on a weekly basis have also been hypothesized as factors contributing to the performance-enhancing atmosphere of comfort of the students for cultural information exchange. Finally, the digital tools have also been presumed to be in favour of student engagement and enjoyment (Andrew et al., 2018; Jeong, 2017; Rafique, 2022).

## Theoretical framework

The previously limited scholarly focus on care in higher education (Walker & Gleaves, 2016) has recently increased due to the uncertainties brought about by wars, environmental threats, and pandemics. This shift reflects a reconsidering of knowledge and existence in the "Anthropocene" (Malone & Young, 2023 as cited by Tongori, 2024). Given the increasing diversity among university students regarding culture, social background, and language, there is a need for transformative pedagogies (Lopez & Olan, 2018).

Transformative pedagogy is described as an educational approach that integrates social constructivism with critical pedagogy (Lynch, 2019; Tinning, 2017). The philosophy of transforming the society with the means of education is also reflected in the UNESCO guide for teachers Transformative Pedagogy for Peace-Building (UNESCO-IICBA, 2017). Its intercultural nature is described by UNESCO Guidelines for Intercultural Education (2006) as the presence and fair interaction of diverse cultures, along with the potential to create shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect. These pedagogies require educators who establish compassionate and culturally responsive relationships fostering learner well-being. In this respect, we are viewing compassion in a positive light, as it has always been seen by non-Western cultures (White, 2017). This approach aligns with the novel methods in intercultural



education (Kawalilak et al., 2019; Tongori, 2023) as well as the pedagogy of care. Both emphasize mutual respect and fostering genuine dialogue (Barek, 2023) along with „making kin”, which translates as experimenting within a shared student-teacher environment with a more “symbiotic” relationship (Duraiappah, 2018, p. 1; Malone & Young, 2023). Caring, and being culturally responsive [as well as interculturally competent] as an educator could also be regarded as identical approaches in that teaching builds on ethnically diverse students’ own cultural experiences to avoid inflicting on them a cultural dominance with unfavourable or even debilitating effects (Gay, 2018). The pedagogy of care and culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) are interconnected categories with the latter one guided by five components (Connection to curriculum, Authentic relationships, Reflective thinking, Effective communication and Sensitivity to students’ culture) (Gay, 2000), whose initials form the acronym CARES. When identifying both approaches, the focus is on the educator’s actions and attitudes which result in the students’ experiencing warmth, caring, trust and respect (Bottiani et al., 2012).

Care could take various forms, from course design to ways of offering help during the teaching-learning process, to the manner of interacting with students, to what extent and how regularly interest in their well-being is expressed (Bali, 2020). Regardless of the form care takes, both care-based and culturally responsive pedagogy share the features of supporting students’ strengths, promoting an inclusive and asset-based approach, building on students’ cultural capital and aiming for academic achievement (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Gay, 2018).

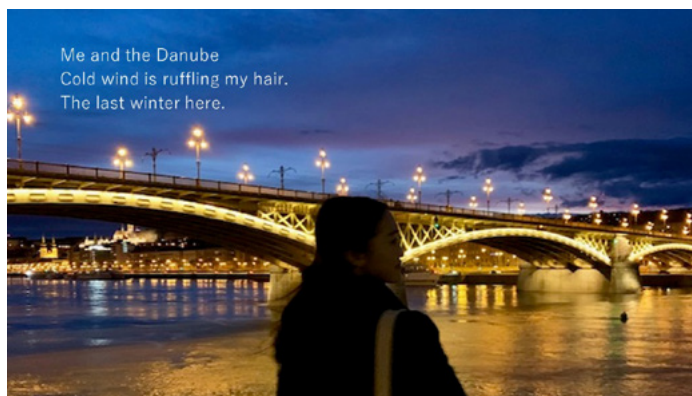
Aguayo et al. (2024) claim that no research has examined student experiences of CRPs from a CARES perspective. This study will not endeavour to discuss student experiences in depth from the aspects of all five components. However, it will approach care-based and culturally responsive pedagogical practices from students’ experiences through activities that are curriculum-related, foster authentic relationships, require and improve reflective thinking, enhance effective communication techniques and presuppose a sensitivity to the students’ culture. By doing so, from an intercultural perspective, in a dance higher education context, it will contribute to the academic discussion of the topic.

In the recent literature, there appears to be more research (although not typically in the higher education sphere) on culturally responsive teaching concluding that utilizing CRP results in more positive outcomes than regular programs or mainstream practices (Au, 2009). According to Bui and Fagan (2013) both the regular and the novel methods sensitive to students’ cultures were equally effective. However, more recently, research has found that in 3-5th grades, Latine students guided by teachers using specific CRPs had better reading outcomes (Lopez, 2016). Focusing on higher grades, a study investigating an Ethnic Studies class implementing CRPs, found that 9th-grade students demonstrated improved attendance & increased grade point averages (Dee & Penner, 2017). In a comparatively uncommon example of research on care in higher education, Anderson et al. (2019) found that students identified care as a crucial element of effective teaching. They characterized good educators as those who are passionate about their subject, dedicated to teaching, and concerned about their students, significantly enhancing students’ engagement, enthusiasm for learning and future aspirations.

Another strain of research focuses on the relationship between student well-being and the use of digital technology. Student well-being is defined as a state in which the student can reach their full potential, feel involved and can get the most from their education (*Leveraging Technology to Support Student Wellbeing*, n.d.). This state could be fostered by practices utilising technology. According to the literature, digital technology will enhance active student involvement and participation, inclusion as a response to diversity, peer tutoring and collaboration, managing workload, self-regulation, planning, self-expression and meeting individual learning needs. Furthermore, it will facilitate support in monitoring and provide for timely assessment (Balica, n.d.; Panesi et al., 2020).

## Methodology

The study explores activities conducted with a diverse multinational group of dance artist and dance coach students who also take theoretical courses relating to host country culture and the dance culture of students' country of origin as well as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. The students were encouraged to make their own choices in their research, enjoying the benefits of a supportive environment, including the teacher and the student body. Cultural immersion in the classes did not only serve to acquaint them with the host country's culture but also fostered a shared environment, promoting equality, homeliness, and a sense of belonging. This shared foundation also facilitated the exchange of their respective cultural heritages through digital products, characterized by mutual interest, appreciation, and respect. In EFL classes the key elements of culturally responsive pedagogy were (1) eliciting the subtopics from students to match their cultural interests, as well as (2) providing culturally appropriate materials to make students feel comfortable and base their own learning experiences on. The project methodology comprised several steps within the 90-minute time frame. The structure of a class was dependent on the nature of the course (culture- or language-related). However, project-like activities had the following steps: (1) initial instruction and demonstration of basic knowledge and skills by the teacher; (2) independent research by students using their digital devices; (3) creation of a product using various digital tools; (4) presentation and communication of the product; and (5) assessment of products by peers and the teacher. The pre-teaching step involved introducing the new topic, demonstrating the use of suggested digital platforms or tools, and presenting a sample product. During subsequent sessions, students showcased their products, ranging from haikus (Figure 1) and storyboards (Figure 2) to slide-show-supported presentations (Figure 3), from virtual museums to flyers (Figures 4 and 5), posters or videos to peers and the teacher. Evaluation followed a pre-agreed criterion-referenced assessment rubric (also fostering student well-being) rating categories such as content accuracy, content depth, organization, and style on a 1-5 point scale.



Figures 1 a & b. Students' own photos and haikus on Poetry Day, expressing their experience as international students, inspired by Hungarian poets' poems and haikus

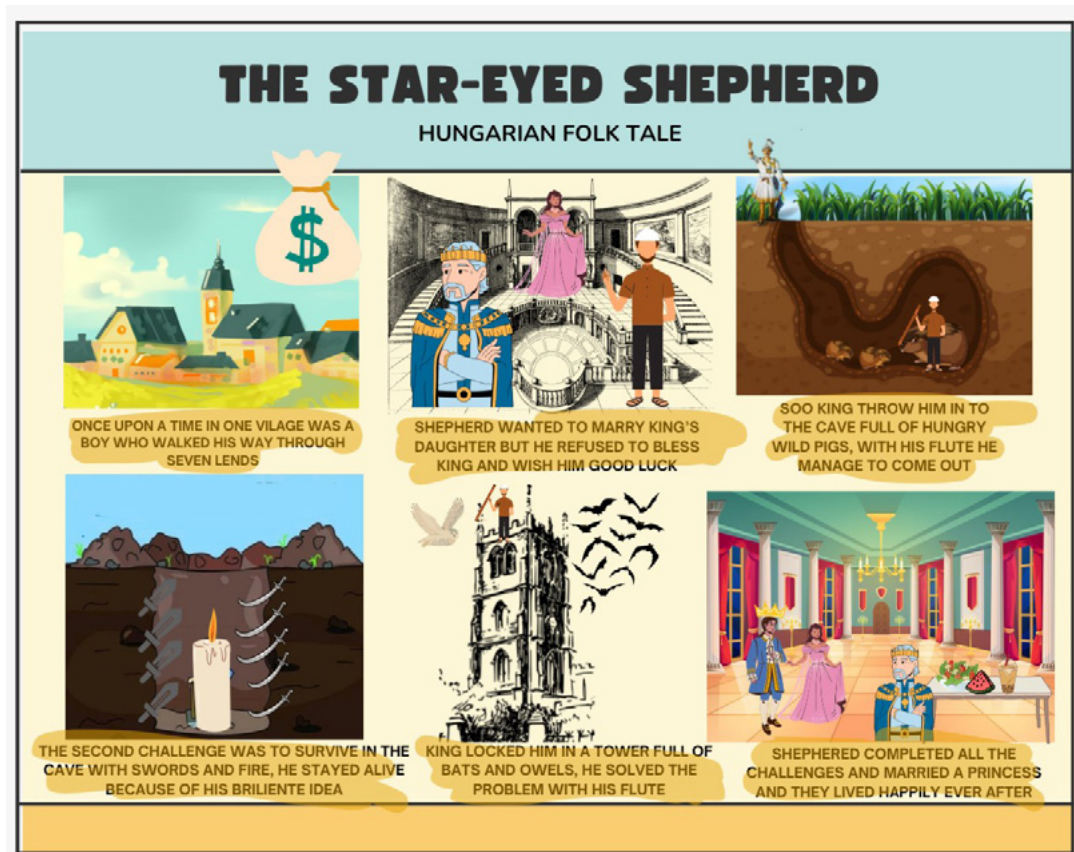


Figure 2. A digital storyboard depicting the plot of a Hungarian folk tale based on one episode of the video serial Hungarian Folk Tales chosen by Student

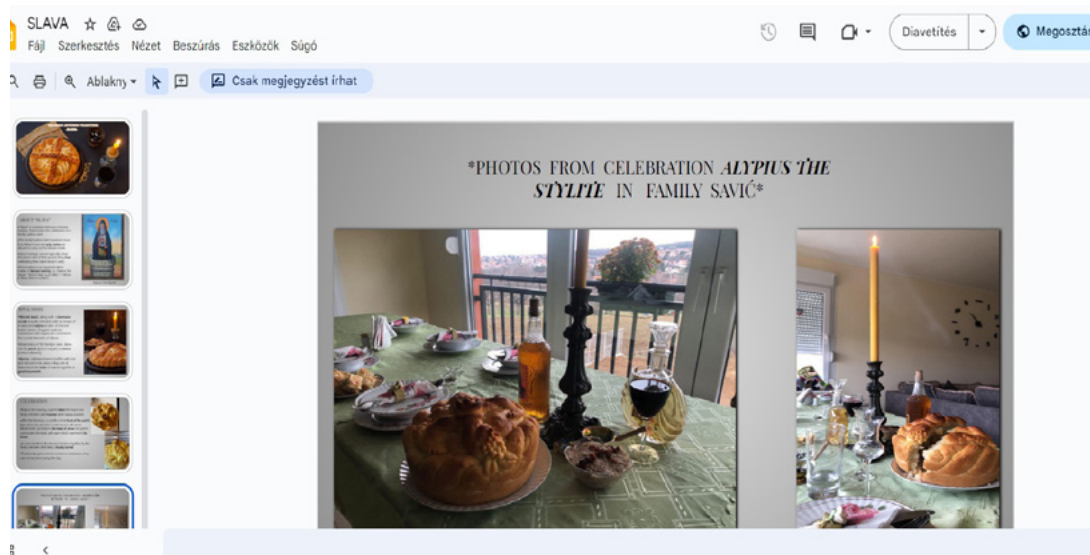


Figure 3. A student generated slide show in Google Slides to support Student's presentation on a home country autumn holiday, Slava



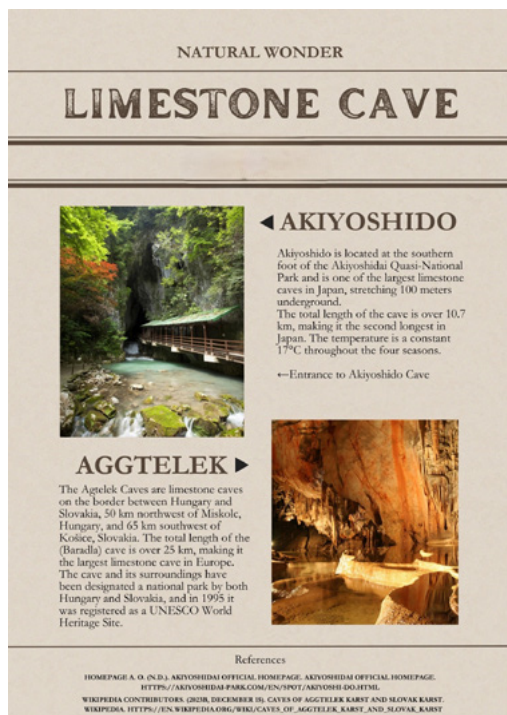


Figure 4. Student's flyer created in AI-powered Canva to compare home and host country natural wonders.

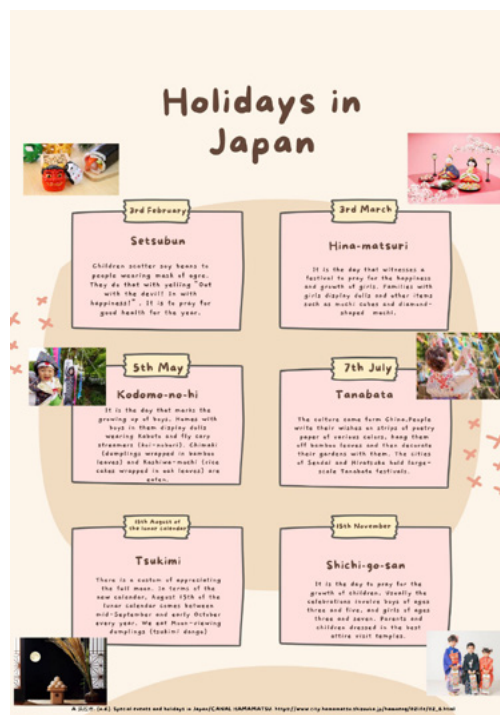


Figure 5. Student-generated poster on the topic of holidays in the EFL class.

Learner feedback was also invited in the form of digital sticky notes (n=18) added to a Miro board in the Miro Visual Workspace shared with the students by the teacher. This allowed the students to reflect on the processes and what they took away with them from the culturally responsive projects (Figure 6). The original notes in the Miro work space reflect the various aspects of student experiences. They provided insights into how students perceived the processes of preparation, doing their research while using (or learning to use) technological devices and digital (sometimes AI-powered) applications, making digital tech-based products and communicating their findings to share the knowledge created for themselves. The content of these notes was qualitatively analysed in the following two ways. First the content of the notes was grouped according to the underlying similarities between the topics mentioned. Conclusions were drawn regarding how the various aspects the students perceived during the processes of the activities. Second, the text of each note was copied and pasted into the WordItOut app for further, word-level analysis. As a basic setting, words with at least two letters in the texts were filtered to avoid the repetition of the indefinite article 'a' and the personal pronoun 'I' but allowing for more meaningful words. Another filtering criteria, a minimum frequency of one appearance altogether in the texts was also set. The filtered sample was composed of 118 meaningful words consisting of at least two letters (Figure 7). In line with the students' process-centred approach, teacher observation was also focussed on student engagement, support and creating an atmosphere where the conventional teacher-student roles are substituted by a collegial and interdependent relationship.

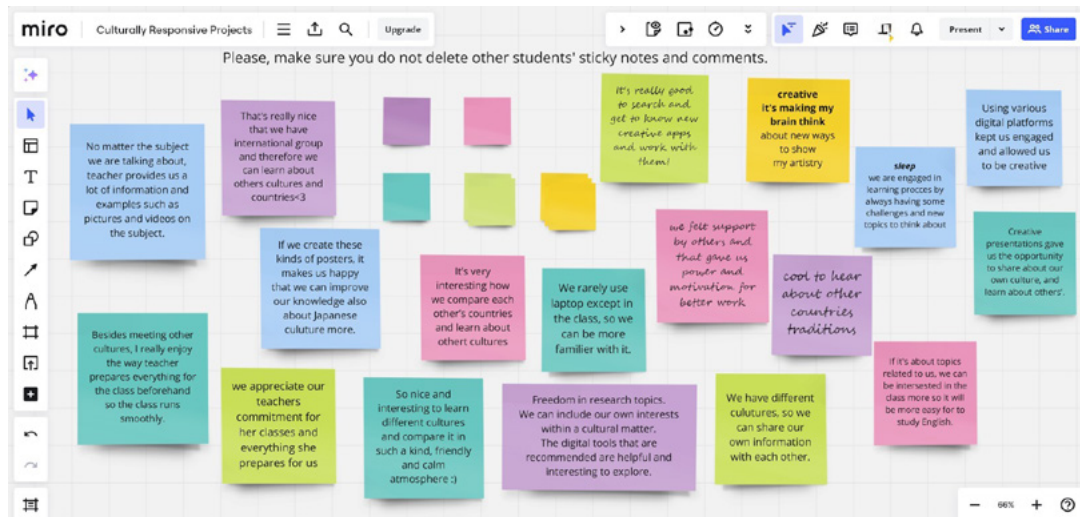


Figure 6. Students' digital sticky notes in *Miro* visual workspace on the CRP projects.



Figure 7. Word cloud (weighted word list) created by *WordItOut* app from students' digital sticky note feedback texts on their experiences about the projects

## Outcomes

The thematic grouping resulted in the following insights. Most students (n=13) self-reported a very positive attitude to the processes in general using expressions like “That’s really nice”, “I really enjoy”, “it makes us happy”, “interesting”, “really good”, “cool” and “engaged”. Almost half of the students (n=7) expressed their definite appreciation of and interest in each other’s culture. This, however does not exclude the other half’s interest or appreciation but sheds a light on a significant weight on cultural exchange in a multicultural cohort of interculturally minded students. It is apparent, that they share a common interest in and respect for not only their own but others’ cultural values. Nearly a fifth of

the students (n=3) found it important to mention the fact that the projects provided an opportunity to gain deeper knowledge of their own culture. A third of the students (n=6) reflected on the use of digital tools and applications. All the six of them expressed positive attitudes towards the technology used either regarding them as “helpful” – emphasizing the opportunities provided by these instruments for creativity, knowledge-sharing or mastering the use of technology, or keeping them engaged, preventing them from nodding-off [because of constant exhaustion from rehearsals and performances in addition to their regular academic and practical work load.]. Around a third of the students (n=5) found the activities appealing in terms of creativity or artistry. Creativity is also one of the 21st century skills (Dean et al., 2010; Sheff et al., 2014) that could be even more important to students with artistic abilities at a dance university. Two students perceived the classes as ones characterised by a supportive, friendly and calm atmosphere. This supports the presence of care-based education, which is an indispensable feature of transformative pedagogies in the 21st century. One student emphasized the freedom of choice, another essential element in educational models promoting the development of reasoning skills. Two students expressed their appreciation for the teacher’s work in the preparation phase to ensure that “the class runs smoothly”. These remarks suggest that the students who made them are aware of the significance of the first, planning and preparing stage of the processes, which is a proof of their maturity. It might also indicate that these students could be future dance coaches. Interestingly, the processes seemed to be more important to students than the assessment phase of the products as no reflections were shared in Miro about the evaluation. It is assumed that learning to use the tools and applications effectively, as well as developing a routine in successful information retrieval to then integrate new knowledge into the existing one time- and effort-consuming for students, therefore their mind was centred more on the processes than the result.

The word-level, technology-based analysis confirmed the results of the “manual” thematic grouping. As by default, the more frequently a word is found, the larger it becomes in the *WordItOut* word cloud, it could be seen that the aspects discussed in the previous paragraph are highlighted in the weighted wordlist (Figure 7). In addition, the analysis was carried out several times, setting the “minimum frequency of the word” to two, three, four or five. In the first case, 30 words from the 118 met the filtering criteria: about, creative, cultures, more, learn, class, topics, really, others, new, own, interesting, other, countries, everything, prepares, gave, compare, subject, different, nice, digital, teacher, engaged, matter, think, work, share, information, each. In the second round, when filtering for words occurring three times occurred, the following 14 words met the criterion: about, creative, cultures, more, learn, class, topics, really, others, new, own, interesting, other, countries. When filtering for words occurring as frequently as four times, a list of 6 words met the criterion: about, creative, cultures, more, learn, class. the final round of filtering for words with 5 occurrences, resulted in only one word: about. As this is a preposition, it is not a meaningful word itself without a noun phrase, therefore the most frequently used words occurring in the students’ reflections four times are the ones that represent the aspects perceived most significant by the most students (excluding the determiner ‘more’ and ‘class’ as it carries no additional value to our research in question) are: *creative*, *cultures* and *learn*. Students are most interested in *learning* about each other’s and their own *culture* using digital and AI-powered tools (like Canva) to enhance their *creativity*.

The results of the teacher observations on the behaviour of the students throughout the processes of the activities could be summarized with the statements of witnessing successful student engagement through digital applications appealing to students, being a witness to students’ enjoying the freedom of choice, viewing students succeeding in their knowledge creation and sharing after asking for and receiving sufficient support, and experiencing students’ relaxed manners in a caring environment, where the conventional teacher-student roles are substituted by an interdependent, therefore more equal partnership.

Looking back at our research questions, considering the teaching-learning processes studied, based on the literature, as well as the student feedback discussed, we can make the following observations: The outcomes observed from the flexible exchange of conventional teacher-student roles to collegial and interdependent ones resulted in heightened student engagement and the fostering of collaboration. By incorporating digital and/or AI-powered tools, enhancement of research skills, stimulation of critical thinking and creativity also took place, together with the practical application of skills through the exchange of cultural information. Based on student feedback and teacher observation, the classes made the participants feel engaged, relaxed, supported and cared for in a dance higher education setting.

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# Reenacting digital learning through art and museum education: an exercise of affirmative critique

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## Abstract

In this study I investigate educational digitalization discursively, holding attention to how discourses are productive of social realities. With this in mind, I focus on how, in the dominant educational discourse, digital technologies are used to reinforce competitive, financialized and individualistic models, unpacking these models through the examination of the main imperatives about learners, knowledge and power. However, using Critical Discourse Analysis as a sensitizing framework, I address the field of discursive production as a contested site, in which plural, and even conflicting visions about learning can be crafted. Hence, attuning to a non-deterministic perspective on technology, I explore the chance to engage with other discourses of digital education. In doing so I tap into art and museum education as epistemological and methodological repertoires to work upon the way we think about, and thus enact, digital education. I use two case studies as empirical entry points into such spaces of possibility, interpreting the data I collected through walkthrough observations, document analysis, and qualitative interviews with key informants. I argue that the two case studies recode some of the tenets and premises of digital learning environments, demonstrating how digital technologies can be reclaimed to different educational visions. In addition, they also unveil a crucial potential of art education, which departs both from the expressivist and the functionalist deadlocks.

**Keywords.** Art education, Critical discourse analysis, Affirmative critique, Educational digitalization

## Introduction

Several scholars have demonstrated how contemporary educational digitalization often nurtures a “narrow educational diet” (Biesta, 2013), made of predetermined learning outcomes, standardized comparisons and peer competition, within an overarching vision of learning as the acquisition of technical knowledge (McLaren & Jandrić, 2018). This educational paradigm has, additionally, progressively coupled with a sheer invasion of the EdTech commercial actors, resulting in a consequential economic re-theorizing and re-organizing of the public education sector, a trend further accelerated by COVID-19 (Cone et al., 2022, Williamson, 2022). Giroux (2011) described contemporary Western education as a form of neoliberal pedagogy. While the current model cannot be fully grasped through neoliberal ideology alone, it is nonetheless genealogically rooted in it, and further complicated by the shifting digital economies and ecologies where it is located.

While digital technologies are employed in this context to maintain hegemonic social relationships, this research is attuned to a non-deterministic stance that, while eschewing techno-solutionism, endorses the suggestion that technology also offers opportunities for fostering subversive and emancipatory pedagogies (Rose, 2015). To explore such spaces of emancipation – which Biesta (2013) described as ruptures in the order of things – I approach educational digitalization discursively, i.e. addressing discourses as productive of social realities (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak, 2014). Hence, I tap into art and museum education as epistemological and methodological repertoires to reimagine how we think about, and thus enact, digital educational practices.

Art and museum education, in fact, serve as discursive sites where specific ideas and visions regarding (digital) learners and learning are crafted. These visions, which may conflict with the dominant, highly financialized, and individualized ones, can be borrowed in order to open alternative discursive pathways in digital education. Two examples of such effort are the notions of “unlearning” and “emancipatory objects” (Baldacchino, 2013; Mayo, 2013). While Baldacchino suggests unlearning as a way to refuse any given, pedagogical certainty, Mayo has proposed the analogy between the museum and the curriculum, as both are sites of hierarchical and official knowledge relationships. However, he also argues how museum artifacts can be reconfigured as emancipatory, helping to unveil the non-neutrality and the partiality of any knowledge production process, as well as revaluing it as a collective action. These two ideas, while not exhaustive, provide a useful starting point for reimagining educational digitalization – or at least they suggest that such an effort is possible – as an educational programme based, for example, on a collective production of subjective, politically charged knowledges (as sustained by the emancipatory character of museum objects) and aimed at an unexpected unfolding which exceeds from the standardized, predetermined idea of learning (as implied in the concept of unlearning).

This research thus has a twofold aim. First, I attempt to frame the discourse embedded in the model of digital neoliberal pedagogy, disentangling the values and imperatives which animate the contemporary prescriptive discourse of digital education. Second, with this analysis as a background and acknowledging the contested nature of any field of discursive production, I carry on an exercise of affirmative critique, drawing upon art and museum education. To do that, I present two case studies as empirical entry points into such discussion, reflecting on how they unsettle some premises and assumptions regarding digital learners and learning.

## Methodology

In order to frame the discourse embedded in the model of digital neoliberal pedagogy, I draw upon Critical Discourse Analysis, which I address as a sensitizing framework suited for teasing out how specific discursive formations and their embedded ideological assumptions materialize into sociodigital practices (Fairclough, 2003; Machin & Mayr, 2023; Macgilchrist, 2021). I restricted my field of analysis to Higher Education, which is particularly involved in the process of moral and material financialization of education (Giroux, 2011; Jandrić; Boras, 2015; Peters, Jandrić, 2018). I also focused on the case of Italy, thus also taking advantage of the insights conveyed by my lived experience (Fook, 1999). Wanting to consider both the policy and the business domains – and above all, their increasing, symptomatic symmetry (Williamson, 2022; Komljenovic et al., 2023) – I investigated the PNRR (*Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza*), one of the key policy documents in Italy concerning these issues, and a set of textual samples collected from the Italian homepages of the so-called Big 5 (Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Google, Meta) educational departments. Building upon previous research in educational and discourse studies (Foucault, 1984; Macgilchrist, 2017) I focused on three key entangled dimensions of educational practices: the ontological dimension (the ideal personas); the epistemological dimension (the legitimated knowledge); and the political dimension (the power relationships naturally embedded in any act of knowledge production).

However, Critical Discourse Analysis is an affirmative practice, in which the dissection of specific discursive formations is aimed at seeing openings, generating ruptures and providing spaces of “freedom and possibility” (Sriprakash et al., 2024). Building on this invitation, as well as wanting to look at sociodigital practices from a “position of abundance” (Gibson-Graham, 2008), I conducted a case study analysis. Thus, I selected two projects of digital art education and analysed them by coupling document analysis, a careful navigation modelled upon walkthrough technique (Light et al., 2018; Duguay & Gold-Apel, 2023) and qualitative interviews to key informants (museum staff and researchers involved in the projects). I interpreted the data building upon the relevant literature, again focusing on the aforementioned ontological, epistemological and political dimensions.

## Reassembling the dominant discourse of digital pedagogy: key findings of the Critical Discourse Analysis

My analysis demonstrated how the digital pedagogies often enact a discursive production of its prefigured subjects. Focusing on the ideal learners, for example, they are re-moralized in a competitive, individualistic way, and their value is expressed in terms of their ability to perform and take advantage of the (supposed) freedom of flexibility – i.e. to learn at any time, place and pace. Here, digital technologies are endowed with the potential of helping students perform more efficiently, faster, and overall to fit better into such system (Grimaldi & Ball, 2021; Ball, 2003; Houlden & Veletsianos, 2019).

In this context, a very specific knowledge is legitimated. Such knowledge is claimed to be objective and neutral and is required to be new and fast. While these values are already embedded in the neoliberal ethic (Rosa, 2003), digital technologies are exploited to bolster them, promoting a technical knowledge and participating in the innovation frenzy ingrained in the “data gaze” and the “algorithmic imaginary” (Beer, 2019; Kitchin, 2023).

As any act of knowledge production entails an exercise of power (Ball, 2012) the first consideration about power structures concerns their stiffening due to the universalization of a unique legitimate form of

knowledge. Moreover, this idea of knowledge is shaped through the interests and expectations of EdTech actors – what Williamson (2023) refers to as “technofinancial futuring” – hence making the business giants of tech more and more influential towards how education will and should be. In addition, the analysis showed also an asymmetry in the encounter between human actors and technological ones: for instance, the human actor is deprived of agency through specific semantic procedures such as passivation (Fairclough, 2003).

### Tearing the discourse: Case Study Analysis.

The first case study, *Deep Viewpoints*, is a project by the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) in Dublin. Part of the EU H2020 SPICE project, *Deep Viewpoints* is a web app intended to explore how diverse communities, which are traditionally underserved and underrepresented in the museum, perceive artworks and exhibitions. In *Deep Viewpoints*, the process of observing and responding to artworks is guided by a script. Scripts can be categorized by their type (a statement, a question/set of questions, a story opener) and by their theme (e.g., family, home, activism, vulnerability). Depending on these features they can be both interpreted (answered) or authored by the participants.

Investigating the ontological dimension, the analysis showed how *Deep Viewpoints* engages users as a participative community of learners, thus departing from the dominant figure of the individualized learner-entrepreneur. Here, the hegemonic, discursively shaped account of the ideal self as an individual enterprise is replaced by the prominence of the collective subject of the community. The competitive, outcome-oriented value framework is dismissed in favour of the process of interpersonalisation (Mullholland et al., 2023), i.e. the process in which users engage in a mutual production of relevant meaning, thus reconnecting with Biesta’s (2018) idea of education as a “worldly space”: a site to come and stay into dialogue.

As it is evident, in the case of *Deep Viewpoints* it would be misleading to speak of one legitimated form of knowledge. The very same idea underlying *Deep Viewpoints*, in fact, entails the existence of many perspectives and angles from which to produce knowledge. Moreover, being based on the “slow looking” methodology (Tishman, 2017), it counters the fast knowledge paradigm, understanding slowing down as a way to establish connections and to construct meanings that are consciously subjective and partial. Finally, it is significant that the standardization evaluation effort typical of the mainstream contemporary discourse, represented by the classic higher rate criteria, is overthrown by beyond accuracy ones on which the app is based (Mullholland et al., 2023).

While the pluralization of knowledge is, in itself, an act of fragmentation and multiplication of sites of power, *Deep Viewpoints* is overall based on the displacement of traditional power relationships – between users and institution, for instance, or between privileged/marginalized communities. Overall, it triggers a subversion of given orders and rules regarding who has the right to knowledgeably speak about others and culture in general. For example, this is the case with the two scripts “*Necessary Discomfort*” and “*Pride of Place*”, respectively authored by the Black and Irish Community and by the Irish Travellers. While the first addresses the issue of racism in Ireland, emphasizing verbalization and self-representation as painful, but necessary acts for emancipation, the second attempts to dismantle common prejudices about Travellers’ culture. (Figures 1 & 2).

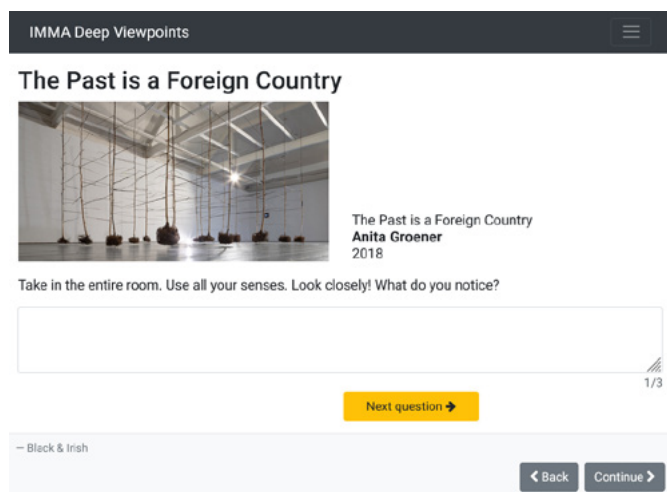


Figure 1. A stage from the script “Necessary Discomfort”, by the Black & Irish Community. Moving from the artwork “The Past is a Foreign Country” by Anita Groener, this question stage invite users to reflect upon issues of migration, memory, time and space.

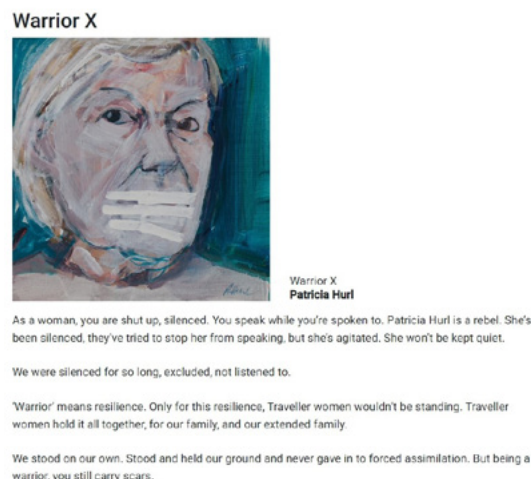


Figure 2. A stage from the script “Pride of Place” by the Travellers Community. This statement stage moving from the artwork “Warrior X” by Patricia Hurl explore the overlooked condition of Travellers women.

The second case study I analysed is *The Uncertain Space*, the Virtual Museum of the University of Bristol Library, launched in 2023. Its first exhibition, called “*Secret Gardens: Exploring Pathways Through our Collections*”, was curated by a group of young Bristolians and addresses the themes of activism, identity, and climate change. The exhibition, being the first of the museum, which is permanent, is hosted by Spatial.o and can be accessed via web app or through a VR headset.

As far as the learning personas are concerned, when navigating *The Uncertain Space*, the students are reconceived as actors among other actors (Biesta, 2018). The young Bristolians involved in the digital museum curation, in fact, become part of a collective subject, while there are still valued in their singularity. They are encouraged to use the virtual exhibition as an exercise in self-expression and self-representation, reflecting on their roles in a much broader socioenvironmental context. While the collective perspective counters the competitive idea of learning, self-representation relates to the exploration of owns and other's subjectivities, recognizing the latter as not fixed or given but relationally and ecologically shaped (Matthews, 2023). This recalls what Biesta (2013) refers to as the difference between identification and subjectification, i.e. the process of either taking up a preexisting and locked-up identity, or to embrace uniqueness and diversity.

Building on this, knowledge is relocated from a space of standardization to one of uncertain, open-ended encounter. First, the tension between subjectivity and collectivity, unfolds in the epistemological dimension as a continual shift between the individual and the group, resulting in an idea of knowledge which is both subjective and co-constructed, hence accepting epistemic subjectivity while at the same time eschewing the typically digital risk of the individualization of learning as a customizable, highly personalized experience. Moreover, as the young curators appeal to the affective and bodily imagination of the user, it is a knowledge which is non-technical in its kind, and its overall living and in-process, aimed at encountering secret and unexpected meanings (Irwin, 2015). Finally, also *The Uncertain Space* addresses the issue of pace and temporality: first, the imperative to innovate and to do it fast is replaced by the need to slow down required by co-creation; and second, the outcome-based idea of learning as a set of discrete, measurable task to be completed is swapped for a persistent and sustainable educational programme. (Figures 3 & 4).



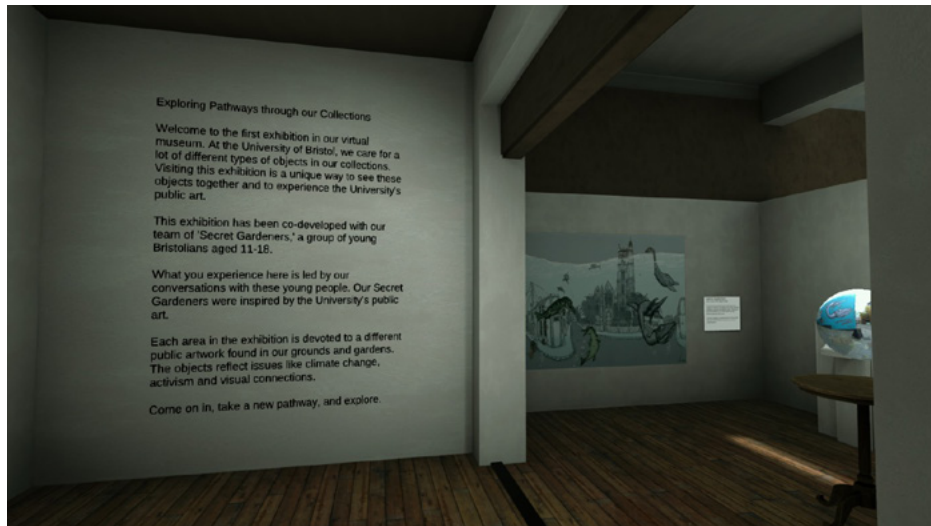


Figure 3. Screenshot of the first room and introducing panel of "Secret Gardens".



Figure 4. Screenshot of one of the rooms of "Secret Gardens" which addresses the issue of climate change through pasts and futures entanglements.

Overall, the analysis indicated an intention to adopt an approach to education founded on reciprocity and care. Learning becomes a mutual effort, reflected in the identification of the educational concerns, the construction of the curriculum and the knowledge production process itself. In this way, *The Uncertain Space* engages in a renegotiation of traditional power structures and epistemological hierarchies – while, as testified by the interviews, not excluding the role of the educator. The learning occasion becomes a source of power through the enablement of usership and access. If this reconfigures the learners' relationship with the institution and its cultural objects – that become resources to be used – it also acts upon the technology, which is reconceived through suggestions of critical reappropriation and conscientized usage, thus eschewing both the prohibitionist and the techno-solutionist options.

## Conclusions

To conclude, the background analysis has outlined dominant discourse tied to educational digitalization. This discourse is firmly rooted in the paradigm of digital neoliberal pedagogy, in which the imaginary

tied to digital technologies functions as a resonant amplifier for characteristics already ingrained in the neoliberal rationality. However, drawing upon the generative disposition of critique inherent in CDA, reassembling a discourse is also a way to disentangle it, eventually identifying openings and tearing ruptures. The case study analysis, in fact, supported the hypothesis that digital education could be approached along alternative trajectories, encompassing diverse perspectives on subjects, knowledges (symptomatically plural) and power relationships.

One of the concluding remarks of this study regards the renegotiation of both technology and education, which are redefined in their mutual relationship. For example, Deep Viewpoints counters the idea of cultural narrowing often embedded in the speed/technology binomen, fostering a knowledge that is pluralized and deepened through the acknowledgment of multiple angles – in other words, viewpoints – to be unravelled, while embracing the need to slow down in doing so. The Uncertain Space, on the other hand, acknowledges education as a mutual and affective process, recoding digital technologies: not as tools for achieving standardized, predetermined results, but as triggers of uncertain, unexpected – even secret! – learning outturns, that unfolds during the educational process.

Therefore, drawing some (partial and provisional) conclusions, I argue that formal education may borrow from art and museum education in order to broaden the way in which we think about, and thus use, digital technologies in school classrooms, research labs or even university online platforms. Such an encounter, in fact, triggers a twofold relocation. The first is a relocation of educational digitalization within a discursive matrix where digital technologies are not a way to enhance learning, but rather to open and broaden it. This stands in contrast to the value framework implied in the very same notion of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) which emphasises learning as a profitable, market-driven process, rather than a human, emancipatory one (Hayes, 2015). The second relocation, on the other hand, pertains to art practice within education, challenging both instrumentalist and expressivist paradigms. In this way, it counters the capture of art by the narrow educational diet propagated by mainstream educational digitalization discourse, which seeks to reconfigure creativity as just one of the many skills required to succeed in the contemporary global economy.

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# Archiving identities from portuguese textbooks

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## Abstract

In this paper we identify the use of Digital Storytelling (DS) as a mode of pedagogy that aligns with an ethics of care. We consider how DS, as a summative assessment, may foreground care ethics such as attentiveness, responsiveness, and trust. Our interest in this topic stems from concerns over the impact on staff and students of the massification of higher education, which includes low attendance, social isolation, and educator burnout. The paper presents an empirical study of students' summative work and educators' views on the use of DS in the classroom in the context of a large, international cohort of first-year undergraduates on an Education Studies programme. We conclude that DS may help students overcome some of the negative issues of massification and the legacy of Covid-19 identified in this paper, and that educators may also derive benefits from its use.

**Keywords.** Digital Storytelling, Education Studies, Ethics of care, Massification of higher education, ummative assessment

## Introduction

Building on Bozalek et al's (2016) research into how an ethics of care may be used to analyse the dialogic aspects of feedback, we consider how DS, as summative assessment, may foreground care ethics such as 'attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness and trust' (826). Our interest in this topic stems from concerns shared by the authors over the impact on staff and students of the massification of higher education, defined as the rapid increase in student enrolment from the end of the twentieth century onwards (Hornsby & Osman, 2014). Policies designed to create more diverse constituencies of learners are fully supported by the authors of this paper. However, international research on the massification of HE has noted numerous concerns including changes to the content and delivery of courses that negatively affect course outcomes (Monks & Schmidt, 2011); the diminishment of interaction between staff and students (Wang & Calvano, 2022), and an increase in 'work-related stress, burnout, and mental health difficulties' amongst staff (Brewster et al, 2022, 549).

This paper asks if DS has the potential to mitigate some of the effects of increased class sizes and offer an ethics of care in the context of an international cohort of 114 first-year undergraduate students. To answer this question, we draw on (i) qualitative data from students' personal narratives as part of their summative assessment (ii) a focus group held with the teaching team after the end of that year's cohort on the module. The module explores the doctrines of some of the major theorists who have helped shape educational research and practice internationally. By locating philosophies of education in their historical context, the module aims to help students explore how ideas evolve over time, and to understand the source of some of their own beliefs about teaching and learning.

## Digital Storytelling

Digital Storytelling (DS) is an educational practice informed by the belief that 'narrative is one of the fundamental sense-making operations of the mind' (Lodge, 1990, 4). For DS, this sense-making has two salient dimensions: (i) by telling stories about our lives, we become more aware of the dynamic forces that shape our values, behaviours, and motivations (Ward et al, 2023); (ii) by combining these stories with digital media such as images, audio, and video (Cersosimo, 2019), we create multimodal vignettes that help other people "walk in our shoes" (Hardy & Sumner, 2018). DS workshops are underpinned by the desire to create a site of trust, empathy, and solidarity for instructors and participants alike. The story circle is the heart of the traditional DS approach as developed by Lambert (2017) and this space has been found to confer to participants precisely the qualities of a space apart that can foster dialogue and an ethics of care.

## Methods

At the end of the module, students attended three lectures on the purpose and method of DS and two seminars in which they (i) viewed and discussed examples of DS; (ii) shared their stories about a learning experience that was of value to them. As part of their summative assessment, the students were asked to (i) combine their narrative about themselves as a learner with music and images to create a DS that could be played on a computer and uploaded to the online assessment portal; (ii) write a 500-1000 word Reflection on their DS, exploring connections between their personal experience and theories/theorists encountered on the module, e.g., Confucius, Rousseau, Wollstonecraft.

After the students had completed their summative assignments for the module, a focus group was held with the module teaching team. The aims of the focus group were to: (i) discover if the classroom helped facilitate students' analysis of any synergy between their lived experience and the module content; (ii) share our experiences of working with the students as they developed their personal narratives.

### *Data analysis*

Our analysis of the students' work was informed by Parry's (1997) theory that the storyteller's use of metaphor enables us to discover how they are configuring their world. This approach is particularly helpful when exploring any uniformity of expression that might arise in storytelling about global phenomena, such as standardised assessment. We therefore asked how the students explained their lived experience through the conscious or unconscious use of metaphor in their DS.

Our analysis of the focus group is based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis, which we found to be compatible with our analysis of the students' work (Parry, 1997), as both approaches acknowledge the researchers' reflections as a component of meaning-making. We read the focus group transcript, and descriptive codes were assigned to the data that were broadened to an interpretive level from which overarching themes were identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **Students' work**

The students' DS explored diverse topics such as family ties, mental health, and the impact of Covid-19. Using an approach based on Parry (1997), two metaphors emerged:

#### 1) The 'Machine'

- Impersonal forces govern our existence, with education likened to a 'sausage factory' that processes students.
- Students feel constrained by rote learning and exam pressure: they are liberated by a person or activity, and express their gratitude for this release.
- Students express dissatisfaction with the factory model of education, which emphasizes rote learning and constant assessment, and identify connections between their lived experience and theory encountered on the module, such as creativity, positive psychology and critical theory.

#### 2) The 'Veil'

- Our mundane experiences 'veil' or obscure life's deeper meaning.
- Students face personal dilemmas and fail to find answers through conventional means, and instead gain enlightenment through faith, love, or meditation.

- Students identify connections between their lived experience and theory encountered on the module, such as Romanticism, Confucianism, and liberal education.

## Focus Group

We developed three themes from our focus group:

### 1) Social cohesion

- Lack of continuity in seminar attendance hindered rapport building among students and seminar leaders.
- Students often attended different groups, preventing them from becoming comfortable with each other.

### 2) Scaffolding

- Despite the lack of cohesion, students engaged well with the DS seminars.
- Effective design and delivery of DS sessions, including pre-seminar activities and structured support, helped students feel less stressed and more prepared.
- The scaffolding approach made seminars more student-led, encouraging sharing and feedback.

### 3) Conscientization

- Developing students' insight into education theory and practice was crucial.
- DS seminars helped students connect module content with other learning elements, pushing them out of their comfort zones and broadening their perspectives and raising their critical consciousness.

## Discussion

The DS assignment aimed to help students connect their lived experiences with educational theory through narrative interpretation and representation. Students engaged strongly with the DS assignment, demonstrating high levels of critical analysis of educational theories. The DS activities encouraged students to link module content with their personal stories, pushing them out of their comfort zones. Furthermore, the process of listening, dialogue, and action in DS workshops led to the development of critical consciousness (conscientization) among students. Despite initial hesitation, students produced polished assessed work, indicating the development of their critical consciousness through DS creation and reflection.

The aim of this paper is not, however, to ask if DS is the optimal means for teaching the history and philosophy of education, but to ask if DS has the potential to foster an ethics of care, defined as 'attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness and trust' (Bozalek, et al, 2016, 826). Despite initial challenges, students engaged with DS seminars and supported each other by listening and responding to stories. Care ethics are evident in the students' DS: whether using the metaphor of the 'machine' or the 'veil' to describe their educational experience, students acknowledged the importance of person-to-person interaction. For example:

*...during the storytelling process, I kept returning to think about the teachers who had a positive impact on my life – for me this shows how central relationships are to education and how they can change learners' lives. (Reflection, Student A)*

The care ethics of attentiveness, responsiveness, and trust that we observed in the story circle were even more pleasing, given the students' prior lack of engagement with their designated seminar groups. We agreed that this lack of engagement was unusual for a first-year cohort and is perhaps explained by the impact of Covid-19 on the students' final years of secondary education. As noted by Kareem et al (2022, 1595), 'Social distancing led to the lack of ample interactions, affecting cognitive development at all stages of growth'. As a result, 'Students' mental health suffered drastically due to a lack of peer and social interactions' (ibid). Some of these issues may have undermined the students' ability to commit to a particular seminar group, but it is also possible that students' random attendance was influenced by the size of the cohort. According to Mulryan-Kyne (2010, 177), 'Low participation levels' and 'social isolation' are common on massified programmes. This tendency for social isolation, coupled with the profound impact of social distancing prior to coming to university, may account for some students' inability to engage consistently with their designated seminar group. Despite the lack of "gelling" prior to the storytelling sessions, the students engaged with the DS seminars and were willing to act as a 'witness to the other' (Ellis, 2017, 439) by listening and responding to each other's stories.

## Conclusion

Higher education (HE) has become so massified that our current era is termed 'post-massification' (Shin & Teichler, 2013). Research shows that massified programmes often suffer from low student participation and social isolation, compounded by educators feeling disconnected from their students (Mulryan-Kyne, 2010; Diller, 2018). Despite this, Noddings (2013) argues that care ethics, which include attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, and trust, can be applied beyond small communities. This paper demonstrates the potential of DS to foster an ethics of care, promote social cohesion, and enhance critical consciousness (conscientization) among students, regardless of cohort size.

Although some students were reluctant to engage consistently with their seminar groups, they participated actively in DS seminars, sharing personal and relational stories. This engagement helped overcome issues related to massification and the impact of Covid-19. The process of storytelling revealed students' capacity for attention and critical consciousness. The structured, iterative process of DS seminars, including listening, dialogue, and action, was crucial in this development.

Students' narratives often depicted experiences of constraint and release, reflecting on oppressive educational practices and their limited opportunities to express these feelings. While the reliability of these stories was not evaluated, the heartfelt and moving nature of the storytelling was evident. The DS seminars provided a platform for students to respond to their entanglement with others and the world with compassion, often expressing gratitude and a desire to help others.

The use of DS was not burdensome for educators and contributed to job satisfaction, which is linked to reduced burnout (Li et al, 2022). The diverse experiences shared by students, including those with disabilities, carers, and those facing economic hardship, highlighted the potential of DS to support widening participation in HE. This study suggests that the ethics of care underpinning DS can mitigate the challenges of large cohorts and support students from underrepresented backgrounds.

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## 2. Visualities and materiality

# Can the images be another thing?

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## Abstract

“O risco é, por natureza, uma coisa invisível. Ora, o que não se pode ver é geralmente desconhecido. Para que uma coisa seja conhecida, tem de ser visualizada.” [Risk is, by nature, an invisible thing. What cannot be seen is generally unknown. For something to be known, it has to be visualised.]

—Achille Mbembe, 2024, *A Comunidade terrestre* [2023, *La communauté terrestre*], p. 158.

The images shown to us and ostentatiously offered only provide the risk of ignorance inherent in what is rendered invisible. A risk that promotes numbness and does not awaken interest in investigating what has been hidden.

Rejecting the numbness that is offered to us, promoting as indisputable the culture that in Europe is becoming hegemonic and drifting away from the defence of the values that established it (*liberté, égalité et fraternité*), our critical perception presents us with a controversial present that affects all of humanity, erasing hope. These are times of imminent climate catastrophe, ecological recklessness, exhaustion of Earth's resources, conflicts driven by the Western dominance of geostrategic politics, the expansion of neoliberal policies, populist delusions, and ultra-conservatism.

The critical recognition of the overload of images that surround and affect us is part of the research carried out during the execution of the *[in]visible* project, focusing on textbooks. This research seeks to identify the omnipresence of naturalised images representing hegemonic values, ignoring the potential use of images that could foster the development of socially engaged citizens, actively shaping renewed possibilities for the future.

What is presented in this article, which corresponds to a presentation at ECER2024 and focuses solely on the singular example of the presence of images in textbooks, represents an effort toward globality, contributing to the defiant promotion of anti-discrimination and anti-colonial policies. The presentation at ECER 2024 was focused on the second seminar, *Illustrating the absence with Júlio Dolbeth*.

**Keywords.** Images, (Un)representation of identities, Textbooks, Anti-discriminatory values

## context

The project *[in]visible – [in]visibility of identities in Portuguese 1st grade elementary textbooks of Social & Environmental Studies after 1974*<sup>1</sup>, which began in January 2023 and ended in August 2024, is a research project that was funded by the *Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia* of the Portuguese Government.

During the project, we analysed the conflicts that the concept of Identity entails and their representation in images offered to the Portuguese school audience of the 1<sup>st</sup> elementary grade in textbooks adopted during the last 50 years since the Carnation Revolution (25<sup>th</sup> April 1974). Based on the visual representations present in the subjects *Estudo do Meio* (1991–) and its predecessor, *Meio Físico e Social* (1976-1990), the project team analysed the curricular history of these subjects, the associated legislation, and the adopted textbooks<sup>2</sup>.

The studied sample – the 1<sup>st</sup> grade of these specific subjects between 1974 and 2023 – corresponds to the period following the April Revolution and stems from the realisation that in these disciplines created from then on, there was a clear desire to promote the training of new citizens with the possibility of growing up in freedom and democracy. These subjects (*Estudo do Meio* and *Meio Físico e Social*) include themes that directly, objectively and subtly emphasise people's social integration and place in the private and public spheres. The choice of the 1<sup>st</sup> grade of schooling stems from the realisation that this is a school year in which formal education begins, in which children are not yet familiar with reading and writing words but are more used to dealing with images.

Thinking about and analysing representations of identities means considering that not all identities/people are represented, leading to questions about who deserves to be seen and highlighted in these books and who doesn't. Thinking about identities also means reflecting on the discrimination that can be "seen" through the representations and absences of genders/sexualities, ethnicities, classes, ages and abilities. Reflecting on the invisibilities and absences of otherness evident in the naturalised and stereotyped presentation of the "same", drawing homogenous identities.

## seminar\_illustrating the absence with Júlio Dolbeth

One of the research methodologies used during the project *[in]visible* was the realisation of seminars involving the participation of specialists, professors, illustrators and students. In this paper, we will present an overview of the second seminar, entitled "Ilustrando a ausência com Júlio Dolbeth" [*Illustrating the absence with Júlio Dolbeth*], that was held in February 2024 at the Faculty of Fine Arts of

This seminar involved students from the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the Master's in *Illustration, Edition and Print* [MIEI] with the illustrator and their professor Júlio Dolbeth<sup>3</sup>. This teacher had participated as an illustrator in the first seminar, "Ver o invisível" [*Seeing the invisible*]<sup>4</sup>, which facilitated the articulation between the students of the master's program and the project. As for the participants, from a total of 13 students, the average age was 26 (the youngest was 22 years; 10 people were between 22 and 27 years; and the three oldest were between 31 and 34 years old).

Once the group of researchers had presented the project *[in]visible* to the participants, and following a shared reflection on the power of images/



illustrations regarding discriminatory or anti-discriminatory content, the students were asked to create illustrations for the pages provided in the facsimiles of the textbooks of Social & Environmental Studies (1<sup>st</sup> grade), used between 2016 and 2023. Since there were no limits relative to the illustration techniques and mediums during the seminar, the proposals for representations of identities should work, from an anti-discriminatory perspective, on the possibilities of images combined with the texts in the proposals provided.

Reflecting on what happened at the seminar, which was a good exercise in approaching the purposes of *[in]visible*, allowed the research team to come up with new approaches to the complexity of processing and creating images for the teaching context, facing the search for possibilities of creating images that are not stereotyped and comfortable with naturalised ideas that do not directly address discrimination.

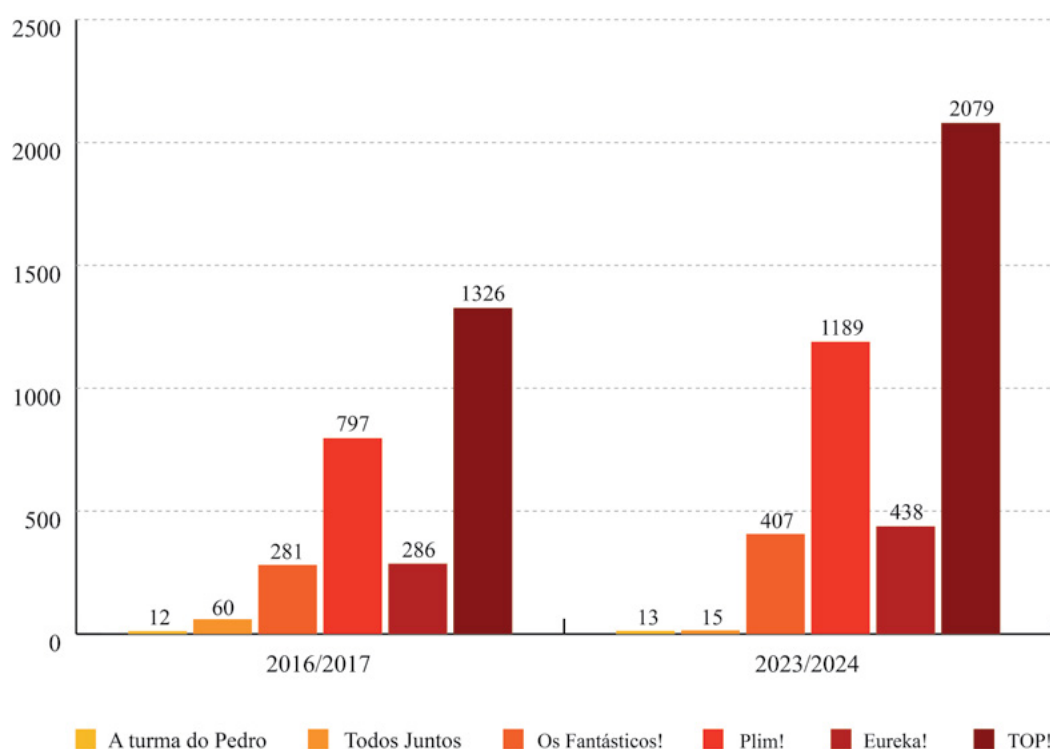


Chart 1. Distribution of 1st-grade Social & Environmental Studies textbooks between the first and last year of their validity period. The data was obtained from the DGE (Direção-Geral da Educação, n.d.)

Between the school years 2016/2017 and 2023/2024, six Social & Environmental Studies textbooks were adopted in the public Portuguese schools. From these, “Eureka!” and “TOP!” are from the same publisher – Group Porto Editora – and both were adopted by an average of 60% of schools. The second publisher with broader distribution in Portuguese schools is from the Group LeYa (textbooks “Os Fantásticos!” and “Plim!”), with a distribution of an average of 39%.

Regardless of the commercial capacity of some publishers to dominate the textbook market, the study focused on more than just these textbooks. Thus, within the focus of the investigation, differentiating between the images published from this perspective was irrelevant.

For this seminar, the proposals of textbooks’ pages, which were chosen randomly by the students, were of the following textbooks:

- GONÇALVES, Alícia & LISBOA, Joana (2022). *Estudo do Meio – 1.º Ano. Os Fantásticos!* (8<sup>th</sup> print run; 1<sup>st</sup> ed. in 2016). [Illustration by NósnaLinha & João Tavares; cover by Zero a oito]. Edições Gailivro, Grupo LeYa. Pages 19, 30, 38-39 and 45.
- MOTA, António José, LIMA, Eva, PATRONILHO, Fátima, SANTOS, Maria Manuel, BARRIGÃO, Nuno & PEDROSO, Nuno (2022). *TOP! Estudo do Meio 1.º ano* (15<sup>th</sup> printing; 1<sup>st</sup> ed. in 2016). [Illustration by Adão Silva, Adília Costa, Luís Prina, Rui Mourão, Zaira Costa & Zé Nova]. Porto Editora. Pages 24 and 25.
- NETO, Franclim Pereira & BORGES, Miguel (2022). *A turma do Pedro – Estudo do Meio 1.º ano – 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.; 1<sup>st</sup> ed. in 2016). [Cover and illustration by Vanessa Alexandre & José Pedro Costa]. Edições Livro Direto. Pages 15, 18, 54, 55, 56 and 74.
- RODRIGUES, Angelina, MARCELINO, António, PEREIRA, Cláudia, AZEVEDO, Luísa & ANTUNES, Ricardo (2019). *Eureka! – Estudo do Meio 1. Estudo do Meio – 1.º Ano* (3<sup>rd</sup> printing; 1<sup>st</sup> ed. in 2016). [Illustration by Ana Freitas & Nuno Alexandre Vieira]. Areal Editores. Page 63.

The selected pages of the textbooks that were the subject of this seminar covered different chapters of the textbooks, mainly related to the body and the family, specifically:

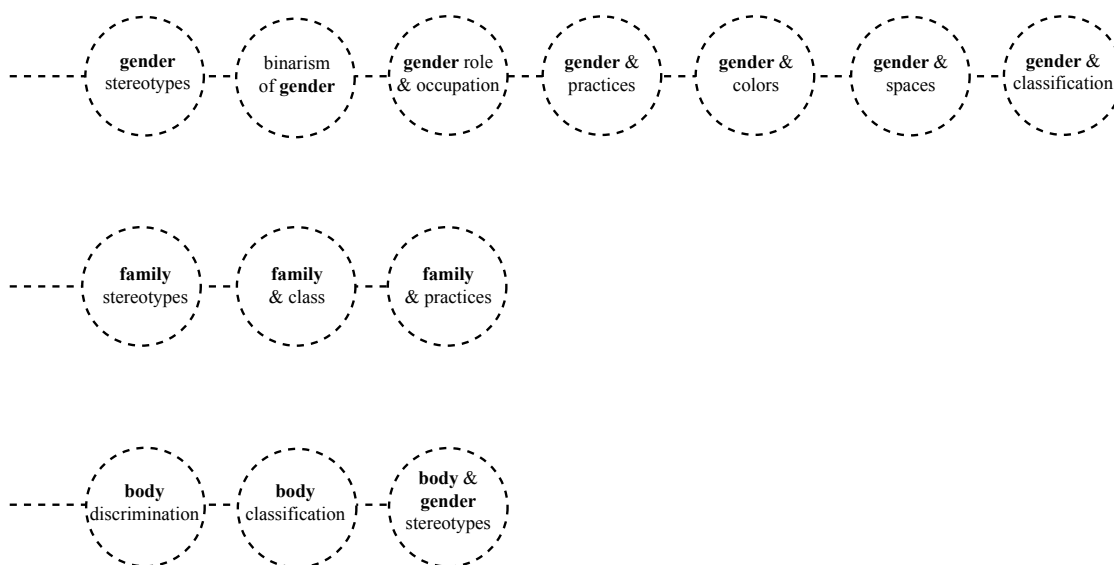
- *How your school works*. Publisher Gailivro.
- *Your body*. Publisher Gailivro.
- *Members of your family*. Publisher Gailivro.
- *House*. Publisher Gailivro.
- *TOP moment!* Publisher Porto Editora.
- *I don't forget*. Publisher Porto Editora.
- DISCOVERING OURSELVES: *Recognising our sexual identity*. Publisher Livro Direto.
- DISCOVERING OURSELVES: *The health of our body*. Publisher Livro Direto.
- DISCOVERING OTHERS AND INSTITUTIONS: *Members of our family*. Publisher Livro Direto.
- DISCOVERING US AND THE OTHERS] *Block 4 – Discovering the interrelationships between spaces > I can do it now*. Publisher Areal Editores.

After analysing and creating new representative images for the textbook pages, the students were invited to share and discuss their difficulties in the first part of the seminar. Difficulties such as avoiding stereotypical choices and imagining possibilities to inscribe in the images the potential to generate critical reflections with primary school pupils. The visual and verbal results were recorded through photography and audio recording.



The collection of drawings and conversations, as well as the analysis of visual proposals and the transcription of verbal exchanges, resulted in the creation of an artistic research exhibition published on the Research Catalogue platform of the Society for Artistic Research. In this exposition, *[in]visible\_illustrating the absence* (Margarida Dias & Catarina Casais, 2024) are presented: the textbook pages randomly selected by each student and used by them; the reflections written and drawn on these pages; the new proposals for illustrations and text elaborations by each student; and a selection of the audio recordings of the participants.

All these images are displayed in blocks, organised by students participating in the second seminar and based on keywords directly associated with the proposed results. The keywords, devised by the project team based on the different analyses, are distributed in categories related to representations of gender, family and the body. The relationship between the keywords and the categories resulted in the following distribution:



Although there is no fixed pedagogical and methodological model for the subject as of 2018 (as was the case, for example, in the previous legislation from 2004, with the publication of the Ministry of Education's "Curriculum Organisation and Programmes" (Departamento da Educação Básica, 2004)), several guidelines for "Essential Learning" drawn up by the Ministry of Education (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2018) and legislated in the *Diário da República* [Official Journal] have been published (*Decreto-Lei n.º 55/2018, de 6 de julho*; *Despacho n.º 6944-A/2018*; *Despacho n.º 6478/2017*).

"Social & Environmental Studies" is a subject that, in a symbiotic integration of knowledge from the fields of Biology, Physics, Geography, Geology, History, Chemistry, and Technology, organises its syllabus into three interconnected domains — Society, Nature, and Technology. The theme of identity, which was analysed and explored by the group of students participating in the seminar, focused primarily on the domains of Society and Nature, from which the student children were expected to engage with a broad range of approaches. As "knowledge, capacities and attitudes", with these domains (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2018, p. 5–6), the students should be able to:

## Society

- “To know significant dates and facts from one’s individual history that contribute to the construction of self-knowledge. [...]”
- Establish kinship relationships through a simple family tree or other methods, up to the third generation, recognising that different family structures exist and that, within a family, different members may fulfil distinct roles.
- Relate the activities performed by some family or local community members to their respective professions.”

## Nature

- “Observe morphological changes that occur throughout the stages of human life, comparing aspects based on parameters such as sex, age, dentition, etc.”.

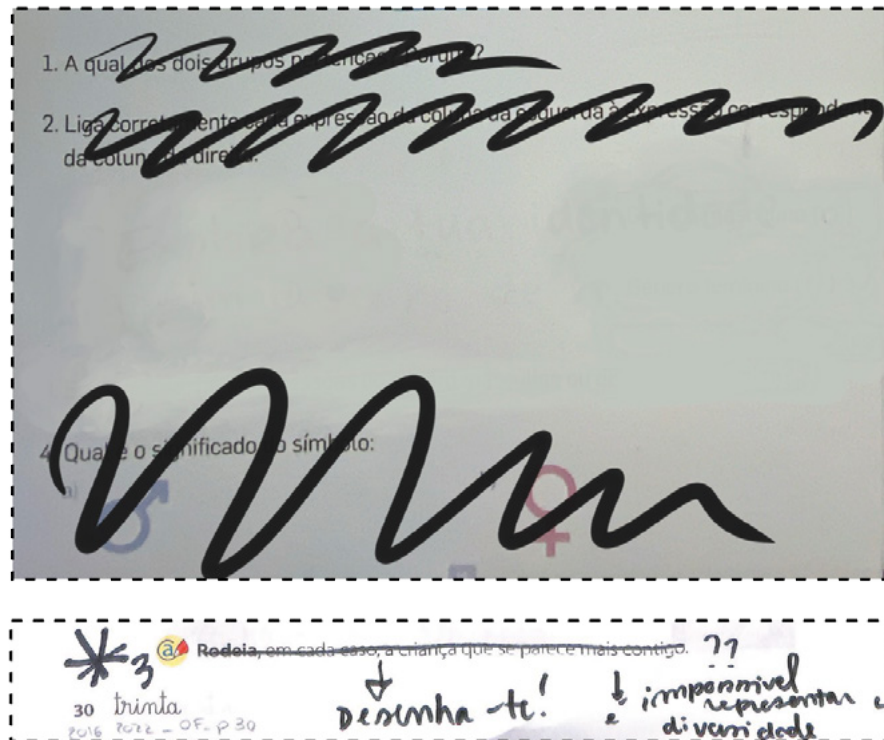
## seminar\_results

In quantitative terms, there was a preference for creating illustration proposals on paper with materials such as coloured pencils, watercolour pencils, pens, markers and so on, with only 3 of the proposals being made digitally.

Since there were no instructions on how the participating students should work, it was emphasised that there was a need to initially reflect together on the texts as indicators of the images (i.e., an instrumentalisation of images). The discomfort caused, a priori, by discriminatory educational approaches in the texts led, in some cases, to the need to counteract them in the images to be created to make them inclusive. The discomfort felt and evidenced was mentioned on several pages, as can be seen in the following exercises:



The debate during the seminar highlighted the power of words and texts in textbooks, both as factors influencing the creation of images by illustrators and in the interpretation of the proposed learning content. This limitation was one of the key points of focus most shared by the students during the discussions and expressed in excerpts from some examples:



The issue discussed in this seminar regarding the texts and how they influence illustrators' creation of associated images represents a real danger of creating new stereotypes, even when the initial intention is anti-discriminatory. In this regard, the question is raised as to whether, in the context of creating illustrations/images for textbooks, it would be possible to make alternative images that reflect diversity, considering the educational direction that the texts carry.

By the participating students, it was considered impossible to represent the entirety of identity diversity in textbooks, as there will always be someone who might feel excluded or not represented. However, it was noted that the absence of representation of specific identities affects the recognition of who is and is not represented. Invisibility, in this context, is always significant, considering the multicultural nature of classrooms and educational realities.



In another line of reflection on what took place during the seminar, the approach to ‘the way of illustrating’ was relevant, considering the nature of the representations created in terms of realism. That is, should ideals or realities be represented? But also, who should make the images? Should children be able to ‘represent themselves’ directly? Should a more abstract approach or one that is ‘non-defining/non-directly related to people’ in the representations of identities be followed?



## conclusion . for the project

For the research of the *[in]visible* project, this seminar did not aim to find definitive answers to the issues under study regarding the present and hidden discourses in the illustrations of textbooks with an anti-discriminatory focus. The intention was to raise questions and think collaboratively from the reactions provoked by the seminar.

The complexity of the issues studied highlighted the lack of attention and/or limitation given by publishers and authors in producing textbooks concerning the questions posed by otherness in today's world, reflecting neglect that objectively prevents fostering critical stances in children's education. As a result of the seminar, it was considered that the existing images, in general, negatively support the educational purposes they are supposed to support.

In addition to this conclusion, the presence at the seminar of a group of students who could become professional illustrators, possibly working in the future in the field of education, also provided a propaedeutic approach, allowing us to collaboratively question the power of images in terms of stereotyped, discriminatory and excluding messages about diverse identities.

## conclusion . challenges left behind

Although the funding for this project has ended, the extensive data collection and the potential for future reflections on this data encourage the continuation of the research.

Despite the completion of the funded program and the limitations of the conclusions drawn, the extensive data collection and the potential for future reflections suggest and enable the continuation of the research, which the team is committed to.

Several questions arise with urgency:

- Does it make sense to set as an educational objective for 6-year-old children approaches that do not conform to a stereotypical representation of a happy world, inscribed in an elementary version filled with discriminatory meanings towards the different and the diversity?
- What possibilities do textbooks provide teachers through the images and texts that are inherently limiting in light of democratic and educational interests stemming from their critical awareness?
- Is there space in initial school training for more agonistic approaches and awakening critical attitudes in a world where we only know how to think about the times to come with either hopelessness or indifferent ignorance?
- What role does visual culture play in the urgent need for research intervention in the future?
- Can be images another thing?

The research team acknowledges the limitations of the study's conclusions. Still, it is known that the project, designed for less than two years, has built a foundation of information that can be leveraged for other results.

## Notes

1. DOI 10.54499/2022.05056.PTDC
2. The study is available in detail at <https://invisible.i2ads.up.pt/en/intru/>.
3. <https://www.juliodolbeth.com/>
4. More information about the first seminar is available at the *[in]visible\_seeing the invisible* Research Catalogue exposition (<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/2090411/2090412>).

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# Documentary Theatre Practice Contribution to Teachers Transition

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## Abstract

The study is about an experiment that took place in the French ministry of agriculture in the National support Disposal training teachers, for the Agriculture Education. Its aim is to question the Documentary Theatre (DT) practice that was experimented during a week-time workshop in 2023, and was organised with a theatre artist, Théo, in the Institut Agro Montpellier-Florac campus, in southern France. The experience mixing agronomy engineer students and teachers in 2022, showed a positive impact on the bifurcation and ecoanxiety decline and transformative engagement in transition. As Agro-Ecological Transition (AET) is the priority for the agricultural high schools, it represents a great challenge for teachers to work on. The ethnographic methodology used different tools like participative observations and interviews. The specific artistic/education (artist/research-trainer) partnership that built this project representing an alliance to the service of the teachers is part of the situation. The location (mountains in the middle of nowhere) is also to be taken into consideration. And the most important question in times of climate and societal changes, is to understand first if the DT practice helps educators teaching AET. Then deepening the running DT process, the formation and the transformation issues might lead to an educational transition.

**Keywords.** Theatre education, Agro-ecological transition, Education transition, Teachers formation, Experiment



## General description

First, we would like to consider this action-research in both post-Covid pandemic time, during which relations within or out of schools have suffered (Franck & Haesebaert, 2023) and climate change time, which stimulate us to think of where we want to land! (Latour, 2017). The specific aim of this study is to consider the Documentary Theatre (DT) practice experienced through a workshop on Agro-Ecological Transition (AET), which is linked with sustainable development and agricultural model changes. It took place a week in December 2023 in the National Support Disposal in charge of experiments and educators' formation. So, benefiting from last year experience mixing 2 teachers and 5 agronomy engineers' students, this experiment was carried out here, with 8 teachers from high schools of the French Agricultural Education and organised in the Institut Agro (Montpellier-Florac campus). The DT practice was chosen in order to teach AET differently (out of usual classroom sessions) and understand the developed skills. The capacity of embodying the AET through an artistic sensitive practice (Covez, 2023, 2018) has been shown before. However, the French Agricultural Education encounters some difficulties in transforming the written AET priority into reality, as this means not only technical but also professional position changes, in times of uncertainty. This can be observed when the Otherwise Producing Teaching program n°2 is being reconsidered and evolving into what should be a more efficient plan on transitions.

Besides, the Institut Agro has recognized the positive impacts of DT practice (Ecoanxiety and bifurcation decline, empowerment in transformative actions) and expressed the wish to realize/convey it at a national level towards engineers' students. We also notice that the higher agronomy education school uses the Socio-Ecological Transition (SET) as a major concern which enlarges the AET approach, recognizing the socio-economic issues. This is defined as a complex formation with : knowledge (methods and evaluation), know-how (systemic, technical...), social skills (together conceiving) and changes in learnings. The needs of epistemological, ethics, anthropology and cognitive ruptures are also very explicit. Therefore, the evolutions showed on both sides encourage us to consider the transition notion (meaning a profound need of transformation due to climate change) at the centre of concerns and practices. Besides, the European Green Transition skills and knowledge concepts and Sharon Todd thoughts (2016) help us moving on the training-action-research so as to focus on the concrete practice. Now, it is important to question transition itself in relation to education, formation and transformation. Therefore, we refer to S. Todd's work on the fragility of transition (if reduced only to a link between the past and the future) and rather consider it as a process that relies on the present. Finally, when transition, education and transformation seem so much layered, the DT practice by teachers in training represents an educational and pedagogical opportunity in order to question their relationships.

On the specific arts education point of view, J. Dewey, (2010) showed arts as an experience learning in itself, in link with social environment. Following this author and K. Lewin and J. Piaget works, D.A. Kolb (1984), declined the process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation, with transformative dimensions, which are very much connected with artistic practices. Afterwards, J. Mezirow (2016) studied learning as a transformative process where the role of educator, but also rational and affective components are very important. These theories are quite essential to apprehend what occurs during the DT practice, especially in the context of teachers formation. The specific DT practice would then point out an experience of *transformative learning* embedding the capacities of co/creating, on an interdisciplinary point of view.

So: does a DT practice help teachers teaching AE transition? Furthermore, as the teachers are due to create new pedagogical and educational approaches to better teach AET, the deeper question becomes: Does DT practice contribute to teachers' transition? The workshop based on the previous experience

established learning this as an emotional, body, individual and collective creating activity put to the service of the understanding and communication of transition. The hypothesis is now that it represents a tool for educational change in respect to transition, regarding the educators' status and professional identity. As we learnt that the mix way of cognitive and body activities brought an improvement in well-being and empowerment, we wish to understand the impacts of this active pedagogy, relaunching arts education values in aim of teachers training. The coherent and balance form that DT practice represents, would help teachers move on their personal and professional position, then spreading the transition education capabilities within high schools towards other educators and students. Besides, Hugon & Alii showed (2011) that the affective aspects, relationships, and self development are more valued by students who are not in drama option at high school. So, the inexperienced theatre teachers would perhaps feel benefiting more affective and personal development, discovering a new world of experimentations.

At the same time, different DT practices carried by teachers on a voluntary basis with their students, are being studied. Thus, Michèle (one of last year's DT workshop teachers) received a regional creativity prize for her students' performance on textile transition, which encourages us to consider this practice on a long term in the very different options and contexts of the agricultural high schools with non restricted AE transition issues. As a matter of fact, this teacher has no students in agricultural options, so she let her class decides what kind of transition they wanted to work on, which allows us to think transition as an enlarged relevant question of transformation. Eventually, AET can represent a sensitive issue in high schools where students attached to a conventional way of farming confront with other students wishing to get out of the economical, societal and agricultural traditional modernity paradigm.

## Methodology

The ethnographic training-action-research methodological approach consists in interviews with 8 adults and the artist Théo, actor, dramatist and director, with whom we prepared this renewed project, so as to adapt to the adults only participants. The 8 trainees were partly 4 Socio-Cultural Education Educators (artistic, media, communication teachers and projects activity leaders) and 3 French, computing and zootechnics teachers. Plus, one younger Education Assistant. It represented a mixed group in gender as well as in general/technical matters, which is very useful to get different points of view. The approach is also nourished with participative observations, meetings minutes, field journals, and interviews. To analyse and better understand the whole process, from debating to performing, we also have to consider the artist/trainer partnership. The trainer would participate to activities as any educator but would also intervene in groups so as to calm down the tensions or stimulate the creation. While Théo was concentrating on the artistic forms of creation, legitimizing and assuring the ideas, the research-trainer would help accompanying the demanding sensitive change of position at the core of education (Barbier, 1997).

Therefore, this alliance is valuable to understand the formation process, within which the common objectives were to develop autonomy and DT methodology in the purpose of socio-political critical and analytic mind. So, referring to A. Boal (1996) and P. Brook (2014), Théo worked on emancipation and space in physical and socio-emotional dimensions. It is very important to specify the methodology used by the artist in his own DT practice. Different types exist (Magris & Ali, 2019), and this one is defined by its designer, Théo as a *récit fictionnel* type. This means that creation, made of debates from personal experiences, ideas and shared documents (brought by everyone), enriched with shared concepts and problematics leads to the definition and conception of scenes. Thus, the usual warm-up theatre and improvisation exercises contribute to the session focused on the mise à plat method containing concepts

definitions, thoughts, know-how, messages, wishes, situations, characters and objects that lead to the emerging story. Various forms can be put to the service of the creative trainees from street theatre, clown...to narrative experiences.

Quality research is used so as to get a comprehensive view on the expectations/representations at work from drama, cultural, life skills, the eight core competences (Robinson & al, 2022) or the European green transversal competences (ESCO, 2022). Moreover, the Agricultural Education decided a 15 years plan on psycho-social competences (cognitive, social & emotional skills) on the subject of mental health. But none of the competences were announced or predefined for the DT workshop, letting teachers express themselves freely. The formation, even if in the quiet and peaceful mountains, was also conceived as an intense and demanding experience in a rather short time (Jeffrey & al, 2004). Facing our own limits within ourselves and with the other can feel rather risky. Special attention was brought in making a challenging but secure space of training in regulating the individual and groups progress. The interconnected collected materials intend to embrace the context, process and participants position and evolution, as DT practice is considered as a living experience in transition education.

## Outcomes

Each high school has an agricultural farming (pets, livestock, landscaping...) which represents a great opportunity for vocational teachers to really work on AET, which is not the case for general courses teachers. The educators who had no vocational agricultural matters, wanted to get trained in what could represent a concrete mean to work on AET as they encountered some difficulties on how to grasp it with their students. In fact, they felt a bit lost in translation while doing it, as it is a complex notion that embraces theoretical knowledge as well as practices to be learned in situation. Their worries were : where and how to start with ? So, their wish was first in exchanging on AET and then getting an adapted pedagogical and educative formation. Their desire consisted in living a concrete experience on AET to make their students (stuck to ecoanxiety or anger and feeling unable to apply this transition in own their agricultural context) live it.

The workshop lasted 4 days. None of the trainees knew DT, and 2 out of them had a theatre experience. There was a deep need for each of the participants to express oneself, on the cognitive, socio-economical, agricultural, but also political points of view in the field of AET. Eco-anxiety emotion was expressed, mostly by the youngest one. The analysis shows several challenging and turning points : realising, assuming and expressing one's sensitive point of view in front of others; exposing oneself on the stage for exercises and representation; opening to other's status and concerns (technical/general matters); accepting living emotions when coming out of the self; and working and agreeing together to create (subject and theatre style). To put it into a shell, they had to stick strongly to the necessity of performing which means, not fixing to the self but rather accepting moving and co-creating in emergency. So they found that situation quite stimulating and coherent with the need of society transformation in time of climate change. Moreover, the workshop has been lived as a personal transformation as all these dimensions stimulate the self and professional efficiency back to work.

Subjects that emerged from reflections and positions were: patriarchy, non-human assembly, traditional farmers, symbiotic relationships, quitting consuming society to remote mountains and then narrative stories. Let's add that serious thoughts as well as humour and imagination were very present in the created scenes in situ according to the teachers wishes. Compared with last year experience, their messages during representation were more anthropologist than concerning their own concrete future. As last year engineers students were keen to show concret solutions. For both experiments, transition

remains a non-stable notion going from a never-ending-transition, passing by a cycle, to a paradigmatic need of change, including feminism. Embodying their imagined scene allowed them getting out of a kind of confusion.

In 2022, students affirmed they discovered “they could trust adults”. In 2023, the adults realised they were able to talk to each other on such a tough matter even if it was not that easy. “I did not agree...but I felt it's ok and comfortable about it!”. They could do it and even “grew up!”. Also, the rhythm and balance between theoretical aspects and physical and emotional practices represented a coherent tool “the only one that can exist to be efficient when teaching AET”. They confronted each other : “It was great to mix with a teacher from another background and perspective. We had to listen to him”. They felt reassured : “ We can create out of the students experience, knowledge, Yes we can !”. They committed themselves : “We had to say Yes to this intense experience...it developed autonomy and emancipation feelings”. They felt pleasure and well-being : “Learning to let it go for yourself with others,. see how it feels being like a student... learning and liking to learn !”. Discovering the artistic way : “Out of the words, there is a sensitivity that expresses a view point that is good to share, it was a positive energy”. Finally : “This is an active pedagogy. You can not teach transition if you don't make it living in your body...when you embody it, you remember it and you make it real”.

Eventually, transformation through this formation was put to the service of AET education. And within the little village of Florac in the middle of nowhere in the mountains, the educators felt a “total caring welcome”. It allowed them to take risks and wish to transit to a new pedagogical situation that transformed somehow their perception of education where arts have a valuable and meaningful place. They improved their self-regulation, communication, creation, collaboration, harmonisation and efficiency capacities, through emotional, cognitive and social interactions, which impacted positively their well-being. “I was very happy to be there”. Wishing and reaching to a moving situation, a real specific time and space of experience, they felt involved in the present forgetting their day to day way of work and teaching.

Finally, Balleux & Perez-Roux (2013) define on an accurate way, education transition as “a passing time-space at the heart of non/assumed or non/accomplished change, which requires from the individual to implement adaptation strategies better to deal with ruptures and re/construction of continuities”. The DT practice made the teachers experience the educational transition, on a meaningful way. The work on both intellectual & sensitive dimensions positively balanced their well-being (Benaïem, 2023) and the DT practice educational tool they learned reassured them in responding to the educational situation. As the Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations headline says “Climate change is here. But we are fighting back”. The teachers regained hope to do so. Teachers' formation would thus benefit from creating action-research in innovative pedagogical and educative situations responding to occurring changes, in resonance to the world (Rosa, 2022).

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# Research on Materiality in Arts Education: Connecting Teaching and Research in Universities

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## Abstract

This paper examines possible roles of materiality in bridging the gap between arts education research and teaching in a university context. Drawing on insights from the University of Applied Sciences (UCLL), the study highlights how material-driven approaches can serve as accessible mediums for fostering collaboration. The narrative explores the teaching-research nexus in arts education, highlighting the underexplored importance of materiality as both infrastructure and pedagogical tool. Through practical examples, such as shared learning environments and interdisciplinary seminars, the study illustrates how materiality facilitates innovative interactions between students, teachers, and researchers. It also addresses challenges such as balancing practice and theory and managing conflicting needs in shared spaces. Inspired by New Materialism, the chapter argues for the recognition of materiality as an active agent in shaping educational practices and offers a compelling strategy for integrating teaching and research in universities.

**Keywords.** Materiality in education, Teaching-research nexus, Arts education, Innovative learning environments, Practice-oriented research

## Introduction

This paper explores the role of materiality in bridging the interaction between arts education research and teaching programs within a university context. The narrative is rooted in observations and experiences from a university of applied sciences, with a focus on practical, material-driven examples. The chapter aims to initiate a dialogue about how researchers can actively shape the nexus between teaching and research, using materiality as an entry point. My own motivation is the role of materials in the interaction between research practice and teaching practice in higher education institutions. The presentation I bring is primarily based on my own observations. It is not large-scale research that can be generalised. It is an insight into specific practices. Hopefully it will raise interesting questions, give ideas. I can say in advance, however, that I cannot offer any general solutions or recommendations. Last academic year we also had a project on this focus in our university. I will also include this in my presentation. Perhaps it can provide inspiration for researchers in similar contexts, I will take the researcher's perspective. This text reflects the presentation I gave at ECER 2024 in Nicosia. In that respect, it is more a documentation of a developed narrative than a scientific report.

## Context

### *University structure*

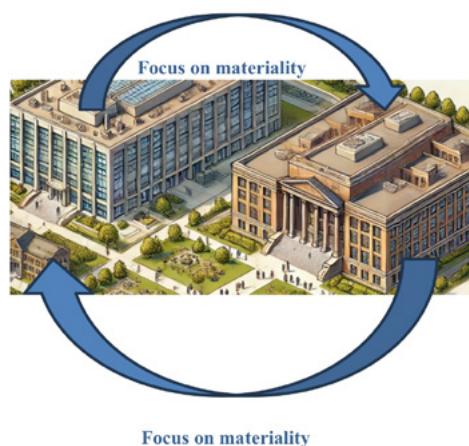
UCLL University of Applied Sciences (BE) provides the backdrop for this exploration. The institution is divided into five educational clusters—Health, Social Work, Teacher Education, Management, and Technology—and supports eight centers of expertise focused on practice-oriented research. The integration of teaching and research is a fundamental aim, though achieving this remains an ongoing challenge.

### *Research Motivation and Objective*

The central research question guiding this exploration is: 'How can materiality emerge in the interaction between arts education teaching programs and research in the university context?' The motivation stems from the author's background in practice-oriented research and teaching. Materiality offers a tangible and often safe medium for fostering this interaction, making it a compelling focus for this study.

When talking about the interaction between teaching and research, the term teaching-research nexus is often used.

This nexus is often understood as the integration of research into teaching, where students learn through research activities, engage with current findings and develop critical thinking, creating a mutually reinforcing relationship that enriches both teaching and research. In this presentation, I'll adopt the description that focuses on the mutually reinforcing relationship that enriches both teaching and research.



### *Literature Insights on the Research-Teaching Nexus*

The concept of the teaching-research nexus often centers on integrating research into teaching, enabling students to learn through research activities. However, the empirical evidence supporting this relationship is inconclusive, and assumptions vary widely. Within arts and design education, materiality—both as infrastructure and as a pedagogical tool—is uniquely emphasized, though rarely explicitly linked to the teaching-research nexus in literature. This gap highlights the need to rethink the nexus in the context of arts education.

Findings from the literature reveal a widely held belief in the positive relationship between research and teaching, though empirical evidence remains limited and inconclusive. Assumptions about the research-teaching nexus are diverse and often oversimplified, especially in arts and design education. Additionally, materiality plays a significant yet underexplored role in shaping learning and research environments, particularly as infrastructure and a pedagogical tool. Certainly the limited attention given to the role of materiality in the literature on the research-teaching nexus was a trigger for me. Arts and design education is an exception in this, in that it focuses on materials in the context of learning and research environments. I did not find the terminology of the research-teaching nexus in this literature either. Here I have come across publications that focus on infrastructure. I find this interesting. In my past work as a teacher educator and practice-oriented researcher, I believe that this may be an important key. I am also convinced that the findings on the role of materiality can be transferred to other subjects and disciplines. Here, I should certainly stress that my literature review was not exhaustive.

## **Cases of Materiality in Action**

### *Material Exchange Between Departments*

1. Teaching Materials in Research: Classroom materials created by students or teachers often inspire and inform research projects.
2. Research Materials in Teaching: Outputs from research projects, such as digital tools or conceptual frameworks, are frequently integrated into teaching practices.
3. Shared Spaces for Interaction: Dedicated environments, such as roundtables, workshops, or shared seminars, foster collaboration between students, teachers, and researchers.

### *Examples from Practice*

- Student-Created Maps: Visual mappings by students, originally created for teaching purposes, were repurposed in research studies.
- Shared Studios: Spaces where students, teachers, and researchers work in proximity, influencing each other's projects indirectly.
- International Research Seminars: Material environments, such as art studios, were adapted for unique research meetings, shaping discussions and outputs.

### *Innovative Learning Environments*

The infrastructure of learning environments significantly impacts the interaction between teaching and research. For instance, shared spaces on the Leuven campus allow students, teachers, and researchers to work in proximity, enabling indirect influence on each other's processes. One such example is the use of transitional spaces where participants can see each other's work, fostering inspiration and collaboration.

#### *Shared seminars*

Seminars that bring together teachers, researchers, and students emphasize materiality in both content and form. Examples include sessions involving collaborative paper-folding exercises or discussions on the impact of digital versus analog materials in libraries. These interactions demonstrate how materiality shapes both the content and the dynamics of learning.

## **Reflections and Challenges**

### *Materiality as a bridge*

Materiality offers an accessible and neutral ground for connecting teaching and research. Unlike human resources, finances, or curricula, which can feel more delicate or divisive, shared material practices foster collaboration and dispel assumptions about the challenges of integrating research and teaching.

### *Infrastructure and autonomy*

The infrastructure supporting shared spaces often serves a unified purpose, which can sometimes disrupt individual needs. For example, researchers may require isolated environments for focused work, while others benefit from shared, interactive spaces. The success of material-driven approaches often depends on the autonomy and vision of individual teachers and researchers.

### *Influence of New Materialism*

Inspired by New Materialism, this exploration highlights the dynamic interplay between human and non-human actors in educational spaces. Materiality is not merely a passive backdrop but an active participant in shaping pedagogical and research practices.

### *Challenges in implementation*

Shared spaces, while fostering collaboration, often present challenges in meeting the diverse needs of all participants. Effective use of these environments requires careful and sensitive mediation to balance conflicting requirements. Furthermore, while practical approaches to materiality can drive innovation and engagement, they may inadvertently overshadow theoretical depth.

## Conclusion

This chapter underscores the importance of materiality in fostering a meaningful connection between teaching and research. While theoretical purity may sometimes be obscured by practice-oriented narratives, the insights provided here demonstrate the potential of material-driven approaches to enrich educational environments. By integrating materiality into shared practices and spaces, universities can create opportunities for collaboration and innovation that transcend traditional boundaries.

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### 3. Playing with boundaries

# What if We All Spread Our Ears Around the World?

## The Idea of a Community of Free Listeners in Becoming

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### Abstract

In this article, we turn this question into an essay about otherness in music, about how we can bend the boundaries of already known sound and project it now towards the infinite, towards endless sound, towards that which is yet to be known.

It is about exposing a restless experience of thinking that inhabits and is present in a teacher-musician and an art education teacher – researchers and listeners, who hear voices confirming their incompleteness when confronted with the infinite and the materiality of sounds.

Here, then, are some fragments of this meditative discourse; here are the most recent declarations-eruptions of this volcanic activity in our thought. What becomes most clear is, above all, the emergence of what is said, not so much for its truth, or even its falsehood, but much more for its desire for contact and wandering among concepts that project them onto the sonorous face of the Other <sup>1</sup>.

It is important to clearly state that the Other is not a threat; it is a challenge, and this must be affirmed.

**Keywords.** Sonorous otherness, Nomadic listening, Post-music



## [0] Before starting

We became silent for a long period, during which an extensive essay was woven, in theory, about the possibilities of silence moving us to other latitudes of imagination and reflection. We identified it, momentarily, as the call to memory that we all have of the noise of the world. We said, then, that it was not absence; it was much more a presence of something that gives us the opportunity to think of ourselves as that unique space-time that is only inhabited by us.

And so, we realised that missing those who think and make music is synonymous with silence, a kind of comforting and savoury shadow that, amidst the sonic heatwave, helped us listen to the world, even when it (dis)sounds, or proposes it to us.

At that time, we dived labyrinthically into Rui Chafes, Marcel Duchamp, Maria Gabriela Llansol, João Barrento, Maria Filomena Molder, Silvina Rodrigues Lopes, Eugénia Vilela, Paul Celan, Bashō, Laozi, Heraclitus, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, Adorno, Agamben, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Aimé Césaire, Franz Fanon, Hildegard von Bingen, Anton Webern, Messiaen, John Cage, Morton Feldman, Luigi Nono, Albert Ayler, Murray Schafer, Eliane Radigue, John Blacking, John Berger, Hermeto Pascoal, and many, many more. They were all a kind of ideal class to which we do not even know how to return, because we will never have left it. With them, behold our constellation, we became diacritical and capable of suspending the robotisation of speech that inhabited us in cultural apnoea, a subject to which we paid particular attention, for it was not rare that it made us less open and available to the events coming from the sounds that continuously crossed us and persist in piercing us.

From there we set out for our open exhibition to the sonosphere, on the common ground of academia, to approach the plural richness of the sonorous-musical existence, and to seek to make sense of the singularity of our discourses and the authenticity of our lives.

Although we have not yet left there, as we said, it is time to let go of some of the thought adventures that we have recorded. Here they take the form of an essay, thus designated by the questioning in the epigraph, and which has in sonorous otherness an inexhaustible source of inspiration and exaltation, exposed and expanded now, as we listen to the reinforcement of voices from E. Levinas, J. Derrida, Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, Franz Boas, Isabelle Kalinowski, G. Deleuze, G. Agamben, Mark Fisher, Kofi Agawu, Pascal Quignard, Mieke Bal, Peter Pál Pelbart and a few more.

In this essay, we realise that between the thinker-musician-creator-art education teacher who starts something and the reader-receiver who interprets it, an indefinite number of relationships tend to increase. If so, between the stage and the audience, between the thought sound and the felt body, between the classroom and the academic gathering, countless thoughts-events also grow, which sometimes bring us closer and sometimes distance us from the relationships between musicians, creators, and listeners.

In any case, it is necessary not to unravel the web composed between all of us. It is, so to speak, forbidden to undo or misalign it, as this is what remains for us to survive the triviality of geometric and linear thought, precisely the one that crushes us every passing hour and brutally vulgarises and labels sonorous otherness as a rude and dispensable threat.

Music, when it truly is, does not merely lean on our bodies. It enters them immeasurably, carving its path within us like a lightning bolt that, through the constituent intensity of its otherness, takes us by storm. And this only happens when the strange coexists with the familiar.

### *0.1 Shadow, Arts Education, and Cryptic Pedagogy*

What we demand, therefore, is an education in which the artistic imposes its shadow. Such a premise calls upon us a conception of the “artistic”, whose sphere compels us to act directly on the sense of our place in the social, political, artistic, and educational arena. Indeed, whatever the idea of art and education, we want to believe that both constitute a gesture of philosophical-political reaction against the mechanisms of domination and naturalisation of our thought.

The cultural right to create and collectively engage in processes of critical profanation of that fundamental gesture which is “to create” – especially in a contemporary world that fetishises the discourse of creativity in the name of a future that is given to us to consume – requires us to question the ontological and phenomenological sense, primordial, we might say, of that impulse of knowledge which is the desire for the artistic. But such a desire cannot be pursued ignoring the shadow, as Mario Perniola (2006) would say, which inseparably accompanies the production of works, the artistic operations, and their discourses.

“The more violent the light that one intends to cast on the work and the artistic operation,” writes Perniola, “the sharper the shadow projected” (Perniola, 2006, p. 8). This means that “the more daylight-like and banalising the approach made to the artistic experience, and in this case, to the experience of music, the more its essence retreats and protects itself in the shadow” (ibid.). This obliges us to see the naivety present in the discourses of arts education, in the practice of teaching, and in arts and music research. But naivety lies not only in ignoring the shadow but also in using the defence of aesthetics as a weapon against the normalisation of art. In truth, according to Perniola, we face a double naivety – that which identifies art as an object (objectuality) and that which, reinforced by a climate of consensus, consists of understanding art “diluted in life”, as an instrument of communication. So, how to operate in the context of such reductions?

By entering the shadow of art, what we begin to do is react against the orders of goodness and harmony with which science and art have taught us to think. This means that by inhabiting a place of shadow, by incorporating that place in us, in our body, in our subjective action – because the shadow lives beneath us, it is the crypt – there is something that starts to implicate us, stirs our living force, disturbs us, destabilises us.

We believe that this confrontation is the essential confrontation with a pedagogy of the precarious and the fragile, a place from which we can relate to the rest, to waste, to all that is of the order of the disposable and the particular. Hence, the following observation is imposed: What will we be able to know through this cryptic pedagogy? Because “the ‘shadow’”, Perniola continues, “does not place itself in an adversarial position, but as the holder of a knowledge and a feeling that only it can achieve and that disappears as soon as the intense light seeks to replace it” (Perniola, 2006, p. 11).

Let us then ask again: What are the possibilities, today, for a cryptic experience of the artistic? What are the possibilities, today, of inhabiting a musical art education whose logic is less challenged by the clarity of things, and more by what remains of the light? Can art – and our relationship with culture and education – mean such an experience?

## [1] Nomadic Listening

(...) I listen more and more with my imagination. I want my music to cast sounds and calls beyond what is heard or can be heard. I want my ears to learn to listen with the utmost clarity.

Maria Gabriela Llansol in *Ensaio de música*, LisboaLeipzig, Ed. Assírio & Alvim, 2014, p. 248

Music, all of it, is the living and pulsating permanence of the *arché* in us. There is in it a distant, unnameable, and formless secret that subterraneously exposes what still subsists in us, arising from the vanished sounds that inhabit us.

If it were to be prescribed a science, it should be designated as “*hauntology*”, a concept that Derrida<sup>2</sup> and Mark Fisher<sup>3</sup> would approve. Here, this is understood as the deconstruction of the concept of sonic ontology, allowing us to be more attentive to the spectral trace of sound in its vibrational materiality, and less to its own metaphysical presence exposed by the phonocentrism<sup>4</sup> of the positivist logos that dominates almost everything we do when we wish to speak about sound.

All music, hence, the auditory crick in our neck when we are affected by it, is uterine and predisposes us and prepares us for the return to the pre-linguistic, the amniotic site and place of babbling, a time and space proper to enunciating the world without object.

Music, sound, and listening could then be thought of as our fictional attempt to return to the affect, to the sensitivity of the *infans* we once were, in our desiring projection, dedicated to our past futurity, paradoxical as this may seem.

It is from this future anterior that music is made and, therefore, we should be available to negotiate with Orpheus who will pay the bill for such a demand, and attentive and unavailable to any action arising from a cultural machine that only extracts, for its own delight and interest, illusory effects of ourselves.

The reason is to test the strength to give to the metaphysics of absence<sup>5</sup>, in its dialogue with sonorous otherness<sup>6</sup>, as if the relationship with it were that fundamental epistemic leap to be taken by those who observe the world in its ethical and aesthetic condition, in a responsible and simultaneously bold way.

We are thus faced with an approach in the form of becoming that critically views the logocentrism and phonocentrism we are accustomed to. This is a very comfortable position given the hierarchical and hegemonic tendency that prevails in this part of the world in which we live.

The Western edifice has lived like this for too long, and it is time to question it, to provoke a stutter in its discourse and, perhaps, to force it to rethink itself, by demanding unconditional hospitality<sup>7</sup> from it. It is urgent to clear away the categorisations it exposes daily, provoking a setback, by adopting a position of action and different and nomadic<sup>8</sup> listening in its handling of the world. Spreading our ears around this world is precisely based on this assumption. Yet, even knowing that listening is itself a victim of successive captures, managed by the politics of sonic training, it is necessary to spread different and nomadic ears as a practice of micro-utopian obstruction.

### 1.1 Can We Envision a Nomadic, Transhumant Arts Education?

In the “Lecture on Nothing”, Cage writes: “I remember loving sound before I had ever taken a music lesson. Then we pattern our lives by what we love” (Cage, 2023, p. 18). The relationship between poetry, music, word, and sound is not only the sole basis for understanding but also the most profound, in the context of the mythologies that ground us, the “violence of music itself”, as Nietzsche considers in the context of tragedy. Such an intricate web does not presuppose any idea of a path – “Now our poetry is the understanding that we possess nothing. Everything then will be a pleasure (since we do not possess it) and we should not fear its loss” (p. 8), returning to Cage.

On the contrary, if we are willing to engage in a nomadic arts education – and in that task which is to think about art and education from the crisis of their relations – we will be led to rethink the meaning of our own discourses and, above all, their failures of truth. Such an exercise evokes in us a role, a form of intervention, as Ortega y Gasset (2018) would say now, that is, a gesture of commitment capable of resisting a critique that subjects arts education to a humanising and humanistic operation.

In arts education, such an imperative imposes on us the need for dissonances between the unspeakable and the speakable, between the power of the inscrutable and the cruelty of the visible. Our *dissonant* desire does not correspond, however, to a mere will to know, that is, to subjectivise everything we know to be of the order of the objective, and which is part of the world of art. It seems that no one desires to be saved by art any more, even though the narratives and discourses we produce in arts education continue to emerge from that kind of orthodoxy that makes us all “idyllic shepherds”, as in one of the figures alluded to by Nietzsche.

It is by knowing of the existence of many of these focal points of resistance that we are here, in academia, to test a protagonism alongside them. Or rather, our task is to compose an insistent agonism – this is the case of arts education – in the production of a collective reading of the discontinuities to be operated in our pedagogical practices, and by fostering dissensions, even in the midst of the existing artistic archive.

## [2] Sonorous Otherness in the World

The sociocultural reality of the present time is very complex and demands a discernment and intellectual involvement from all of us which is capable of bringing it to the forefront, putting it into perspective. Arrangements need to be proposed that fuel our work with energetic commitment, adept enough to combine our conceptual concerns with direct, concrete, and committed actions towards the world that surrounds us.

In this circumstance, we can ask where the things we do are. Where are our fabrications? When the possible has been surpassed by the spectacle of sameness, what remains of that noise within us, and what prevents us from expanding the universe of symbolic sound? In the harshness of these conditions, it is fitting to declare that our life will never be obscene if we sonically and musically reject impostures, injustices, and shamelessness.

In our case, when we work on music and its repertoire, we have been arduously and persistently escaping the semantic prison that confines sounds to an idealisation, let us say Platonic, which does not allow them to create significant spaces and times between the sensible and the artistic that touch everyone.

In a kind of cautious and prolonged *ars longa*<sup>9</sup>, we establish a relationship with sounds that can be framed within the Nietzschean concept of *amor fati*<sup>10</sup>, a place of aesthetic experience with sounds, where their destiny is not a fatality. On the contrary, it is more of a challenge where music becomes a poetic manifestation, constructed at the same time by calculation and by the wings that sounds contain within themselves.

By spreading ears around the world, we are asking everyone, without exception, to do the same. Why? Let us respond with another question: Were sounds born to dissolve into multiple listenings? Is that their ontology? If not, what purpose would repetition and difference between sounds serve? Here we find a fragility in the logos that attempts to parameterise it, infecting it in its pursuit of sounds: it only follows them to lend diversity.

This is how the logos allows us – here is the good news – to advance beyond the known, by experiencing the sounds that excite the ears scattered around the world, welcoming them in the space-time of the unlimited which it itself constitutes. At this moment, we do not know where to find the logos of listening, but we suspect that it will never be in the ear. The ear, more like the foetal image of a human body, tends to be more of a nomadic oracle of the senses than anything else.

To the voracious machinery of culture, we counterpose a concept of music – perhaps even post-music – in an ontological instability, testing the power of its restlessness, dedicated to the overflight of ideas, objects, sounds, and impulses.

Spreading ears, a mutant and precarious strategy, resembles not a philosophy, but a thinking poetics that asks music to reveal itself in its essence. With this spreading of ears, we speak of a sonorous and profane epiphany, whose nature, if we may call it that, allows us to access the fragments of the sounds of the world equitably, rescuing them from the margins where they live.

## 2.1 Spreading ears

Spreading ears constitutes here a poetics, a poetics that is a poem woven by a “carpet of water”, as Thomas Bernhard puts it. Arts education thus begins to inhabit a place of nowhere, a constant return to that place of contentment, which is nothing, made of intervals and “solitary communities”, which, by seeking nothing, become something. As Cage says, “we are always arriving at nowhere”, but “carrying our home within us” (p. 10).

This home corresponds to a place of conflict with which we begin to cohabit, but which implicates us in the production of a “paradoxa”, reintroducing here the term of Deleuze (2000), whose reality can no longer be measured by the “goodwill” of reason and its natural method of thinking. But if we find ourselves in a place that is critical of criticism itself, “how, in the end, do we escape the game of mirrors?” (id., p. 264), we ask with Deleuze.

Deleuze uses Artaud’s writing to position himself before a thought whose potency is recognised in its own “difficulty”; it is the “collapse” and the “fissure” – the “natural impotence” (id., p. 251) of the being that is thought there. Such recognition seems relevant in the exercise of thinking about an arts education capable of resisting the colonising narratives of art and education, whose *apparatus* fixes criticism in an act that attributes to thought a single set of “civil states” considered from the viewpoint of a law and a

nature of fact. Thinking well, and in a world that is always better, is, in this respect, a symptom of such an operation, which involves using the instruments of aesthetics, science, and behaviour (for example, psychology) as forms of legitimising the act of thinking itself.

The exercise of criticism, in art and arts education, is subordinated to a logic of divergence, which is almost always seen as contrary to convergence. But the problem “is not to direct, nor methodically apply, a preexisting thought by nature and by right” (id., p. 252). On the contrary, Deleuze continues, “it is to make what does not yet exist be born (...). Thinking is creating, there is no other creation, but creating is, above all, engendering, ‘thinking’ in thought” (id., *ibid.*).

The musical present that inhabits us today lives in us because it is pregnant with futures, but much affected by the past. It is in this present that we place our hope of becoming more available for the discernment that comes to us, granted by musical and sonorous otherness.

With this gesture, we move towards a joyful, but not innocent, availability capable of escaping the chronological and hierarchical line of time, letting ourselves be enchanted by *achrony*<sup>11</sup>, or even by *panchrony*<sup>12</sup>, which happens when the instant begins to listen to the infinite.

Spreading ears across the world takes the infinite as its motto by asserting that the past no longer survives what it was, what happened. In a new context, this hegemonic past assumes itself as something posthumous, as a fleeting and passing apparition. Thus, this questioning becomes a kind of method without a system capable of proposing inquiries into the unexpected that exists in the relationship between sound, art, and nature, arguments composed in direct contact, face to face, with the face of the Other, of otherness.

### [3] The post-music<sup>13</sup>

Thus, we find ourselves with a voracious appetite in the search for the unfixed, the unstable, speculating on a common ground about the concepts that promote errant yet incisive inquiry into the sensitivity of which we are made. Is this a direct representation of post-humanity, including post-music within its embrace?

We do not yet know, but we are already marked by the inquiry into the sensitive ways of thinking on and making music openly, considering this very gesture in the haptic way of listening to the world. Because of this, at the end of the day, we will realise that music will be no more than a hypothesis of experiencing another kind of knowledge, in a utopian action designed between us and reality.

Let us imagine post-music as a shelter, or temporary respite, to distance ourselves from the vicissitudes of contemporaneity and postmodernism. It ceases to be merely the resonance of this time to become, opportunely, untimely and futuristic in the present we have. Let us imagine ourselves again as someone who becomes immune, perhaps because they are in academia, to the indifference with which all of us are infused by this contemporary way of living.

In testing this immunity, we realise that the music, the post-music we are now preparing, comes from an intimate need to invoke concept-words that name the figures that threaten us and, because of this, dare to draw a horizon of freedom.

We are faced with another music, a music that anticipates resistances to comfortable and established sound, and gives us access to the best of ourselves, by not reducing us to mere survival.

There is an imaginary vitality in each of us that can bring out the multiple tonalities we are made of. Each of us is a multitude, and this confusion – Godard called it our music – is that orchestration that allows us to distinguish, record, and announce the existing soundtrack in the world.

Given a sociocultural reality as complex as ours, we are required to engage even more deeply to measure these complexities. It is here that we think of post-music as a cartographic rather than merely ethnographic action. We say this because we consider that there are significant critical conditions involving the human, which clearly affect their affects and percepts. Here is where post-music advances, associating with the post-humanist movement stemming from Rosi Braidotti<sup>14</sup> and Karen Barad<sup>15</sup>. It distances itself from the universalist humanism that took the human for granted, as a centre of gravity, celebrating a concept about which there is no rigour and promoting hegemonies and hierarchies that narrow both human beings and their artistic manifestations.

Post-music, in this sense, becomes an experimental field where sound is detached from its traditional functions and reimaged as a force capable of destabilising existing narratives. It embraces the instability and multiplicity of contemporary existence, offering a critique of the fixed, linear conceptions of music that dominate our cultural and educational systems.

In conclusion, post-music represents a radical shift in how we understand and engage with music and sound. It challenges us to rethink our relationships with the sonic world, encouraging a more fluid, dynamic, and inclusive approach to artistic creation and education. Through this lens, we can explore new possibilities for human expression and understanding, ultimately contributing to a more diverse and equitable cultural landscape.

### 3.1 Post-music: an exploration of sensibility and arts education

Post-music, to use Cage's term again, is "micro-macrocosmic" (p. 12). It intertwines with matter, form, or tonality, but its vitality is sentimental, lacking any truth, goodness, or greatness in society. This "nothingness" is of interest in the exercise of an arts education that, like music, sounds, and noises – entities that predate knowledge and are perpetually in transit – needs the *transhumance of practices and discourses to survive*. To what extent can we think of this arts education within the expanded sphere of art? Does it make any sense? What is the nature of the not-knowing in arts education?

An expanded conception of art, using the terms of Italian philosopher Mario Perniola (2016), has been establishing itself on both a global and local scale, bringing art closer to techno-science and reconfiguring its conceptual and constitutive logic according to what we might call imposed superficiality.

In a time of compulsive fusions and fascination with new multimedia aesthetics, this conception is not immune to the influence of contemporary neoliberal forces aligned with this exponential hyperactivity, whose policies affect the meaning of artistic knowledge, especially concerning its contexts of production and observation. There has been a massive proliferation of art biennials, markets, fairs, and artistic and musical festivals (*luna parks*), with the emergence of cultural industries focusing on the creative and its various applications in an art economy, along with the consolidation of managerial and regulatory logics of the "art world". These phenomena, despite having distinct impacts, have been transforming the artistic



into a negotiable field of relation with the real, understood either from an essential point of view (art as work), an instrumental one (art as playful manifestation), or even a communicational one (art as a public object).

The naivety evident in these three positions lies in a common search for totality, whose language allows us to speak of art in the “singular”. It ignores the metamorphoses, experimentalism, and new regimes of artistic formation that currently challenge pre-established disciplinary boundaries and the atmospheres in which art transits in a profoundly intriguing way. With the emergence of new visual, plastic, and techno-performative configurations, traditional notions of art are altered, while at the same time political positions within artistic practices diminish in the face of the impulse of fashion and its subsequent inorganic anaesthesia. Given such a scenario, where can we find a sense for the sensitive today? What operations are now involved in constructing artistic authorship?

An aesthetic of contemplation is therefore imposed on an aesthetic of estrangement and alterity. Both serve an experience of difference, less immediate, radically opposed to the pragmatism of art’s affectivity and emotionality, and consequently inscribed in a gesture of suspension (*epoché*). Through this, we neither deny nor affirm anything—only the enigma, the mystery, and the shadow come to sustain our gaze and the artistic judgment that emerges from it.

Consequently, a conception of the shadow – inherent to art, experience, and *aisthesis* – also accompanies the construction of an image of the contemporary, which we retrieve from Agamben (2009). In its significant ambiguity, art and shadow form a phenomenological experience, through which we no longer direct our gaze to the artistic objects “in themselves”; it is rather the consciousness, and its acts of knowledge, that produce the intersubjectivity necessary for the difference, the parody, and the eroticism that the particularity of art can exert in us in a way that goes beyond the aura and its reproducibility. Hence, the expanded field of art is giving rise to contemporary artistic and musical practices linked to both the power of not knowing and the potency of non-neutrality in social, cultural, and political terms, within which education and its various agents seek to activate processes of an anti-monumental, anti-classist, and anti-colonialist order.

The ecology of art and education, viewed through the lens of the expanded field, embodies a socially committed arts education. That is, the game of educational practices corresponds to a game of forming commitments, where the dialectic of contemporary artistic and musical experience is no longer a dialectic of winners and losers – it is, instead, a dialectic that challenges the banalisation of culture, incorporating the leftover, the precarious, the waste, the particular, the mourning. In this sense, many contemporary issues in arts education are based on ruptures, rifts, and conflicts – whether of a philosophical order (and its aesthetic resurgence), political (as a guarantee of freedom, equality, and social justice), or disciplinary, especially regarding the sense that artistic knowledge can reacquire in an intrinsic relationship with educational practices.

By exploring the concept of post-music, we embark on a journey that seeks to redefine the boundaries of arts education. This journey challenges traditional frameworks, embracing the instability and multiplicity of contemporary existence. It calls for an education that is nomadic, transhumant, and perpetually in motion, engaging with the world in a way that is both critical and imaginative. This approach not only fosters a deeper understanding of the artistic process but also cultivates a sensitivity to the diverse and dynamic nature of the human experience. Through this lens, we can create a more inclusive and responsive educational landscape, one that is attuned to the complexities and nuances of our ever-changing world. We are talking here about a convergence to take place between post-humanist thought

and the *poiesis* of post-music, the right place for us to embark on an ethically, aesthetically, and politically committed action with a radical epistemology of democratic, antifascist, anti-racist, and anti-hegemonic nature, in its clear purpose of asserting that the human is anything but a neutral concept.

So, what does post-music need to manifest itself?

It needs to activate convergences between post-humanist critical thought and the musical performativity stemming from communities of creators, performers, and free listeners, putting their sonic-musical thinking and action at the service of everyone in a nomadic and rhizomatic environment.

Post-music will always be that which is aware that the choices it makes are political hypotheses arising from a specific cultural formation. Furthermore, in our particular circumstance, it dares to question essentialism – the case of the binary question of erudite/popular in music – and the reduction of the complexity of sound phenomena, for example, the devastating case of world music.

Post-music only needs to make its presence felt in our bodies by affecting us with the sound materialities patented by its creations. It will suffice, then, for us to imagine a community of free and becoming listeners, something that will demand presence and action from it.

In this other community, we will then be ready to quench our thirst for experimenting with other ways of thinking and making music: this is the reason for the presence of the concept of musical otherness here, which advances, in our case, right in the core of the academic context.

For this to manifest, it is important to make singular discourses audible, as seen in the case, to give just two examples, of Isabelle Kalinoswoski who, in *La Melodie du Monde*, Ed. Philharmonie de Paris (2023), invites us to observe music in context from the perception of differences, and Kofi Agawu who, in *L'Imagination Africaine en Musique*, Ed. Philharmonie de Paris (2020), gives us an account of the richness and diversity constituting African sonority. Both of them, in distinct ways, populate our thinking with an atmosphere close to the ontology of difference, and this has given us food for thought.

These two examples would be enough for us to dare to imagine the gesture of spreading ears around the world, just like an antidote to stem the civilisational malaise caused by the forced verticality of hegemonic cultures.

#### [4] Right Now, and Almost Finishing...

In this text, we put our conditions of creation, interpretation, and reception in music under tension. We hide the underlying question of this essay – how can we understand what we do not know without resorting to the already known? – in a fabric woven between the concepts of sonic otherness, nomadic listening, and post-music, wondering whether our indefatigable curiosity must always be synonymous with usurpation.

From this reflection, we are left with the idea that it is worthwhile to combine what has already been heard with what has not yet been heard, in the hope of being able to remake – this is our micro-utopia – the profile of existing music.

For this, we need to embrace the sonic that has always been marginalised, by questioning the canons and endowing music – behold post-music – with the strength of multiplicity, porosity, and strangeness arising

from sonic otherness, which can be rehearsed from a device – a war machine we now call the aesthetic literacy of otherness.

Let us explain: music is non-historical, and this tells us a lot about its condition. To create is always to betray what exists around us, as each act of creation contains a future that does not yet fit within the present we have.

When we talk about post-music, we are talking about the anterior futurity it contains, for it forces us to feel it as a negation of the finite. Post-music is a sonic case of excess, as it is capable of being unfaithful to the culture and history that subtracts it.

When we now speak of the aesthetic literacy of otherness, we are at the epicentre of an epistemic hurricane because we know that no two listenings are the same. Because of this, we suspect that there are also no two places of speech that are the same. If so, why do we not propose plural ways of understanding the world around us and let ourselves be ensnared by the one-way street of hierarchical comfort of sameness?

By advocating for the device of the aesthetic literacy of otherness, we are calling on all of us to exercise disobedience to the canon and affirm that listening is no longer just obeying (to *listen* in Latin means to *obey*).

#### 4.1 *Emerging ontologies against banality*

In this sense, knowledge, that desire to know, contains a potency whose relationship depends neither on teaching nor on learning. It is precisely from within a “tangle of landscapes”, recalling the Portuguese poet Herberto Helder, that we seek to listen to ourselves in a singular community because our thinking is in a permanent relationship with all the noises and references that live within us. Such noises are part of a thought whose singularity is, above all, an object of our own world-making, yet hostage to that operation of humanisation to which schooling incessantly seeks to give rise. Faced with such salvific forces, what, therefore, will be the commitment of art in its relationship with teaching? What agreement is it seeking? What are its justifications?

We believe that such questions instigate the field of arts education beyond its aura, and beyond accommodation to a rhetoric of genius, taste, admiration, or competence. Everything that is of the order of the symbolic is difficult, requires laborious articulation, returning to Perniola, and this is why such an order can be profoundly transformative for those who speak and those who listen. In the place of the shadow, our relationship with the rest is implicit, and such a relationship, which is different from the relationship with knowledge transmitted by teaching and the relationship with knowledge singularised by the artist, requires us to take a position that is not only political but also deeply fragmentary and discordant within itself. It is this idea of considering precariousness that interests us in the practices of arts education. It is, above all, what this idea elicits in us, and not so much the idea or ideas themselves. Such a gesture helps us to identify the reifying forces that the discourses of arts education are imbued with and the practices of normativity that invariably attack us.

We are motivated by a certain temporality, a melancholy towards a time in which we do not recognise ourselves: the time when our future is shown to us; the time when, in the field of art, images, and music, the mix of reality and abstraction is infinitely explored by informational products; the time when critical discourses are accused of being too cynical and therefore always relative; the time when the

meaning of our action in the world – as educators, teachers, artists, researchers – is produced based on positions that seem to exclude any need for justification (especially political); the time when listening and listening to ourselves – the condition of freedom and democracy – lives in a space that is the space of the *establishment* and mass communication; the time, finally, in which, in a very Manichean way, opinions reproduce the dominant relations of power, disguising experiences and processes of critical emancipation whose content, in effect, we continue to desire in artistic education and research practices. Therefore – what do we think? How do we think? And why do we think? Do we think autonomously or are we thought? How do we build the freedom of thought and our choices? Such questions lead us to think about the figures, roles, and names we give to things – it is the relationship with education, with learning, and with the teaching of art and music that here is revealed to be problematic because such relationships are not given by the nature of things in themselves; they will always be *oscillating potentials*.

If we understand literacy as the interpretation we make of what we hear, if we think of aesthetics as the attention we give to the impact exerted on us by the way sounds reach us, and if we understand otherness as that which comes from the Other, or even from the self-in-the-Other as different, unknown, we can then claim a regime of academic work dedicated to the sharing of the sensible.

This is a game dedicated to the not-yet-felt that projects itself well beyond the political, social, and educational fields, a place where the Other should already be coexisting with us. This is a matter of urgency, and we are already late, very late.

Without concluding, we move forward with the purpose of listening to the human landscape, not as a background sound, but more as a unifying feature with the sonic diversity of the world, making sound a hybrid, future-oriented concept.

For later discussion, there remains the hypothesis of seeing post-music as that which does not wish to practise human monoculture, perhaps because in post-humanity – we know well that music cannot stand alone in this desire – we want to reduce the prevailing autistic humanism to the smallest species and proclaim the *diaspora of sounds* by spreading ears across the world.

Now the petit bourgeois no longer wants to listen. With a flick of the ears, this idea is dismissed. What an annoying fly this idea is.

Aimé Césaire, "Discourse on Colonialism", Ed. Vs, p. 31, Vilarinho das Cambas, 2023

## Notes

1. The "Other" is considered here from a porous, hybrid, and multiple perspective, as an element expelled from a logocentric sonic world that tends to excessively, and at times violently, favour sameness. This attitude has been the cause of a reductive conception of the world of music, reified through exclusionary and marginalising criteria, which is identified here as a criticisable arbitrary category. This becomes problematic when glorified within a power ideology that consistently promotes procedural linearities, enabling the exploitation of binary, dichotomous, and exclusionary notions of truth.

2. Derrida introduces the term "hauntology" in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (Routledge, 1994, p. 202), proposing it as follows: "To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept".

3. Mark Fisher, in "Ghosts of My Life" (Ed. Vs, 2020, p. 47), addresses this Derridean concept, expressing the idea that it refers to "the way in which nothingness enjoys a purely positive existence".
4. By phonocentrism, we understand the emphasis placed on sound through the excessive weight of the logos, a focus that prevents the observation of music and sounds in their multifaceted existence.
5. Western tradition situates presence and cosmic reason as the locus of forms. The metaphysics of absence we introduce here asserts that this is insufficient to approach the real, a notion claimed by Derrida in *Writing and Difference* (Ed. Perspectiva, 2019, p. 9), where he states: "only pure absence (...) can inspire, (...)." This evokes a notion of implicative resonance, a breath, a pneuma, which we seek to align with the hauntological strategy in order to approach the (ir)real of sound.
6. Here, we adopt the concept of otherness, which we qualify as "sonic", drawing from Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* (Ed. 70, 2023, p. 7) in his approach to the Other as the face of the infinite, and from Derrida in *Writing and Difference* (Ed. Perspectiva, 2019, pp. 129–143), where alterity is conceived as presence and the manifestation of absence.
7. In Derrida, unconditional hospitality involves a dual action: responding to the call for hospitality while creating conditions for welcoming the Other, under circumstances yet to be determined. The Levinasian influence here is substantial.
8. The concept of the nomad is introduced here at the intersection of Deleuze's philosophical explorations in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Ed. Assírio & Alvim, 2007, pp. 447–494), Mieke Bal's concerns with intercultural analysis in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (University of Toronto Press, 2002), and Isabel Kalinowski's ethnomusicological perspective on expanded listening in *La mélodie du monde* (Ed. Philharmonie de Paris, 2023, pp. 131–139). We venture here to engage human listening through this specific lens.
9. This is the desire to extend the rapture and impact of the arts in the world.
10. The wisdom of affirming life, even in the worst circumstances. *Amor fati*, a distinctly Nietzschean concept, seeks a profound aesthetic relationship with our existence by expressing the idea that destiny is not a mere inevitability but a challenge. This involves accepting the finitude and incompleteness that define us. It is not a resignation but rather a joyful adjustment to our lives, enabling us to continue affirmatively.
11. *Acronia* here denotes what is abstracted from time, that which becomes timeless or occurs outside of a specific temporal framework.
12. *Pancronia* points to the possibility of a multiplicity of possible times within a particular moment.
13. The neologism we use to focus on the conditions of musical creation, interpretation, and reception at the precise moment we speak. From these conditions, we reflect on the historical subject we are, as we dare to announce the metaphorical paradox inherent in creating, interpreting, and receiving a sound: we are, in fact, simultaneously both midwives and birthers of the sound. *Post-music* lives precisely in this space: in the prior future of sound and in the transhumance of music.
14. Rosi Braidotti (1954–), an Italian philosopher and lecturer at Utrecht University, emerges from the tradition of Continental philosophy. Her research explores how to think about difference and

what it means to move beyond dialectics. Her work reflects an ethical concern, which can be read in *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (2006, Cambridge Polity Press) and *The Posthuman* (2013, Cambridge Polity Press).

15. Karen Barad (1956–), an American theoretical physicist, advocates for “agential realism”, a framework for understanding a new formulation of causality related to new materialism. Her work resonates with the ideas of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, and Walter Benjamin.

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# Towards the Assemblage of a Human-Piano: Exploring the Hecological Cartographies of Existence<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This chapter reflects on an attempt to undertake a cartography of existence of the Portuguese pianist José Vianna da Motta (1868-1948) as a participatory and interdisciplinary proposal developed with the Network 29 – Research in Arts Education attendants, at ECER Nicosia 2024, under the premises of the *History of educational ecologies (HEC)*. HEC is a recent trend enrooted in the historiography of education field that aims to achieve a closer understanding of the arts-based methodologies in order to develop their aims towards intertwined timespan of present and past and new spatial relations. By focusing on cartography and inviting participants to engage in a collaborative experience, a more traditional historiographical knowledge and document-based research had to be temporarily set aside to give way to alternative ways of constructing knowledge by experimenting with artists' and arts educators' awareness of the agency of the non-human. During the workshop, participants created their own interpretations and questions about how these cartographies could evolve towards the assemblage of Vianna da Motta as a human piano. In addition to the rich exchange of experiences, perceptions and suggestions, the experiment made it clear that the standpoint of this cartography as the development of a hecological project had to clarify from the outset why it was necessary deconstruct the time and space as previously given cathegories, and at the same time provide more material that could allow for an actual arts-based approach, also by *doing*.

**Keywords.** History of educational ecologies, Cartographies of existence, Arts-based research, Collaborative and participatory processes, Music education.

## Introduction: Arts Educations as a route into a hecological approach

What happens when we take historiographical research and engage in a collaborative arts-based proposal? Such wonder was the spark for exploring how historiographical knowledge and document-based research could be explored within a workshop group on arts education research, with the aim of opening up a historiography of educational ecologies, henceforth referred to by the neologism *hecology* (Paz, 2025). This trend is being now framed within the collective History of Educational Ecologies (HEC) in order to experiment with historical sources using non-linear time and diverse spatial origins as a methodological principle (Van Gorp et al., 2022) within an interdisciplinary, collaborative, artistic, cartographic, and narrative approach that allows us to move “through time and space”, so as to understand “the organic” and engage “with the fluid” (HEC, 2022). Notwithstanding some approaches to the arts (Grosvenor & Roberts, 2022; Grosvenor & Colleldemont, 2022) and the continuous attempt to engage in collaborative and participatory processes within the HEC group, the lack of engagement with other disciplinary experts has made it difficult to achieve one of their main objectives of raising an actual interdisciplinarity and participatory approach from the methodological question: “*What does this have to do with everything else?*” (HEC, 2021, April 10).

This gap provided the opportunity to engage with an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach from the HEC case-study of the life and work of the Portuguese musician José Vianna da Motta (VM). Born in the African island of São Tomé (1868) he established as a pianist in Berlin from 1882 when he was 13 years old up to the dawn of the First World War (1914), when he moved to Switzerland. Pushed back to Portugal, where he lived until his death in 1948, VM’s entire life and work was permeated by phenomena greater than the simple choice, will or agency of the human subject, such as the First (1914-18) and the Second (1939-1945) World Wars, and the 1918-19 influenza pandemic and subsequent waves. This, combined with the fact that his education and training depended on different educational environments that developed in the axis of Lisbon and Berlin, and that he was constantly travelling as a professional pianist, made him the perfect case study for framing a cartographic experiment (Hernández et al., 2018).

This *hecological* workshop tried to rehearse a collaborative cartography of existence (HEC, 2022 May) and explore its potential towards moving through time and space as fluid categories to accommodate the participatory and transdisciplinary with the following questions:

*How can participatory and artistic processes allow for VM’s cartography as processes of knowledge-building within a HEC perspective?*

*How does this process allow for the problematization of (inter)connection, simultaneity and void of VM’s cartography of existence?*

This paper outlines an ambitious agenda to contribute to the definition of a hecological approach, to bring another way of exploring the life and work of the pianist Vianna da Motta, and to align these objectives with a growing awareness of how the materialities are embedded in the meaning-making of research and the identity-building of the researchers themselves. It is yet but an experiment which ultimately aims to evaluate the reception of this proposal and to gather suggestions for its continuation<sup>2</sup>.

## New ecologies of time and space

The search for “new modes of thinking in the History of Education” led HEC “to an ecological approach to the conceptual framework of time, space and memory allowing for an inter-and transdisciplinary

approach to educational research” (HEC, 2023). The *hecological* approach owes credits to the “oecology” coined in 1866 by the German biologist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919) (Van Gorp et al., 2022), but aligns with the *new ecology*, which may be “generally characterized by an embrace of complexity, history and path dependence; an appreciation of interconnected geographical scales in ecological relationship; a retreat from the broad law-like generalizations of systems ecology; and critically, an embrace of change, constancy as the new normal (Botkin, 1990)” (Prudham, 2009, p. 177, our italics). In their own motto: “Environment, ecology, disease, humanity – nothing is inherently separate from anything else, everything is ‘entangled’” (Van Gorp et al., 2022, p. 728). *Mutatis mutandis*, through highly experimental research, HEC tried to envisage other ways of thinking about educational environments. It is clear that it is in exuberant moments of chrysis (pandemics, wars) that the assemblage of the human and the non-human into an “yet another articulation and strands of entanglements projected in time and space” (Van Gorp et al. 2022, p. 730) becomes tangible.

The categories of time and space have long ago been discussed and attempts to redesigned them have brought forward the possibility to intertwine them. The main difficulties in establishing the lace between time and space emanate from an abstraction exercise that was undertaken by Immanuel Kant, namely in the *Critique of the Pure Reason* first published in 1781. “Arguing that both time and space are distinct and necessary *a priori* notions, rather than substances, for any understanding of human experience, Kant paved the way for the creation of separate academic disciplines addressing spatial rather than temporal questions in the nineteenth century” (Strohmeyer (2009, p. 755). Simultaneousness and void are conceptual examples of how time and space intimately connect, but even in our common cultural practice, we tend to interrelate time and space, without much conscience of it.

## Towards a cartography of existence

A cartography of existence and how it might evolve is at the heart of this experiment. The first ideas turn back to the HEC Manifesto about the “building” of “personal cartographies” (HEC 2022), and to the references to “the cartography of seriation” (Foucault, 2002, as cited by Grosvenor & Collelledmont, 2022, p. 22) and the mounting techniques based on Walter Benjamin’s Arcades Project (Grosvenor & Collelledmont, 2022), such as the Mosaic and the Tesserae (Van Gorp et al., 2022), that were also used to build new topographies of childhood through a comparison “democratic exercise in memory” (Grosvenor & Collelledmont, 2022, p. 33).

Initially, the plan was to invite participants to engage in a collaborative cartography using the materialities - VM’s objects - that would allow a narrative about the shaping of the time span from various archival objects to a final installation. The research questions would be disposed to set up a workshop where the attendees were invited to participate from their original disciplinary standpoints, moving towards a more hybrid perspective. In a serious quest for disobedient modes of expression (Atkison, 2018, 2022), we wanted to illuminate the possibilities to unlearn (and disobey yet our own knowledge and instructions) (Baldacchino, 2019). The idea was for the example, to take a music sheet, a letter, some personal objects, or activate the environment with some soundscape bringing new connections between them into an installation and then open up a reflexive part through card-questions. However seductive this plan drew, it would easily decontextualize these objects and exclude VM’s agency. It would not be wrong to do so, it became evident that we would miss the research objective of helping to open up the hecological work (Paz, 2025), which would require the lived context and the place of these objects in a seriation cartography or eventually in a vernacular cartography (Atkison, 2022).

In order to meet the HEC's objectives and to be more in tune with the materiality issues of the VM's cartography of existence, we kept the research questions, but redesigned the workshop accordingly, thus avoiding any chance of objectification, fetishism of collectionism. At the same time, we knew some of the participants beforehand, and this gave us some awareness of how we could better connect with their style of thinking and thus adapt the proposal to this audience, who would be more interested in reflecting through talking together, rather than making an installation – nevertheless it was but an option, and in the future this lack of performativity may be a gap to address. Considering also that there would be no other VM experts or musicologists in the room something was missing: what could startle the questioning and the realignment of facts on a pianist?

These conditions made us look at the need to give some brief biographical facts and made travelling as the most important raw data. Drawing back on his diary (Motta, 2015) and biographies (Branco, 1987; Caseirão, 2020) enabled us to enlist cities connected to specific dates. It also gave us the perception that in most cases VM was there for a very concrete reason, either to play in a concert, have a lesson or do a cultural activity; even when doing walks, he was there with a purpose. So the procedure was to write some of this information in cards and distribute them randomly indexed to one of these reflexive questions:

1. How can/could we participate in an investigation we know nothing about?
2. How did we allow ourselves to dwell today in a past time?
3. How can an artist that is no longer humanly with us actively participate in an investigation through the objects that were part of his life?
4. How participating in a cartography of an artist's existence transforms us and expands our knowledge about our original disciplinary academic area?
5. How can the artistic, eventually poetic creation -that we may produce with archival elements about a past life- gain the status of constituting itself as interdisciplinary/hybrid knowledge for these disciplinary areas?

As there were only four groups in the room (which were freely formed), questions 4 and 5 were assigned to the same group, and the sixth question was adapted to suit all of them, and emerge as the centre of the discussion:

6. What can this exercise add to the concept of ecologies of existence and its ways of cartographing it/them?

The participants were asked to engage freely with topics, drawings, written reflections, and the moderator went to each of the groups to elucidate on biographical aspects.

## Re-inventing the Piano-Man

Vianna da Motta travelled constantly, first as a young student 'adopted' by a German family and protégé of several important teachers, then as a professional concerto player and major professor throughout the world, travelling regularly within Germany, Europe, but also parts of Asia and the entire American continent - but never returning to Africa or reaching Oceania. From the differentiated nature of these

displacements, journeys, study trips, holidays, etc., the infiltration of the ecologies of existence gave way to a constant desire to settle once and for all - in Berlin, Weimar, Frankfurt, Geneva, Lisbon, but this was not possible until the 1940s, with the outbreak of the Second World War, when he also became too ill to travel. This panoramic cartography was ground zero for building the collective activity and the places where we never went were also underlined by all the participants.

The first output of this experiment draws from the principle that it is possible to assemble VM's ecologies of existence into a single cartography, which at the time had only been attempted as a timeline (Branco, 1987) – a straightforward and linear approach to time and space. These educational ecologies could also be assembled through small fragments, as it happened in small discussion groups, by relating events to a specific city, date, or composer.

This brings up another point about the assemblage of someone who is no longer with us and the possible agency of this historical figure in the present. The reflections that emerged from the group made it clear that the HEC framework would have to gain a deeper understanding of the categories of time, emptiness and silence. Outside a circle of experts, the problematisation of historical time was not taken for granted, as historians assume (Bevernage & Lorenz, 2013). In this regard, the large group discussion on time raised a number of fundamental questions for the pursuit of this research: What is meant by time and chronology; how do time and space interact with each other; what is the political significance of linear time in the context of VM research, why should it even be opposed, and what alternatives should replace it as critical to the Western concept of time; and also how we researchers engage with it from unequal standpoints (as educators, artists, historians, we meet at the same point in time, but work with it differently).

Spatiality raised a very different set of questions, taking a more relational approach to the locus of arts education. It was space (and not so much time) that gave way to the problematisation of the materialities of VM and how we might relate to it, from different points in time (linear or not), the problems of simultaneities (things that happened at the same time or were very similar, even if split in time) and the void, namely where VM never was, never spoke about or that we will never know.

As a concluding remark we must stress that despite the HEC framework that tends to bring together time-space, what we can perceive in a cartography of existence from the research in arts education perspective is the densification of space over the volatility of time. Such a glance brings together the piano-man is its becoming potency (over time) and materialized in particular spaces, that may connect to each other besides any time notion. The assemblage of the piano-man through this experimental cartography inspires us through the notion of time suspension, and an intensification of matter.

## Notes

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# Arts and Educational Research from an Ethics of Care

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## Abstract

This contribution is based on a workshop carried out in ECER 2024 about Arts and Education Research from an Ethics of Care. After exposing various cases based on previous research, we invited participants to reflect on care in research and arts educational practices. From the conversation, several notions of care emerged such as care for the people, for the materials, for the space. Care in different educational stages. When talking about preschool children, care is more linked to tenderness, safety, and bounds. In primary and secondary students, care has more to do to listen, commitment, and trust in their relational, creative and sensible capacities.

The final reflections invite researchers to create ecologies of imagination from care, engage a performative ethic mediating in the arts that allows us to visualise, project and create worlds that are yet-to-arrive. It is important to be open to a process of uncertainty and to continue to try to remind ourselves to open up caring spaces for possible new encounters.

**Keywords.** Pedagogy of care, Performative ethics, Arts-based research, Ontology of becoming, Research-with

## Introduction

Taking Haraway's (1988) conception of situated and relational knowledge, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) comments that knowing practices require care, and care is relational (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012, p. 198). Starting from the ontology of becoming, or an ontology that is made (in the making), Puig de la Bellacasa speaks of becoming-with and thinking-with (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012, p. 200). This invites us to move away from a culture of individuality and "seek common reasons for hope in concrete forms of situated "praxis"" (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012, p. 203). Practising the pedagogy of care means becoming aware - and responsible - about who we are (in relationship) and how we do things (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012). If we think of reality as relational, we enter into ecologies of being and knowing where our actions are constantly affecting our reality, a reality that is being co-created by all human and non-human entities that exist in a concrete space-time-matterings.

In a time where individualisation and competition are being ever more present and promoted, we find there is an urgency to discuss and explore which kind of supportive environments we create in research, collaboratively. That's why in research it is important to mind the human dimension, that is, not only our thoughts, ideas and brains, but also our corporeality, our presence, and our affects (Ahmed, 2004; Page & Sidebottom, 2022). We, as researchers, are subjects-in-relation (Onsès, 2021). This calls for taking into account the ethics of care. According to Joan Tronto (2009, para. 5), an ethic of care is an approach to our personal, social, moral, and political life that starts from the reality that all human beings need to receive and give care to others, and this is part of what marks us as human beings.

This means that although being aware that power relations exists in any collaborative work, researchers and participants can make the effort to open for a good working environment, by paying attention to one and another's needs, and mind each participant's experience and reflections (Pettersen, 2011) to establish more horizontal and caring relationships. An ethics of care is constructed across the places and spaces and throughout all co-creative processes. This entails an affective response and an ethical response-ability (Barad, 2010; Higgins, 2017). That is, having the ability to respond (response-ability) to the emotional-social needs in a way that predisposes us to learning in the best possible way for the entire educational community involved. Care is listening not only to words but to senses, actions, corporeality, movement, humour and even if it is not always possible to establish such a respectful and democratic environment, we would, however, like to underline the value of striving towards it in diverse collaborative contexts. To bring the concept of care into light for a moment, to reflect, discuss and problematise it will hopefully further develop and strengthen its presence among us.

According to Andrew S. Larsen citing Gordon et al. (1996), pedagogies of care "consists of a set of relationship practices that foster mutual recognition and fulfilment, development, growth, protection, empowerment, human community, culture and possibility" (Larsen, 2015, p. 17). From this theoretical framework, two researchers wanted to explore ways to 'create community' with the participants we research with in a workshop so that we together could explore cases, strategies, projects linked to care against conformity in arts education.

The questions that guided the collaboration were:

- Which notions of care emerge in research in the arts educational field?
- How can we explore new ways to create supportive environments and networks in arts and education research through pedagogies and ethics of care?

## Method

In the workshop, two cases were presented as a starting point for the discussion.

Two cases from our earlier research projects, pedagogical proposals that could also have been situated in an everyday practice in any school.

**Case 1.** Judit explored a research project about how to create bonds in KO-3 between kids and teachers, where corporeality, communication between pedagogue and child, tenderness, aesthetics, environment and design of the space are exemplified.

**Case 2.** Ebba brought two examples from a previous research project, *The magic of Language* (2015) that explored the relation between aesthetics and the spoken and written language. Order and Chaos - how do they affect creativity? How do they play along, dialogue and what dimensions of care can they communicate through the agency of the material?

These presentations were followed up by a collaborative workshop in smaller groups and as a discussion in the whole group.

### *Case 1. Creating bonds in KO-3*

In Spain, since the maternity and paternity leave is 4 months, after this time, many kids have to be enrolled in a kindergarten for 0 to 3 years old. In this type of school, working within the bounds is fundamental for kids to feel safe and confident whilst they are far away from their parents. In this case, the pedagogies of care are very important. At the ages of 0-2, children do not master the verbal language very well, so teachers need to develop more corporeal, affective and sensorial strategies to create bonds with the children, offering them learning experiences based on respect and tenderness.

Here is recommended to address them from the proximity, posing the bodies in a way that eyes are at the same height; using a sweet, tender and friendly tone of voice; inviting them to explore materials and objects both by themselves, together with the teacher and with their classmates.



Figure 1. The game installation before entering the kids



Figure 2. Hands-on experience of game installation

In Figure 1, we can see a picture taken in a game installation [instalación de juego] (Ruiz de Velasco Gálvez & Abad Molina, 2023) that invited children to explore the beach and the elements we can find there. So teachers prepared the classroom with sand, shells and other objects related to the sea and beach. In this activity, we can see how care is put at work in various ways. In Figure 2, we see another moment, when children has entered to the classroom and started to relate and play with the installation, with the support and accompaniment of the teacher. Looking at how the teacher is seated close to the kid. She is observing him, just being there if he needs her and, sometimes she introduces an object that they explore together in a sensual way - the shape, the sound, the smell of the object, the materiality, texture, hardness, color... and, after, the children continue to play and explore on their own, without the teachers support. This kind of playful, careful way to create bonds between children and teacher and the environment becomes a quite non-demanding, calm play that creates a listening dialogue and mutual respect between children, teacher and objects, allowing the children to play and explore at their own pace.

### *Case 2. The magic of language*

Figures 3 and 4 were taken during the research project “The magic of language” (2015) where the purpose was to explore how we as teachers could meet the already strong interest in reading, storytelling and writing in early childhood, in a playful and caring and inspiring way. One of our inspirations in the project were the preschools of Reggio Emilia, in Italy where the concept of care has been central in every pedagogic aspect for many years. In relation to materials, questions, projects and environments. This is partly based on Vygotsky’s ideas of children’s rights to learn and play in rich environments. The research was also inspired by emergent philosophy, to create open-ended pedagogical proposals for children to experiment with (Olsson et.al, 2015).

The first table, figure 3 is a spontaneous table in a preschool setting, which is fine - a little bit chaotic and neglected by the teachers, but still used by the children. This kind of setting is quite a common sight in schools and preschools. The second table, figure 4, is a more thoughtful, careful proposal for the children,



prepared by their teachers. Both tables serve their purposes, but they speak different languages and the invitations to the children are different. The table that is more organised and rich creates a sense of care, it communicates that the teachers care about what they offer the children and this also affects how the children encounter it, they responded to it with the same care as the sender.



Figures 3 and 4. A table with different proposals in a preschool atelier

We had observed that the children in this preschool loved to create books, even though most of them couldn't read and write in a conventional way-yet.

So, as an answer to that observation, we, as researchers, continued to propose many different artistic contexts where they could explore different ways of experimenting with the written and spoken language through various aesthetic proposals. We called our proposals "irresistible zones for reading and writing". It could be a table with carefully prepared materials as in the example above, a floor of confetti-sized paper, or a whole room wrapped in paper (Figure 5). The paper room was prepared as a response to what we interpreted as the children's strong desire to write, draw, tell and create stories collectively. This room made place for everyone and for collective stories to take form (Olsson, Dahlberg, Theorell, 2015).



Figure 5. An example of the irresistible zone for reading and writing.

In the ECER workshop, the concept of care was discussed and exemplified in many different aspects and from many perspectives. The participating researchers were invited to:

- Discuss their different/similar perspectives and experiences in groups of 3.
- Which political aspects did they face in relation to care in educational settings or in research.
- To find artistic examples – films or photos that can exemplify and visualise aspects of the discussion.

### **Notions of care that emerged from the workshop**

We discussed different ways of thinking and seeing the child in relation to this topic - as in the image of the child as natural, competent, as being or becoming, as easily satisfied or spoiled - and so on, and how all of these aspects also connect to the role of the educator and its possibilities to build inspiring, playful and caring contexts for our children.

#### *In terms of Materiality*

In the discussion, one of the participants underlined the importance of the quality of the material that we offer the children. To respect the potentiality of the artistic expression, real materials should be available to the children - clay, sand, high-quality paper, high-quality colours instead of simulacra. Care for her meant making students aware that they are important, so they are provided with real artistic tools for creation. As a gesture to give importance to both them as artists and art itself. If they are going to work on art projects, they will have quality tools, which is also a way to say that what they are going to do is important. What happens when we provide students with proper pencils, adequate brushes for specific painting techniques, instead of offering them poor materials? When we offer students poor materials, implicitly, we are saying to them that we, as teachers, do not trust them as artists, and what they are going to create doesn't deserve spending more money on real artistic materials. This is something we will have to continue to underline as researchers and educators, since it also concerns political and economic dimensions.

#### *In terms of Chaos - Order in space*

A discussion that became very engaging was one concerned with the romantic image we have of an artist's studio as a messy and disordered space, dirty and disorganised. And that this image often relates to the child as a "wild" creature that doesn't care about the environment they play in. However, it is important to take care of the space and the materials for artworks and to reflect upon how the material communicates to the children, and how it should be treated and dialoged with.

In our research, we have found out more inspiring and respectful to start creating in a clean and ordered space than in a chaotic space. And how important is it to maintain this order, although artistry usually entails disorder and chaos. Chaos claims more chaos. And usually, chaos entails not caring about the materials and the space. Working with students who have grown up not caring arts (arts usually are not valued so highly in schools), it is not easy to transmit this care and love for materials and the act of

creation. That's why, from the children's first introduction to arts and materials, it is important to create this atmosphere of care.

### *In terms of notions of child*

Another attendant at the workshop explained a story about a group of adolescents in a museum. They were visiting an art exhibition and suddenly one kid broke a piece of art. The children's teacher became deeply concerned about the accident and felt a great deal of guilt. However, the staff from the museum responded in a very kind way. They said they could try to repair the piece and did not quarrel with the student. The teacher asked if they would now make it harder for children to visit the museum, and the staff answered: absolutely not, and stressed that it had nothing to do with the person being a child; it could have been an adult. In this sense, care means caring for people and living matter (in the sense of being aware that the artworks also live their own lives), understanding who the other is. In this case, understanding the circumstances and acting creatively and respectfully towards the piece of art and towards the child, seen as a citizen with equal rights to adults to experience arts and culture.

### *Care linked to tenderness*

Tenderness is usually associated with early childhood. These beings who have just arrived in life with everything to explore, who exude a unique love and affection. However, we propose from the pedagogy of care to extend this tenderness to all ages. And try to develop a loving, careful, and affectionate attention to pedagogical relationships in all stages of life. To make an effort to pay attention to how we use our voice, move towards togetherness instead of individualism, read body language, how materials and environments are curated - handled with care, but also pay attention to not simplifying reality by turning to conformism, but instead try opening towards curiosity to the other.

## **Concluding reflections**

This proposal is an ongoing research that looks for other pedagogical relationships among researchers and their communities or networks. It is part of an experimental, never-ending process in which researchers are invited to invent transnational collaborative models for research. It is a new space that has opened, that reaches out to welcoming ceremonies, where curiosity and care are connected.

The ontology of becoming proposes a relational, changing and contextual reality that invites us to think about a different subjectivity. According to Inna Semetsky (2006, p. 3), "the production of subjectivity is not based on any prescribed code, but is creative and artistic." . . human experience itself must be considered as a condition of possibility. . . of becoming another, that is, different from the current self." This places research practice in a relational process where each person must take their part of responsibility by being aware of their power to transform and affect the pedagogical-research encounter. And although we find ourselves in situations with many not-knowings, the importance of learning lies in recognising and understanding the not-knowing not as an obstacle that generates frustration and blockage, but precisely as that which is not-yet-known (Atkinson, 2018) -but with the potentiality to get to know. Creating ecologies of imagination from care, a performative ethic mediating in the arts that allows us to visualise, project and create worlds that are yet-to-arrive (Atkinson, 2018). However, the materialisation of new ways



of being/living by researchers is not an easy task, since it requires not only “an ethical, epistemological, ontological and political process”, but also “an aesthetic process, a process of creativity and invention” (Atkinson, 2018, p. 33). We all have to be open to a process of uncertainty and to continue to try to remind ourselves to open up caring spaces for possible new encounters.

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