

Research Article

# Dialogues in space-time: At the crossroads between Arts Education and Cultural Citizenship

## Diálogos en el espacio-tiempo: En la confluencia entre Educación Artística y Ciudadanía Cultural

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** This article focuses on a teaching-learning process developed within the context of initial training for teachers and educators, involving practices in the visual arts.

**Methodology:** A qualitative study was conducted, considering the generation of data from artistic-pedagogical practices and its respective content analysis. **Results:** Creative processes and resulting materials were analyzed, including photographic series, mind maps and visual essays, as well as the students' critical reflections recorded in their learning portfolios.

**Discussions:** The simultaneous visual and discursive dimensions of the produced materials, as well as the gathered reflections, allowed us access to a set of meanings attributed to the carried-out processes, which encompassed areas such as technical knowledge, creativity,

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communication, interpersonal relationships and a sense of *professionalship*. **Conclusions:** The articulation of the aforementioned domains, in the context of integrated arts education into teacher training, allowed us to observe the impasses, potentialities and, above all, the urgency for education professionals to assume a lively stance in face of a context of uncertainty and rapid social and cultural change. This requires a critical view of realities and truths, an ability to co-create healthy learning environments that promote inclusion and equity, freedom of choice, and creativity in its broadest sense.

**Keywords:** Arts Education; Visual Arts; Creative Processes; Space; Time; Teachers and Educators Formation; Arts-Based Research; Teaching-Learning Process.

## Resumen

**Introducción:** El texto se centra en un proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje, desarrollado dentro de la formación inicial de maestros y educadores, implicando prácticas en el campo de las artes visuales. **Metodología:** Se realizó un estudio cualitativo donde la generación de datos partió de prácticas artístico-pedagógicas y respectivo análisis de contenido. **Resultados:** Se analizaron procesos creativos y materiales resultantes, a saber, series fotográficas, mapas mentales y ensayos visuales, así como las reflexiones críticas de los estudiantes en sus portafolios de aprendizaje. **Discusión:** La dimensión simultáneamente visual y discursiva de los materiales producidos, así como las reflexiones recogidas, permitieron acceder a un conjunto de significados atribuidos al proceso realizado, atravesando los dominios del conocimiento técnico, creatividad, comunicación, relaciones interpersonales y profesionalidad. **Conclusiones:** La articulación de estos dominios en el contexto de la integración de la educación artística en la formación de profesores ha permitido vislumbrar impasses, potencialidades y, sobre todo, la urgencia de posicionar los profesionales de educación ante un contexto de incertidumbre y rápidas transformaciones sociales y culturales, exigiendo una visión crítica de realidades y verdades, capacidad de co-crear ambientes de aprendizaje saludables, capaces de promover inclusión y equidad, libertad de elección y creatividad en su sentido más amplio.

**Palabras clave:** Educación Artística; Artes Visuales; Procesos Creativos; Espacio; Tiempo; Formación de Profesores y Educadores; Investigación Basada en el Arte; Proceso de Enseñanza-Aprendizaje.

## 1. Introduction

Because they allow us to articulate cultural heritages, knowledge, and the ability to reflect and act, artistic practices configure particular ways of knowing the world and its surrounding realities. Through the particularities of these practices, symbolic systems are shared that can give meaning to individual and collective experiences. In this sense, artistic practices are part of a broader spectrum of cultural and social practices, which cannot be ignored when situating ourselves in an educational context such as teacher and educator training. That being said, we argue that the promotion of a "quality education" in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) cannot be divorced from arts education and its recognized contributions to human development, as advocated by Eisner (2002), Efland (2003), Gardner (2006) or Bamford (2006). Assuming this cultural and social perspective of artistic practice and its intertwining with educational practices, in the context of training educational agents, a work proposal was drawn up to be developed with students at two higher education institutions (in Portugal, Escola Superior de Educação do Politécnico de Lisboa - ESELx and in Spain, Facultad de Educación de la Universidad Castilla-la-Mancha - FE-UCLM), based on their perceptions and experiences of urban space. It is the processes and results of these efforts that we bring here

for reflection. The activities were developed with basic education and kindergarten B.A. students and have been drawn up at a crossroads between:

- i) The premises inherent to arts education research (Visual Arts);
- ii) Cultural citizenship, as stated in the *Porto Santo Charter* (2021), according to which “In order to promote cultural citizenship, we must place culture, understood in a plural and participatory manner, at the heart of educational policies, and education at the heart of cultural policies” (Porto Santo Charter, 2021, p. 10);
- iii) The promotion of “quality education” for all (SDG 4).

Several authors have highlighted, over the last few decades, the gap between contemporary artistic and cultural practices and the still persisting pedagogical proposals in the visual arts field (Mason, 2004; Acaso 2009, 2013; Oliveira, 2015; Iavelberg et al., 2022). Specifically, we refer to the dissociation between art, society and education, with a particular focus on teacher and educator training efforts. Considering this to be a fundamental area for facing the social, cultural and political challenges of a globalized world, and given the porosity and fluidity of the boundaries between school space and external reality, special attention needs to be focused on the intellectual (scientific-pedagogical), human and professional dimensions inherent to the training of future educational agents. In this regard, Mason (2004) advocates the existence of a sense of belonging between students and teachers to the school, and from the school to the community. This sense of rapprochement between society and education implies a broader vision of education and learning processes, which partially dilutes a hierarchy between what we learn in school *time-spaces* and what we learn informally, at school or in other social and experiential *time-spaces*. Universal truths on knowledge and learning are questioned by the ubiquity of information, the rapid pace of technological changes, the dispute over multiple subjectivities, and movements counter to democratic coexistence, while real civilizational rifts in access to education persist.

Thinking about change from the perspective of arts education leads us to observe the educational and cultural significance of artistic practices and the contributions they can bring to “quality education” - *inclusive, equitable and lifelong* (SDG 4). This insight also requires an evaluation of perspectives aligned with international agendas, such as UNESCO's *2030 Agenda* or the OECD's *The Future of Education and Skills 2030*. Such a confrontation presupposes a broader understanding of how concepts and approaches (both conceptual and pedagogical) can contribute to the development of meaningful learning and align with the concept of “quality education” underlying SDG 4 (Venkatesh, Ruprecht, Ferede, 2023).

Following UNESCO's conceptions (*UNESCO Road Map for Arts Education*, 2006), arts education interweaves two essential dimensions: the learning of artistic languages and learning through artistic languages. The first conception focuses on the acquisition of knowledge specific to each artistic area, while the second mobilizes the arts as ways of understanding the world. Numerous documents produced over the last two decades by organizations such as UNESCO or the OECD have focused on measuring the impact of arts education or the integration of the arts into the school *curricula* and extracurricular contexts (Meleisea, 2005; Bamford, 2006; Winner et al., 2013; Venkatesh et al., 2023; Fernández-Cao, et al., 2023). From these readings, the contributions of arts education, or the arts, stand out in: a general improvement in academic results; the development of creative thinking and psycho-social skills (such as collaboration or communication); the promotion of humanist values (including a culture of peace and respect for cultural diversity); and pedagogical innovation (through the development of approaches and tools capable of providing holistic learning experiences

integrated into a perspective of the integral education of the human being). However, a fundamental question remains about the conceptions that underpin all these discussions. This question relates to a redefinition of artistic practice under the broad umbrella of creativity, and how creativity, an inherent characteristic of art, should become an essential skill for students and professionals in the context of *liquid* realities (Bauman, 2001) brought about by the 21st century's global capitalism (Biesta, 2019). Creativity, within the framework of arts education, must assume an ethical commitment to the social, cultural, individual, and collective spheres (Fernández-Cao et al., 2023, p.14), thus becoming, in Julio Romero's perspective, a “distributed creativity” (Romero, 2010).

According to Biesta (2019), in the field of arts education, two perspectives confront each other: a utilitarian perspective that instrumentalizes artistic practices (the latter being at the service of an extra-artistic objective) and an expressionist perspective for which art appears as a field for the exploration of emotions, and the discovery and affirmation of identity.

When looking at the presence of arts education in school *curricula*, the author detects two threats: the potential disappearance of the arts from the field of education and the disappearance of education from the realms of the arts (Biesta, 2019, p.2). The first threat relates to the arts' integration into the *curricula*, justified by their impact on other learning dimensions, thereby unveiling knowledge hierarchies such as the arts contribution to language development, improving math results, or solving problems in the sciences.

The second concerns an essentialist view of education, which validates the educational process through a set of measurable learning “results” or “milestones”. Parallel to the utilitarian vision is the expressive dimension of arts education, advocated not so much for aesthetic, functional or instrumental values, but for existential (ethical) ones, involving the individual and collective experience in and with the world (Biesta, 2019, p. 4).

Considering the aforementioned debates around arts education and the perspectives (in our view conflicting, but not always antagonistic) that justify its inclusion in the school *curricula* and in the training programs for teachers and educators, we have been developing, in this last field of action, a set of work proposals that aim to articulate a visual arts literacy with a practical experience that we understand as a space for research. As such, this paper analyzes the creative processes and the results of a work proposal developed with students from the two abovementioned higher education institutions (ESELx and FE-UCLM), as part of the research project *Time-Lapse: Memory, Post-Memory, Artistic Practices and Community* (IPL/IDI&CA2023/TimeLapse\_ESELx). *Time-Lapse* is a research project based on artistic practice in the visual arts. It takes the concepts of Time, Memory, Post-memory and History as structuring lines of thought, considering them capable of interconnecting individuals and communities. Both methodologically and conceptually speaking, the initiation of arts-based research with higher education students, through their participation in research projects, is encouraged. This is considered one of the pillars for the training of teachers and educators, which are intended to be capable of developing innovative, socially and culturally appropriate educational methodologies and practices.

In this case, the project's guiding principle was the development of an artistic practice articulating the knowledge of the visual arts' specific codes and techniques, the valorization of each individual, and that of the collective of the classes involved, their creative capabilities and potential, and the importance of artistic knowledge for cultural fruition (participation), regarding the following objectives:

- i) to deepen the understanding of visual arts composition and impact on visual communication;
- ii) to experiment with different possibilities and to create visual narratives based on the concepts of time and space, considering the plastic and multimedia variety of the languages involved;
- iii) to express and experiment with different ways of questioning, understanding, and communicating *space-time*;
- iv) to create a visual and thought-provoking discourse about the experience and living of the territories; and
- v) to promote collaborative work processes.

The analysis of this teaching-learning process through a qualitative approach, in which we have situated ourselves as teacher-researchers, has demonstrated the potential of conceiving the classroom as a territory that is both educational and cultural. When understood in this way, this teaching-learning context allows for the creation of strategies and materials that embrace the development of holistic pedagogical approaches. It is ultimately constituted as a territory of “distributed” and “constructed creativity” (Romero, 2010). One that recognizes and values shared intersubjectivities (between teachers and students), individual specificities, and that promotes practice-based experiences in the field of visual arts, experiences which in turn are anchored in collaboration and based on an experience of urban space that transforms the “look” at urban reality into the “see” (Munari, 2007) of such a reality, as a space of multiple interactions.

## 2. Methodology

The study on the teaching-learning process employed qualitative methodologies, focusing on the work processes and the analysis of resulting outcomes. From our perspective as teacher-researchers, involved in the teacher and educator qualification scenarios, two research dimensions must be considered. On the one hand, the design of the work proposal and its inherent scientific-pedagogical dimensions (which will be detailed further on). On the other hand, our analysis of the process and results using content analysis (Bardin, 2011, Coutinho, 2015). This included a range of textual and visual sources, such as the students’ critical reflections (embodied in their *Reflective Learning Portfolios*); *sample-series* (Roldán, & Mena, 2017); individual and group mind maps; visual essays; and collective exhibitions, with specific content analysis methodologies employed.

A total of 149 students from two educational institutions took part in the study: 109 students from the Basic Education B.A. program (ESELx), and 40 students from the elementary and kindergarten teacher master's programs (FE-UCLM). The work processes were developed through classes with a diluted duration over the course of a month, and intensive workshops, respectively. Although these differences in time organisation have influenced some of the results (particularly in terms of the theoretical reflections presented by the students involved in the workshops), we observed no significant discrepancies in the artistic practices of both these groups.

The content analysis began with a “floating reading” (Bardin, 2011), allowing us to map out the main issues that emerged from the collected materials. Data analyses focused on the

timeline of the teaching-learning process, cross-referencing the stages of the work proposal with the resulting outcomes. Subsequently, the interpretation of the collected data identified various areas of learning (individual and collective) involved, as well as the contributions of the outcomes to teaching and educational professionalism. When developing the work proposal (of an artistic-pedagogical nature) practice-based research methodologies were considered, focusing on the links between concepts, techniques, artistic practices and the ability to question and generate different perspectives on the *space-time* concept in the visual arts, both in a strict and broader sense. This understanding can also extend to individual experiences, enabling the formulation of different and heterogeneous perspectives, experiences, interrelationships, understandings and conceptions of territory.

Arts practice-based research is currently seen as a multidimensional space which, since its enunciation by authors such as Elliot Eisner (2006), has provided access to different forms of knowledge through holistic and committed approaches to social issues (Leavy, 2015), where experimental practice and the creation of theoretical discourse are reciprocally intertwined (Roldán & Viadel, 2012; Rolling Jr., 2013).

As a disruptive paradigm, arts practice-based research proposes analysis perspectives that break with deep-rooted forms of dominant thinking in the fields of education, the social sciences, but also art and culture. The *Dialogues in Space-Time* project was developed at Lisbon's Polytechnic University of Education (ESELx) and Castilla-la-Mancha's University Education Faculty (FE-UCLM), adopting a theoretical-practical approach. From a pedagogical standpoint, active methodologies were employed in both contexts. Framed by collaborative project-based learning and considering the *space-time* of each student's citizen existence, methodologies were thus rendered socially and culturally plural and inclusive.

At the crossroads between the inherent premises to arts education research and cultural citizenship, our project proposal was drawn up. It comprises four dialectically structured moments:

- a. Individual exploratory practice - *Observing space-time, in space-time*. Photographic registry intended to capture the transformation performed by time, from a fixed point of view, over the course of six different moments. From this phase, the creation of a *sample-series* (Roldán, & Mena, 2017) has resulted;
- b. Meanings construction - *From literalness to metaphor*. Drawing up mind maps from each student's *sample-series*, outlining the web of meanings emerging from those images;
- c. Collaborative exploratory practice - *Dialogues in space-time/ Real and imagined space-time*. Creation of visual micro-narratives, departing from the previous records. Collaborative work, carried out in pairs, around both the images and the web of perceptions and issues individually perceived. These micro-narratives have taken the form of a visual essay, created through the exploration of several techniques (photography, drawing, collage).
- d. The integration phase - Creation of *macro-narratives* - Development of collective macro-narratives by experimenting with the articulation possibilities between the visual essays carried out in pairs. Fostering thought and dialogue around the multiple experiences and perceptions brought about by the project results.

### ***2.1. Individual exploratory practice: Observing space-time, in space-time***

At first, each student's research was based on recording photographic images as a visual resource. The initial photographic survey underwent selection and was displayed on the free-use platform *Padlet*. This platform allowed all participants to view the results collected by each student and collectively discuss different ways of visually representing an abstract concept such as time.

The collection of visual documentation was shared in a sequential-series format, to construct a narrative of change; a shift in perspective towards *space-time*, highlighting the sense of impermanence and awareness of the multiplicity that constitutes the perception of a given phenomenon. Through the analysis of the collected documentation, a shared debate was conducted, which led to the identification of several visual categories that enhance awareness of the concept of time. During this process, students remark categories such as: the physical change of location within the photographic image frame or sudden absence of animate beings or objects; the play of light and shadow; the effect of motion blur; gestures; changes in the direction of the gaze of those depicted; the orderly repetition of elements, creating a sense of rhythm; the capture of undulating forms; and the capture of forms deviating from their resting positions.

### ***2.2. Meanings construction: From literalness to metaphor***

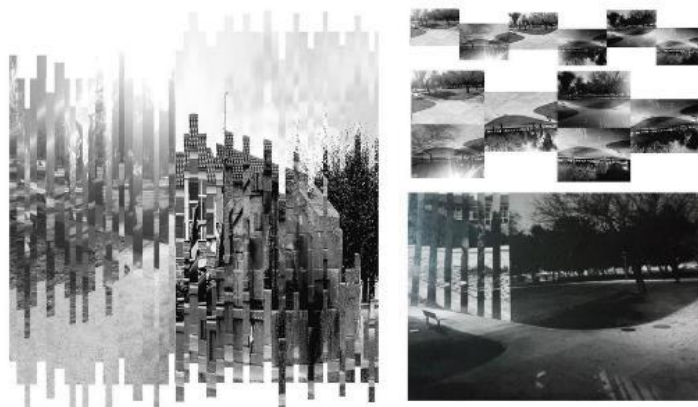
Starting with literal meanings, we progressed to uncover figurative, connotative and denotative meanings, by observing the sample-series created by each student. A mind map assembly was then proposed to articulate the images and the meanings that emerge from them. For a more concrete understanding of the scope and breadth of the readings and content provided by the analysis of the collected images, and their respective organization, the cartographic process was invoked. This process involves organizing and presenting the set of ideas, concepts, metaphors, the symbolic dimension, uses, meanings and perceptions evoked by the experience in its multiple dimensions.

### ***2.3. Collaborative exploratory practice: Dialogues in space-time/ Real and imagined space-time***

Organized in pairs, the students were invited to develop a work process that culminated in the creation of a visual micro-narrative, capable of synthesizing perceptions and concepts associated with the representation of space-time. Through collaborative learning, we sought to foster a dialogue around both the interrogation of the images and the web of perceptions and questions, mapped on the individual mind maps. The interrogations, perplexities and the knowledge emerging from this dialogue were, in turn, mapped in a second mind map, which supported the development of a practice-based creative process that was accompanied by reflection. From the analysis of the mind maps drawn in dialogue, it stands out that it was the search for common ground, or consensus, and the demand for complementarity, that proved to be the most vigorous facilitators in facing the next challenge of the on-going exploratory research process: to create the requested visual essay, configuring a broad process of "expanded creativity" as proposed by Romero (2010).

**Figure 1.**

*Experimentation using digital media*



**Source:** “Reflective Learning Portfolios” (2023).

**Figure 2.**

*Experimentation through manual processes*



**Source:** Photographs by the authors (2023).

**Figure 3.**

*The composition process*



**Source:** Photographs by the authors (2023).

Through photomontage and collage, utilizing digital tools (Figure 1) or manual processes (Figure 2), procedures of fragmentation, decomposition, re-contextualisation and re-creation of meaning have been experimented with the images (Figure 3). Considering the need to ensure that all students had access to a set of materials and technical processes, we proposed the use of prints, drawings, transparencies, and digital photomontage, which were gradually appropriated through the development of exploratory and collaborative practices. By means of processes that are basic to the visual arts (photography, collage, photomontage, etc.) the



students were able to comprehensively configure (through plastic processes, sharing and discussion, reflection) a set of questions and metaphorical meanings that are intrinsic to artistic practice.

#### **2.4. The integration phase: Macro-narratives creation**

By what means can a set of micro-narratives, when combined, form a spatio-temporal macro-narrative? This question was central to the joint presentation of visual rehearsals conducted in pairs. At this stage, students were challenged with presenting the work they had completed together in a predefined architectural space. The goal was to consider how these compositions would interact and influence one another, leading to new perceptions and, importantly, generating different meanings.

The exchanges and discussions, which were based on observing the works now displayed in the school's architectural space, are viewed as moments of knowledge exchange and collective

learning. This culminates in a teaching-learning process that integrates both individual and collaborative methods (Figure 4).

#### **Figure 4.**

*Results presentation and sharing*



**Source:** Photographs by the authors (2023).

### **3. Results**

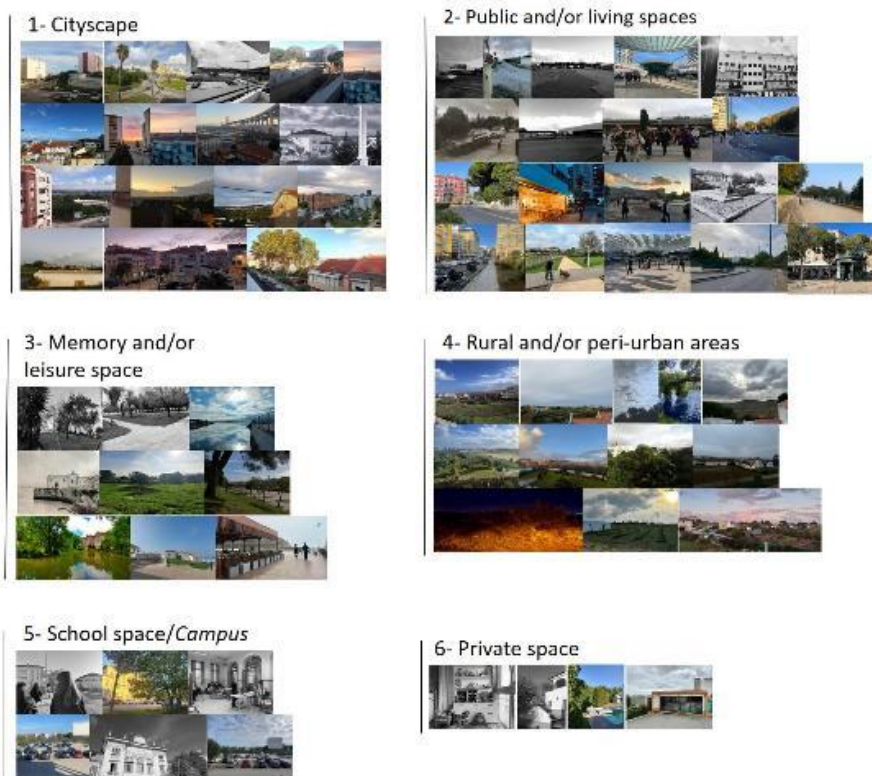
Within the framework of arts education research, there are numerous intersections between the teaching-learning process, creative processes and artistic practice. In this context, and considering the different dimensions observable through mind maps, visual essays, and individual reflections, results will be analyzed that emerge from the various stages of the aforementioned process. Firstly, the results of individual work will be analyzed. This project stage focused primarily on the collection and analysis of photographic images and the creation of sample-series. Secondly, the results of collaborative work will be presented. From the analysis of the developed results, various dimensions of a technical, compositional, and discursive nature have emerged. These findings will be addressed in our survey, as they are part of a practice in which “doing” and “thinking” are inseparable.

#### **3.1. Sample-series**

Through photographic research and the analysis of sample-series conducted by each student, the choice of location from which the photographic material was collected is noteworthy, as well as the method used to represent time.

**Figure 5.**

*Sample-series analysis, in terms of the space representation*



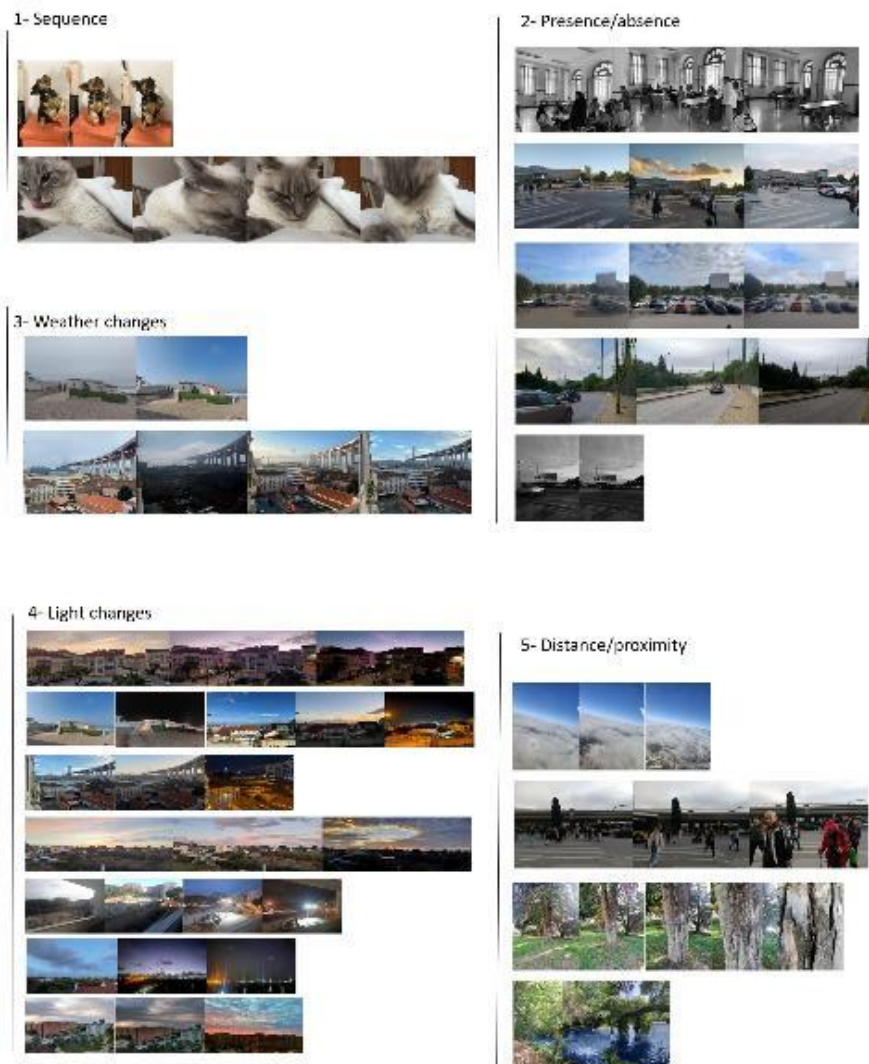
**Source:** Own elaboration (2024), following the visual diagrams proposed by Roldán & Viadel (2012).

Regarding the territory (Figure 5), there is a notable emphasis on cityscapes and urban/public spaces as the subjects of images collection (lines 1 and 2). The urban landscape, whether captured from a window or from within the urban space itself, stands out as mode of representation, illustrating various ways of perceiving and experiencing space.

In the first case, there is a distant gaze that highlights the connections between interior and exterior spaces. In the second case, the focus is on different ways of utilizing city spaces; the relationship between architectural scale and the scale of the body, and places of social interaction, all of which are mapped by students as objects of visual analysis. Thirdly, peri-urban or rural spaces are prominent, with nature often occupying the foreground of the captured images. Additionally, memory places, leisure spaces, school settings and private scenarios also emerge as categories from the individual collection of images.

**Figure 6.**

*Sample-series analysis, in terms of time representation*



**Source:** Own elaboration (2024), following the visual diagrams proposed by Roldán & Viadel (2012).

As for the ways in which time is perceived and represented (Figure 6), the sample-series images demonstrate five different modalities. Most notably, these include the sequences in which changes in brightness throughout the day are perceptible. In addition, these are dialogues between presence and absence (of people, cars, etc.) in different spaces; the notions of proximity and/or distance; and the representation of sequences, all of which are strategies for representing temporal duration perceived through transformation and movement. Finally, atmospheric changes also suggest a temporal duration.

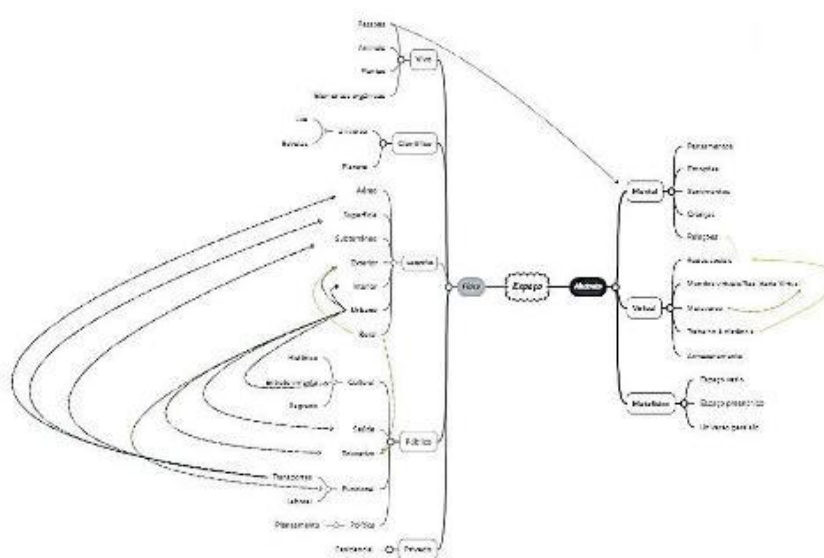
This initial mapping, conducted through sample-series, provides insights into the different connections between students and their lived *spaces-times*. These connections are essentially characterized by relationships of use or usufruct, such as everyday work, leisure, social or domestic spaces, from which a temporal duration is derived.

### 3.2. Mind Maps

A closer look at the students' mind maps, based on the analysis of the collected images, reveals additional layers of meaning that contribute to a broader understanding of space (whether architectural, functional, sensory, symbolic, social, or personal space); time (including chronological, meteorological, human, cosmic, individual, collective, social); human actions and social experiences (including perceptions of self and others); how urban design influences social and cultural experiences and perceptions; the soundscapes and smellscapes that contribute to the materiality of places; the aesthetic dimensions inherent in the geometry of shapes, lines and routes; the scales and variations between places; the *places-times* of memory, and the presences and absences in *space-time* perceptions (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Mind Map



Source: "Reflective Learning Portfolios" (2023).

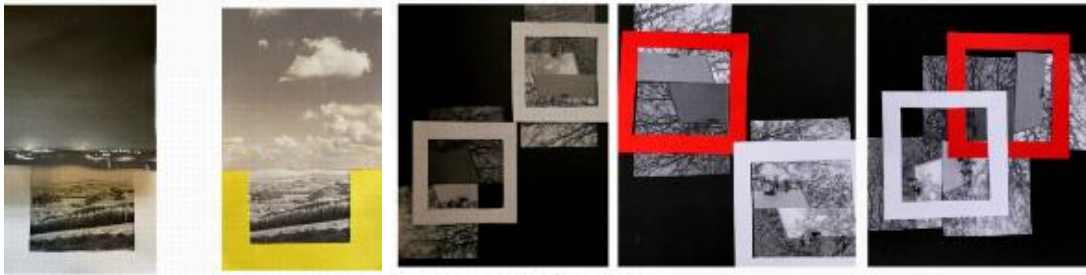
### 3.3. Visual Essays

Regarding the visual essays, their experimental nature is noteworthy, as it allows for the exploration of materiality and immateriality through various technical resources and compositional strategies. In this context, alongside digital image editing techniques (such as photomontage and digital collage), students extensively explored material manipulation methods through collage and drawing.

Analyzing the students' visual essays reveals the intersection of technical, compositional and communicational aspects. By employing collage and/or photomontage techniques, the students were able to integrate different materials and compositional methods, and most importantly, explore diverse possibilities for visual communication using materials collected through photography (Figure 8).

## Figure 8

### Visual essay



**Source:** “Reflective Learning Portfolios” (2023).

The fragmentation of images, the overlays, the use of transparency, the interplay between photography and drawing, were combined with other compositional strategies, such as repetition, alternation, transformation of scales, inversion and juxtaposition, to create visual compositions that, in addition to the experimenting with the nature of form, may also evoke imagined and envisioned quotidian scenes.

Despite the shared starting points and propositions, the variety of the presented proposals is evident when viewed on a global level scale (Figure 9). In light of these considerations, the final stage of the work process - sharing the results in large class groups - is intended to serve as a space for dialogue and collective reflection on the processes and outcomes. The critical perspective on the work also pertains to the potential for exhibiting it in a common space. The exhibition strategy, as a means of sharing the work, allows for the exploration of formal and discursive connections, integrating each element into a coherent whole.

## Figure 9

### Visual essays



**Source:** “Reflective Learning Portfolios” (2023).

## 4. Discussion

Thinking of arts education as a space for knowledge, both in terms of the techniques and languages inherent to each artistic area, and as a means of enquiry into oneself and the world, leads us, as teacher-researchers, directly involved in the training and qualification of educational agents, to consider a broader task: thinking about the premises and practices of teaching-learning, from the perspective of holistic individual formation. This perspective acknowledges that individuals exist as *a subject in the world*, in a dialogical connection with *what* and *who* is part of that world, avoiding centrality (being the *centre of the world*) and instead

seeking a place of equity and equality within the world (Beida, 2019, p.5). It's not merely about the competencies each person acquires, or how they define themselves as a cultural or social subject, but about how they articulate these various layers in their existence as individuals, whose actions will unfold in different realities, which will include resistance, indeterminacy, frustration and doubt.

When analyzing the practical results of each stage of the creative process, and each student's critical reflections on the overall teaching-learning process, seven (discussion) topics emerge, corresponding to different interrelated domains: the technical domain, the creative domain, the communicational domain, the personal domain, the interpersonal domain, the experiential domain and the professional domain.

The technical domain was one of the main topics mentioned in the analyzed critical reflections. The acquisition of technical knowledge in the visual arts, combined with the understanding of visual language, makes it possible to materialize artistic objects. This initial assumption is supported by a view that associates visual arts with manual skills, rather than seeing them as a broader way of communicating thought and growing knowledge.

On the one hand, students valued the use of manual and digital techniques, many of which they had not previously experienced, such as: photomontage, collage, and mixed techniques. On the other hand, they valued compositional strategies like repetition, alternation, scaling, overlapping, and transparency. These strategies, applied through both digital and analogue processes, allowed for the creation of non-linear, non-literal visual narratives that offered a poetic and critical perspective of everyday life, resulting in surprise. In this way, students expanded their learning in terms of techniques (both digital and manual) and visual composition strategies, considering the suitability of tools, materials and discursive intentions. A transversal dimension to the discourse around technique is the experimental and exploratory scope, provided by the work proposal and the research methodology based on visual arts practice. The experimental exercise of techniques, materials and languages became a field for reflection, thought and communication.

Beyond the expressive potential of communicating personal ideas or emotions, there is also the potential to use images to explore complex concepts, integrate them into the artistic field, or establish connections with other areas of culture, knowledge or life in society. The creation of non-linear, non-conventional narratives through the experimental processes mentioned, was seen as a way to experiment with different forms of relating and communicating through visual discourse. This process involves a perception of *space-time* emerging from individual and collective experiences.

The conception of creativity as a "talent", imagination, or an exceptional capacity, inherent to certain individuals, or even a technical skill, was initially mentioned as a preconceived idea that was gradually dismantled through the work process. The idea that creativity is a broad process, both individual and collective, including research, trial and error, thinking, communication and elaboration/concretization, was gradually reinforced throughout the work processes and consolidated after the final presentation of a macro-narrative. At the same time, students described the creative process as a moment of pleasure and immersion, akin to the *flow* state defined by Csikszentmihaly (2013), which involves intuition, concentration and persistence toward a goal.

Regarding the personal domain, the analyzed testimonies reveals a dichotomy between the "experience of resistance" (Beida, 2019) when facing challenges, and the experience of overcoming them. Initial resistance and fear regarding inability and/or impossibility to meet

the objectives of the work proposal, the unpredictability inherent in artistic practices, or the frustration of expectations (the difference between the idea and the practical result) when faced with the early attempts, were mentioned by almost all the students. Symmetrical to this resistance were beliefs in the idea of innate talent as a differentiating factor between success and failure in artistic practice, or the lack of technical knowledge. These ideas are pointed to as justification for reactions to the development of activities in the arts, subsequently influencing perceptions of their educational value.

Pride in the completed work, the experience of overcoming challenges, the awareness of individuality, and increased self-confidence, were seen as the positive outcomes of initial hesitations and impasses. Alongside these are mentions of the expressive potential and even the playful dimension associated with both the practical results and the artistic endeavour.

The attempt to create a nexus for the constructing a visual narrative, from seemingly disparate images, was fundamental to the development of the collaborative work processes. These processes involved confronting perspectives, searching for complementarities, negotiating and encountering others. The shared discovery of solutions to the challenges posed by the work proposal, getting to know each other, and the advantages of teamwork stood out in the students' reflections. Pausing during practical work processes to see the solutions other groups or colleagues had devised, were important learning moments, allowing students to appreciate the diversity of responses to the same challenge, as well as to value difference.

From an immersive perspective, students reflected on different views of a common metropolitan territory, and perceived details that escape everyday transient experiences of space. These are topics that emerge from the students' reflection on the photographic process. Capturing images by assuming a place of observation and exploring different framing possibilities, involves attention to particular aspects that integrate spaces-in-time.—This distinction between “looking” and “seeing” (Munari, 2007) is evident. Urban spatial organization, equipment, and everyday uses, stand out in the collected images, and students' visual essays. This also includes the relationship between body, space and time in the urban context, and experiences of space that oscillate between the strangeness/transitoriness of “non-places” (Augé, 2005) and observations of human behaviour in everyday spaces.

The photographic images and visual essays, by configuring different modes of visual appropriation and meaning attribution to the experience *of* and *in* the territory, reveal a predominance of everyday experiences and the transience that characterizes them. Looking at the transition from domestic private spaces to public spaces, and considering this from a “landscape” perspective, photographing spaces that link home to school, or selecting leisure areas, can be interpreted as visual indicators of how individuals perceive the city as a space for movement or permanence, leisure or work. Of how each person may be an integral part of this space or assume the role of a passerby, a distant observer.

In their reflections, many students initially express an awareness of a subordinated view of the arts compared to other *curriculum* areas, or even their instrumentalisation. They describe a stereotypical perception of arts education as merely a form of entertainment, a domain that offers fun and a break from the demands of other subjects (such as math, language, science), or as being used instrumentally by other subjects, often conditioning artistic activities to annual “festivities” (Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, etc.).

The integration of competencies that contribute to professionalism in education (technical-formal, creative, communicational, social, cultural), blending scientific and personal training, is highlighted as a crucial factor in the learning within the context of their work and future

educational activities. From our work proposal, skills such as flexible thinking, recognizing errors as opportunities for learning, proposing diverse solutions, visual composition possibilities, process and result analysis, problem-solving, effective communication, listening, empathy, and time management, are among the contributions that several students have embraced.

In addition to technical knowledge, a methodological dimension mentioned in some reflections can provide a framework for active and innovative educational practices. This approach does not merely follow a set *curriculum*, but allows for dialogue with different realities and acknowledges each individual's cultural capital. Thus, it can be said that the students have developed a broader understanding of the holistic dimension of arts education within educational processes, which is clearly valued in terms of their professional futures.

## 5. Conclusions

The global perspective derived from observing the work processes, visual objects and critical reflection in students' *Reflective Learning Portfolios*, prompts us to consider various aspects of the relevance of research conducted by teacher-researchers in their educational practices. In this instance, we present an investigative process that serve as a mirror for us. On one hand, it reflects our pedagogical actions in the context of teacher and educator training, where we assume the role of sharing knowledge, and professional experience, with those who may either adopt it (more or less critically) or reject it outright. On the other hand, it reveals a shared construction of professionalism with the students, leading us to confront our own reflection in the mirror.

Building a practice-based *corpus* of knowledge, as a systematic space for reflection on the knowledge, strategies, tools, materials, intentions and purposes of training actions, enables us to envision how artistic practices support enriching educational processes, both in artistic thinking and in personal, social and cultural domains. As illustrated by the previously described and analyzed process, artistic practices foster non-linear, "rhizomatic" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975), forms of knowledge and engagement with complex realities. This approach opens up extensive opportunities for pedagogical action, allowing for the development of innovative and integrated educational practices. Most importantly, this non-linearity, provides a broader understanding of the multiple ways of learning that occur in arts education spaces, which cannot be reduced to a fixed menu or the constraints of a limited framework dictated by economic or ideological factors (Beida, 2019).

Integrating arts education into the initial training of teachers and educators, confronts us with a rapidly evolving landscape, necessitating a fundamental reevaluation of the teacher/educator's role, reflected in their theoretical, methodological, and practical choices. Alongside societal transformations, artistic transformations must also be considered, characterized by polysemy, hybridity, media multiplicity, and openness to diversity, difference, metaphor, co-creation, activism, and experimentation.

Although contemporary practices may seem unconventional at first glance, they challenge perceptions and conceptions of body, space, time, matter, immateriality, and both individual and collective subjects. These can serve as guiding principles for educational practices, providing them with a critical dimension (Oliveira, 2015). The ability to look beyond the apparent surface of images, discourses and narratives, enables us to embrace doubt and error as transformative factors, fostering nonconformity against dogmatic representations and encouraging re-elaboration and reconfiguration.



Facing fixed and hierarchical models of knowledge and teaching, the disruptive and non-conformist nature of contemporary artistic practices, often gets overshadowed by deliberations of uselessness or superfluousness, from decision-makers responsible for educational policies. It is not uncommon for the justification of integrating the arts into *curricula* to focus solely on instrumental utility, thereby stripping it of its transformative and holistic value. As discussed previously (Pereira, 2021), the value of art in education extends beyond mere formalistic gestures and encompasses the realms of knowledge, research, and human experience in its various aspects (e.g., know-how, self-awareness, interpersonal relationships, and engagement with the world). As teacher-researchers committed to the principles of “quality education,” we must confront these challenges and ambiguities. Despite some optimistic narratives about arts education, these issues continue to overshadow its effective implementation and full development, making it accessible to all.

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