

CRITICAL APPROACHES TOWARDS (A NEW) ARTS EDUCATION

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Arts education, as a field of research and action in different spaces (schools, museums, cultural institutions, communities, etc.), still struggles to claim its specificity and equal importance in relation to other kinds of knowledge (Martins, 2017). In public and curricular policies and in several research discourses, it remains subdued to purposes imposed from the outside which frame it between a rhetoric of effects and instrumentalizing practices (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Martins, 2018). On the one hand, there remains an idea that arts are powerful transformative agents and could save the world (Martins, 2018; Martins & Popkewitz, 2015); on the other hand, neoliberalism tends to put economic utility and usage as principles that end up capturing art under the great jargons of creativity, cultural industries, flexibility, etc (Assis, 2019; Kalin, 2018; Martins, 2020). In schools, for example, it is not uncommon to see arts - under the pretext of interdisciplinarity - being mobilized under other curricular subjects (the so-called 'serious' knowledge), transforming them into vehicles that merely facilitate learning and neglecting in them what is also knowledge and possibilities for critical displacement and interventional action in the world. What we do with the arts matters more than what arts do to us (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013).

However, talking about 'arts' is already abusive. Today, and in works that intend to be critical towards themselves, it is necessary to question the very concept and status that arts, but also education, built from European perspectives, aligned with colonial practices, the building of nations, identity constructions and a culture of taste, under a universalist idea of civilization and progress (Gikandi, 2011; Mörsch, n.d.; Varela, 2016). If we look into curricular programs from primary to high school education - and even higher education - in the broad field of arts education we understand how a history of white, mostly male and western art is inscribed in them. Arts do not appear on the margins of society, they are an integral part of it, and carry in them stories that are also responsible for the production and maintenance of social inequalities and injustice.

Thus, in this JSTA special issue we aimed to pose one of the most difficult challenges that arts education faces today: how to build a place and status for arts education knowledge (in a still unequal struggle against other kinds of knowledge) and, simultaneously, how to do it from a critical standpoint, which does not assume for itself, from the outset, a privileged or exceptional place, which does not reproduce the hegemonic power relations it seeks to criticize (Mörsch, 2018), and which stimulates provocation and change instead of accommodation and homogenization. We tried to stimulate and bring authors to a place of questioning, under critical perspectives (anti-discrimination, anti-racist, postcolonial, queer, feminist, etc.), in order to promote alternative views and practices of action and research in arts education, committed to greater epistemological and social justice.

We selected a set of articles that lead, from criticism or practice, to diverse and current reflections on the contemporary problems and turbulences, but also opportunities and paths, of arts education. Among

several submissions received, we chose six texts that, instead of offering a convergent and tendentially homogenic view of what arts education are in the present or should be in the future, propose different critical approaches that enlarge the possibilities and understandings of artistic education. This necessary polysemic but also critical dialogue, emerging both from theoretical and empirical studies, will hopefully allow readers a fertile field for meaningful reflections and questionings on this issue's main subject, themes and questions.

The opening text by Wiktoria Szawiel, Jorge Ramos do Ó and Tomás Vallera (*Governmentality and the arts that matter: producing the conformed, flexible and creative pupil since the turn of the 20th century*) brings us a first urgent and necessary reflection on the profile of the arts pupils as defined by several governments, policymakers and ideologies from the nineteenth century. The authors undertake an historical revision and critical analysis on how arts education has been used within strategic purposes of power and conformity. Moreover, they argument how creativity and artistic experience have been subdued to neoliberal ideologies of productivity and agency, imposed as necessary paths for any successful future citizen or adult. The text thus offers us a crucial conceptual frame to understand current arts education policies and how different skills and profiles referred as desirable in students encompass dangerous routes in terms of their autonomy and identity.

The subject of identity is also keen to Rodrigo Zárate Moedano's and Bruno Baronnet's text (*Afro re-existence in the school of arts*). Their research questions the implicit and explicit anti-black racism existent in Mexican visual culture and tackles the role that arts education must assume in order to allow discriminated groups to perform their political *re-existence*. The authors establish a decolonial perspective through ethnographic and qualitative research, focused on an empirical methodology (*Afro-descendance*) which tries to combat a hegemonic, European and white-predominant worldview on Mexican reality (or realities). Artistic education was explored as a relevant strategy to highlight multiple and heterogenous identities within Mexican past and present, especially by giving (a new) visibility to those often marginalized.

The third text of this JSTA issue (*Moving in between resistances: an axis-thought on choreographic creation in an educational context*), written by Ângelo Neto, moves from the previous notion of re-existence towards the concept of resistance, emphasizing identity and diversity as cornerstones for meaningful arts education methodologies. The author reflects on philosophical and empirical dialogues between art and education by focusing on the choreographic creation as a relationship between choreographers and interpreters that must seek and foster a place for resistance and the creation of small worlds. Neto claims that collaborative processes in dance creation are a good model and example of how we should understand the place of arts within education, capable of generating multiplicity and diversity from its different possibilities for expression and experience.

The following text (*Diverse cultural thought in the European context through music collaboration networks*) moves from dance to music, presenting a theoretical approach and overview on how digital tools and online communication foster new possibilities for collaboration, education and artistic practices. Esther Vargas Gil, Felipe Gértrudix Barrio and Manuel Gértrudix Barrio's research focuses on collaborative and networked musical models and projects with great educational potential. The authors conduct an analysis of 27 different platforms as good examples of the collaborative, creative and pedagogical potential that these digital and technological approaches offer both to teachers and students from different parts of the world. Technology is highlighted in its potential for diversity, agency and creativity, instead of imposing unidirectional methodologies that subdue artistic practice to the logic of reproducing best practices.

Besides connecting and creating collaborative strategies between different individuals and communities, music is also studied in its performative approach by Nádia Moura's and Sofia Serra's research (*Listening to teachers' voices: constructs on music performance anxiety in artistic education*). This text addresses music performance anxiety (MPA) as an important topic to be included in contemporary educational strategies, as it decisively intervenes in the educational and professional path undertaken by music students and aspiring musicians. Through an extensive literature review and interviews to music teachers from a Portuguese educational institution, the authors conclude that addressing MPA in music pedagogy curricula is a key factor to improve students' preparation and well-being, depending on the teachers' previous experiences and vision towards the role of anxiety in music education.

The last article (*Conceptual photography and critical learning of the visual arts in the university context: educational experiences of future teachers*), written by Pedro Chacón Gordillo, Xana Morales Caruncho and Rafael Marfil Carmona, follows up and deepens a previous study from 2018. It proposes photographic creation and expression as a means for future teaching professionals (students of Primary Degree Education at University of Granada, Spain) to reflect on important issues and concerns regarding their pedagogical practice and professional activity. Art, and more specifically, photography, are studied as effective methodologies to metaphorically and creatively question reality and education: on the one hand, by allowing the exercise of producing creative perspectives on critical matters; on the other, by generating expressive outputs that allow us to approach and understand - through artistic discourse - different conceptions of reality.

These articles of the July 2021's JSTA issue address different topics defined beforehand as key to a contemporary pertinent and meaningful approach towards arts education. We hope they will allow, together, to understand how concepts as identity, power, diversity, multiplicity, creativity, or agency are weaved in contrasting and complementary ways around artistic education. Furthermore, they highlight a relevant and heterogenic set of methodologies, approaches and projects that may

inspire new critical theories and new empirical positionings and actions. We hope that all readers interested in this field will find in the next pages insights on what arts education has been, can be or should be, in order to move us into a future where the presence of arts in the field of education potentiates a humanist, just, equalitarian and self-fulfilling participation in our reality and in our personal and collective lives.

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