

Encounters Between Artists, Children, and Educators: Collaborative Learning Through the Arts

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Abstract

This paper examines the Interstice project, a European initiative fostering encounters between artists, educators, and children through peer-learning dynamics in early childhood education. The study focuses on collaborative learning methodologies developed in nursery schools in Catalonia, involving Norwegian and Catalan performing artists, teachers, university students, young children and researchers from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Through immersive artistic experiences, co-facilitated workshops, and reflective practices, the project reshapes traditional educational approaches by embedding the arts as a core pedagogical element. Using qualitative methods, the research highlights transformative effects on teachers' perceptions of art, pedagogical intentionality, and children's engagement. Results reveal increased teacher confidence in integrating artistic languages, improved relational dynamics, and the development of more creative, inclusive educational environments. Interstice suggests how collaborative artistic practices can foster sustainable professional growth, enhance early childhood learning experiences, and contribute to building empathetic, reflective educational communities.

Art as a State of Encounter: Relational Pedagogy

The Interstice project is a collaborative initiative involving universities, artists, and cultural institutions across Europe. Designed to foster encounters between artists, children, and educators, Interstice constructs an “architecture among us” (EduCaixa, 2017): where teaching becomes a mutual learning process rooted in shared time, dialogue, and deep contextual knowledge. The project embodies what Bourriaud (2002) describes as art as a state of encounter, creating interstitial spaces between cultural and educational institutions in which knowledge is co-constructed through artistic and relational practices. Interstice not only responds to the urgent need to embed art more fully into educational environments but also challenges conventional frameworks by positioning the arts as central to both pedagogical and cognitive development.

Relational Art and Pedagogy in Early Childhood

To understand the role of art in education, we must move beyond Bourriaud’s (2002) notion of relational aesthetics toward a more layered ecology of learning, creativity, and care. While Bourriaud focuses on social interaction as the essence of artistic experience, more recent perspectives call for frameworks that not only describe participation but also critically engage with the conditions, power dynamics, and affective textures that shape those interactions.

Building on Helguera’s (2011) conception of socially engaged art, we can understand artistic practice as inherently pedagogical—not merely a platform for participation, but a mode of knowledge production rooted in ethics, situatedness, and transformation. Helguera explicitly connects artistic interventions to educational and civic responsibilities, framing art’s public relevance through its capacity to foster dialogue, reflection, and collective agency.

Arts-based research and education operate as critical, affective, and embodied practices that generate knowledge through relational, emotional, and sometimes uncomfortable inquiry (Finley, 2008). By integrating the arts into research and pedagogy, these approaches activate multiple ways of knowing—engaging the senses, emotions, and imagination—and enable the expression of lived experiences that resist reduction to data (Leavy, 2009). Such practices cultivate empathy, connection, and social understanding, aligning with post-qualitative and decolonial pedagogies that position uncertainty, reflexivity, and entanglement as fundamental educational values.

Rita Irwin’s *A/R/Tography* (2005) deepens this approach by combining the roles of artist, teacher and researcher through living inquiry and collective meaning-making. In early education, this aligns with artful pedagogies (Jardine, 2017) and studio pedagogies (Kind, 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2024), where children become co-creators, engaging with materials

and environments in open-ended and exploratory ways. These studio pedagogies create co-learning spaces where creativity and inquiry emerge collectively, challenging traditional development frameworks and fostering an attunement to the emergent, collective nature of learning.

Relational art and pedagogy are never neutral. They are shaped by intricate social, ecological, and material entanglements. As Latour (2005) argues, the social is not a fixed structure but a dynamic process—constantly composed and recomposed through interactions. This view resonates with Interstice’s commitment to emergent, site-responsive, and participatory practices, where knowledge and community are co-constructed in relation. Latour also urges a shift from objective facts to matters of concern—issues that hold real significance for communities. Learning within Interstice is guided not by abstract curricular goals but by shared concerns such as sustainability, creativity, and care. Knowledge emerges from actor-networks in motion rather than from static instructional systems.

Together, these entangled approaches position art as a space of inquiry, where children, educators, artists, and materials collectively shape learning environments marked by uncertainty, care, and transformation. This shift from participation as an isolated goal to relational complexity encourages us to rethink educational practice as a dynamic and shared process embedded in context and collaboration.

Research shows that the presence of artists within school environments leads to significant transformations: it fosters cognitive development, facilitates the acquisition of artistic competencies, redefines the relationship between artists and children, and reshapes the structural and pedagogical dynamics of educational settings (París, 2019; Kiline et al., 2023).

Arts integration fosters creativity, identity, critical thinking, and collaboration, especially when connected with community cultural organizations (París & Hay, 2019). Challenges remain—collaborative projects can face institutional barriers—but evidence shows they can build resilient learning communities (París, 2019). Contemporary thought positions art as imaginative inquiry that reshapes understanding (Sullivan in Wesseling, 2011). Philosophers like Garcés (2013) and artists like Steegmann-Mangrané (2018) emphasize relational existence and interdependence, moving beyond modern dualisms.

Within this relational paradigm, arts must be central to education. They encourage learners to question their relationship to the world, imagine new possibilities, and build collaborative possible futures. As Camnitzer (2021) explains:

Schools are designed to share the well-known, they are institutions founded in the

past, in contrast, the arts offer children an opportunity to look towards the future, and that's why we strive to introduce art into the educational institution.

Art has always been somewhat marginal in education because it is assumed to be an emotional and expressive tool that uses imprecise and subjective thoughts, and that is situated in an individual symbolic space. As Camnitzer (2021) states, schools transmit the known, while art opens futures. Arts shouldn't be marginal but central—valued as knowledge production combining creativity and critical reflection (Sullivan, 2011).

Camnitzer (2015) advocates for art as a way of thinking, contrasting with education as mere training. From this perspective, education should be transformed by the arts, not merely supplemented by them. As artists and educators, art is understood as a state of encounter (Bourriaud, 2002), which underscores the need to fuse art and education as co-constitutive processes. As Bruner (1990) and Greene (1995) suggest, imagination is vital to education: it rescues us from the obvious and the banal, from the ordinary aspects of life, cultivating empathy, criticality, and transformative learning.

As Greene (1995) explains,

It is the imagination, above all else, that makes empathy possible. Of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is precisely the one that allows us to give credence to alternative realities. It enables us to break with what we take for granted. The role of the imagination is to awaken, to reveal what is usually not seen, heard, or expected.

Learning to observe and create should hold equal importance to reading and calculation. This is not only a call for more robust art education, but for a redefinition of education itself—one that understands art as a vital epistemological domain. While some institutions have begun to recognize the breadth of artistic knowledge, the broader education system has yet to embrace its transformative potential fully.

Peer Learning: Theories and Models: Peer learning is a pedagogical approach in which learners actively engage with and learn from one another, fostering knowledge retention, communication skills, and social development (Topping, 2005). Research highlights the importance of initial training and cooperative interaction as key elements for successful peer learning interventions (Duran, 2020). Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that peer collaboration in early educational settings enhances not only academic skills but also social competence and classroom engagement (Jiang et al., 2023; Hui et al., 2023). Peer interactions in early educational settings have been shown to significantly influence language acquisition,

literacy, and cognitive growth, with children benefiting from the dual role of peers as both supportive partners and sources of challenge (Jiang et al., 2023; Justice et al., 2023). Moreover, the quality of peer relationships and the diversity of interactions are crucial for fostering inclusive participation and positive learning outcomes, especially for children with special educational needs (Hui et al., 2023).

When thoughtfully implemented, intentionally designed peer learning experiences create opportunities for children, educators, and—where relevant—artists to collaboratively construct knowledge, engage in shared reflection, and grow together as a learning community (Blanch et al. 2013), as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Children and teachers working with Judith Cuadros, artist resident at espai C, Encants school, Barcelona. Image credit: Gemma París.

Artists bring to the school a way of questioning, an open mindset, defining a space that will be safe for children in order to empower themselves, open up and explore through co-creation with others (París & Hay, 2019). Artists act as learners, rather than infallible experts passing on knowledge to others. Matarasso (2016) explains that is important to collaborate or work alongside artists because they bring questioning, open-mindedness, defining a space in a way

that makes it safe for people to open themselves and to explore; and which results in the co-creation of shared meanings that can be understood and shared with other people through whatever work comes out of that. Educators (by training, by theory and by policy) have a structured approach to working with children and nurturing learning; and bringing together artists' way of understanding learning, a more creative one, build this new space of encounter and peer learning (Hay, 2023; Adams & Owens, 2016). To build this space of encounter between art and education is necessary to change the word "teach" for the word "learn", because then teachers, artists, and students would learn together and share the risks one faces when exploring new areas (Camnitzer, 2015).

The Interstice project, developed through collaboration among universities, artists, and cultural institutions across several European countries, exemplifies this approach. It seeks to develop strategies of engagement between education and culture, rooted in peer-learning dynamics and encounters between artists, children, and educators. Within this vision of education, teaching is inherently a process of learning—a process that requires intentional spaces for dialogue, shared time, and collective inquiry.

As artist Nicolás Paris (Sáez de Ibarra, 2015) articulates, to define a space, we need architectural elements, but to produce meeting places, we need elements such as dialogue, noise, light, and hours. The Interstice project embraces this philosophy, working to construct an "architecture among us" through sustained dialogue and deep engagement with the unique local projects unfolding across participating regions.

At its core, Interstice aims to elevate the role of the arts within educational faculties and school systems, enabling young people to experience learning in ways that are not only cognitive, but also aesthetic, emotional, and relational.

Collaborative learning through the arts in Interstice project: Through this "interstice"- a reflective, collaborative and generative space between artists, educational and cultural institutions -, the project aims to cultivate across four countries a framework for innovative and transformative practices in art and education, and a culture of high-quality aesthetic creations within formal education environments; thereby to create nurturing and creative educational settings where teachers (both pre-service and in-service) and children can develop strategies, methodologies, and critical thinking skills through the transformative power of art.

Interstice project stems from the partners' expertise across various artistic domains, including visual and performing arts, which include children of different age groups (0-3, 3-6, and 6-12 years old), as well as the successful outcomes achieved in diverse educational and cultural partner institutions. This innovative model that embeds art and education is inspired by

previous collaborations and projects of the five cultural and education singular projects participating in Interstice, detailed in Table 1.

Table 1

Singular projects developed by Interstice partners

Singular project	Territory	Description
Espai C	Barcelona, Spain	Visual artists undertake year-long residencies in primary schools, fostering synergies between education and art. Students and artists collaborate on creative projects, with teachers facilitating co-creation and decision-making.
Mestres que es mouen / Artistes que es mouen (Teachers in movement / artists in movement)	Barcelona, Spain	An innovative arts training program that brings together teachers and artists to explore new learning modalities and foster meaningful interactions among peers and children through conferences, workshops, and collaborative activities.
School Without Walls	Bath, United Kingdom	Children participate in a seven-week residency in a cultural setting, such as the egg theatre, following a creative curriculum supported by teachers, theatre staff, and artists from House of Imagination. The experience extends learning beyond the traditional classroom.
Scenekunst til ALLE små (Performing Art for the Very Young)	Stavanger, Norway	Artistic encounters led by performing artists and university educators focus on participation and interactivity for babies, toddlers, and their educators through specially crafted performances.
Museo Officina dell'Educazione (Workshop-Museum of Education)	Bologna, Italy	A virtual museum and collaborative platform connecting future teachers, artists, researchers, educators, and children. It features interactive exhibition rooms and serves as a repository for educational best practices and artistic processes.

Together, these projects exemplify the Interstice vision: to embed contemporary artistic creation in educational settings, nurture children's creativity and agency, and support the professional growth of educators through collaborative, art-based learning. All these projects contribute to embedding art in the entire curriculum, ensuring that all children and young people—especially those with limited access to high-quality cultural experiences due to social, cultural, or economic barriers—have meaningful opportunities to engage in artistic processes. Integrating the arts across disciplines, particularly through partnerships with community-based cultural organizations, enhances the development of a wide range of key

competencies. These include cultivating creative identities, fostering critical thinking, and promoting collaboration, empathy, and shared responsibility (París & Hay, 2019).

Collaboration among students, artists, and teachers is at the core of the Interstice project, which aims to promote this innovative model in arts and education. To achieve it, the project involves different participants: children, university students, teachers, artists, mediation professionals, and families; as illustrated in Figure 2, which depicts university students engaging in an artistic experience alongside artists.



Figure 2. University training with the artist Helena Cabo from laSala center. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Image credit: Gemma París.

The project embraces an inclusive approach, characterized by a horizontal and collaborative vision of the work to be undertaken. It recognizes that the diversity of backgrounds and cultures among each partner, encompassing a wide range of expertise in various areas -visual arts and performative art, and early childhood to primary school students- through the

development of unique projects, presents a learning opportunity. Every partner (artists, universities, cultural and artistic institutions) acknowledges their own expertise while also valuing that of others, demonstrating a willingness to share and co-create new collective visions. This is achieved through shared artistic experiences and ongoing reflection. We have always tried to build reciprocal knowledge, learning from the experiences and knowledge of others, making the pedagogical materials produce traces of these reciprocal gestures. We understand that if we were all more reciprocal, everything would work better. Interstice has functioned, from the beginning to the end, as a "network of affections" (Caycedo in Ostendori-Rodriguez, 2023, p.82).

The main methodology during Interstice project is collaborative learning through the arts, including different perspectives and research views developed by visual and performative artists involved on the project. These subjectivities habitually remain outside the educational system, and teachers cannot include these speculative and imaginative research strategies, leaving most children distant from the creative processes necessary for a rich development of their own identities and a more creative relationship with the world. During Interstice project, university students were invited to build knowledge with the teachers and the artists, situated on the same level, a level where each one shares the knowledge from their expertise and with their own languages and their own learning strategies.

In order to incorporate contemporary art in a meaningful way into educational centers, it was necessary to support teachers' learning in this area promoting training activities that could allow them to explore artistic languages and reflect on the role of aesthetic practices in the classroom. As argued by Thurlings and den Brok (2018), learning with and from peers is an effective approach to teachers' professional development; moreover, coherently with Interstice principles of horizontal relationships, the activities were aimed at fostering peer learning among teachers, artists, children and researchers. To promote peer learning, in the Interstice framework an art-based teacher training was developed and analysed.

Collaborative learning was structured through co-facilitated workshops, reflective dialogues, and iterative planning sessions. Artists and educators co-designed activities, while children's ideas and actions were integrated in real time, making them genuine co-authors of the process. Mechanisms included:

- Joint planning meetings between artists and educators.
- Peer learning groups among teachers.
- Real-time adaptation of activities based on children's responses and aesthetic practices.

To illustrate how these principles from Interstice were put into practice, the following section

will narrate one of the experiences: *Mestres que es Mouen*.

Art-Based Teacher Training with Performative Artists and Nursery Practitioners

The training experience called *Mestres que es Mouen (Teachers in movement)* was developed in three nurseries in Sabadell (Catalonia) and investigated during the Interstice project. The design of this experience originated from a previous training activity developed by laSala; however, the initial idea was reformulated during the experience through joint reflections among artists, art mediators from laSala, teachers, headteachers, and researchers (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Children and teachers from a nursery with the dybwikdans company. Image credit: Tord Paulsen.

The training was organized in three phases: group training linked to an immersive performance in the theater; nursery training, and a collaborative learning experience across nurseries.

Phase 1. Training with an Immersive Experience in the Theatre

BlueBird, an immersive performance presented by dybwikdans company at laSala in Sabadell, was tailored for nursery teachers who could participate with the artist during the play, proposing, moving and singing. Following the performance, a workshop facilitated by two

artists from the company provided an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their experience in connection with art and education. This workshop concluded with an evaluation questionnaire about their thoughts and feelings about the aesthetic experience. Additionally, during the same week, some teachers accompanied children and families (45 in total) to experience the same immersive performance. During the play, children, families, teachers and artists had the opportunity to co-create along with the music and the movement.

Phase 2. Nursery Training with Artists and University Teachers

Observation and reflection in the Nursery: The second phase of teacher training focused on integrating art into nursery settings, which involved working closely with an artist. Initially, the artist conducted participant observations of teachers in each setting over a morning session and acting as a model to enhance artistic opportunities with children, such as creating a rhythm from a sound that the child made. Subsequently, a reflection session was held with the teacher and nursery director to explore how art could be integrated in a meaningful and crosscutting manner.

Personal and team goals, experiential maps: At this stage, based on teachers' experiences and feedback gathered through the evaluation form, each nursery team identified their specific needs and interests, resulting in the establishment of the following goals:

- Recognize art as a universal human quality.
- Discover the artistic potential within every individual, drawing from their authenticity and being inspired by the existing artistic world.
- Deepen the adult-child relationship through artistic languages, fostering presence, trust, and pleasure.
- Create creative spaces to facilitate horizontal relationships between adults and children.

These goals were contextualized to each nursery's unique environment. Two workshops, named "experiential maps," were conducted to further explore these objectives. Prior to the workshops, teachers were encouraged to reflect on and document impactful memories involving a child or group of children. During the workshops, these memories were shared within the team, followed by a series of questions aimed at delving into the experience and identifying associated emotions and themes. Subsequently, teachers collaboratively devised performances to represent these memories using various artistic mediums, with the support and guidance of their peers and a trained artist. Following each performance, the artist facilitated a reflective session, helping the group to delve deeper into the symbolic meaning behind the experience.

Following these experiential workshops, teachers documented artistic practices observed during their daily activities through videotaping. These recordings were then reviewed with the guidance of two artists, utilizing a video-feedback approach. This process allowed for an external perspective on teaching practices and children's activities, fostering opportunities for reflection and uncovering implicit mechanisms. Through this collaborative analysis, teachers were able to identify both strengths and areas for improvement within their artistic approaches. Finally, collective reflection sessions were held to discuss the recorded artistic proposals, highlighting both their possibilities and limitations, and collectively shaping future directions for artistic engagement within the nursery settings.

Phase 3. Collaborative Learning Among Nurseries

The closure session marked the culmination of the training program involving the three participating schools. During this session, nurseries collaborated in teams to share the learning opportunities gained from the training, as well as to identify ongoing needs and propose improvements for future endeavors. Artists and researchers who were involved also participated in this session, to share their view on the process and their own learning.

Research Methods

Alongside with the training activities, research was conducted to assess individual learning outcomes and document any potential changes within the educational centers; it was conceptualized as a fundamentally qualitative inquiry and carried out by researchers from the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona and the mediator artists from laSala.

Participants

Three public nurseries from a small town in Barcelona province participated both in the training process and in the research. A total of 32 teachers (including the 3 headteachers) were participants of the research: all women except two men, with a mean age of 34 years ($SD = 7.1$) and a wide range of teaching experience (from 1 to 24 years).

In order to better understand the learning process and exemplify the application, the research focused especially on one teacher who was 27, with 8 years of experience teaching. During the last 3 courses, this teacher had worked with the same group of children, between 2 and 3 years old at the time of observation.

Moreover, two of the artists involved in the performance; the two artists who acted as trainers; and one person from the cultural organization that led the project participated in the research.

In total, 313 children (0-3 years old) participated in the experience; they shared the initial

performance, and they were involved in the creation of the video recording of the artistic practices in the nurseries. Their spontaneous interactions, choices, and creative responses directly influenced the design and evolution of the learning experiences.

Data Collection Strategies

To collect information from different sources throughout the process, questionnaires, observations, and interviews were carried out.

As for the questionnaire, it was designed *ad-hoc* by the research team with a first part consisting of 13 closed items (5-points Likert scales) on satisfaction with training (4 items), achieved learning (4 items) and transferability (5 items). The conceptualization of variables was adapted from Pineda, Quesada and Ciraso (2014) and Ford et al. (2019). In the second part, eight open-ended questions were also proposed, where teachers were asked to express their perceptions on the training proposal, strengths and weaknesses, learning and intentions.

The questionnaire was applied at the beginning of the process, right after the first session of training; and at the end, after the closure session. In the first application, teachers were asked to state some transfer intentions and specific actions that they wished to perform, in order to apply this new learning; and the final questionnaire was individualized, so that the questionnaire that each teacher received had a reminder of what they stated in the initial one; and they had to report eventual changes that they had introduced as a result of training. In total, the research team gathered 23 initial questionnaires and 28 final questionnaires.

As for the observations, a total of 14 fieldnotes (classroom observations and teachers' activities) were gathered. In most of the sessions, limited participant observation (Riba Campos, 2007) was used; in some sessions, the observer was more involved into the activity when it was required by the very dynamic (for instance, when the trainers invited to participate as a trainee, or when children interacted more intensely and the observation was not possible if not participating in their activity). As for classroom observations, the principles of Picklerian observation were considered, mainly: the separation between descriptive, interpretative, and explicative levels; the naturalistic manner of observation; and the attitude of the observer (Mózes, 2016).

In order to deepen our understanding of the learning processes and how they impacted participants' practice, eleven interviews were conducted: with six teachers, four artists, and two cultural agents. The interviews were designed as semi-structured and had the same script, with broad, open-ended questions about: how they experienced the process, their learning, the eventual impacts of their learning into their practices, eventual beneficial effects for children, strengths and weaknesses of the project. The average duration of the interviews was 30

minutes.

Finally, photographs, children's artworks, and session recordings served as supplementary data sources, as well as elicitation for the joint discussion of teachers.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed with the quantitative data from the questionnaires; as for all qualitative data (open-ended questions from the questionnaires, interviews, and fieldnotes of observations), a content analysis was carried out with emerging categorization. A system of categories was designed, from the review of the literature and the research goals; and later validated (the system is detailed in Blanch Gelabert et al., 2023). For the categorization, two members of the research team were involved. At first, they coded independently one interview and then compared their two categorizations; 10 discrepancies were found and resolved through discussion, out of the 81 codifications. Afterwards, one researcher coded the rest of the material, holding periodic meetings with the other member in order to agree on the applied categories and solve possible doubts.

After the categorization, the analysis was based on co-occurrence tables, counts of coded categories according to different agents and situations, and the content analysis of meaningful quotes that allowed the reconstruction of the overall discourse and of the different perspectives on learning and impacts of training.

Results

Reflection on learning and change: From the interviews, several notable outcomes emerged. Each nursery exhibited varying degrees of impact from the training, depending on their initial level of engagement and perspective. In one school, teachers demonstrated a shift in their perspectives regarding art and the active role of the teacher in children's aesthetic experiences. However, there were still contradictions present, with some aspects of the discourse remaining anchored to a perception of performance as something separate from pedagogical intentionality and daily life. In another school, teachers successfully integrated an artistic viewpoint into their interactions with children, recognizing alternative artistic experiences that do not infantilize children and foster authentic peer relationships between adults and children. In the third school, teachers were beginning to grasp the concepts addressed in the training, such as presence, relational aesthetics, and the role of art in daily actions. They experienced meaningful team experiences during workshops and through artistic languages. However, it appeared that the changes introduced as a result of the training had not yet led to substantial impacts within the nursery environment.

All agents agreed that this project facilitated a change from seeing art as something distant, limited to certain moments and people; to something that is strictly linked with human activities, relationships and children's interests:

Here we thought about art for 0-3 years old children like... that a lady comes and tells a story or performs with puppets. Not like this sensorial and bodily work... An awareness, an idea of art that is totally different. (I-T13)¹

On the other hand, something that was stressed during the workshops and expressed by several teachers, is that they understand now that they can and should enjoy with children, during the artistic practices. This was linked to the first "immersive performance", having experienced the show *BlueBird* as they were children themselves, and later with children (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Blue Bird show by dybwikdans company with families and teachers at laSala, Sabadell Image credit: Artur Gavaldà.

¹ Quotes are translated from Catalan into English for the article; and coded according to the strategy of data gathering (I for Interview, Q for Questionnaire and O for Observation); the collective of participants (T for Teachers, A for Artists); and a number assigned to each person.

In the words of a teacher:

Especially in the fact of being able to propose activities where I have been more present, they liked that. And I think it was one of the things that motivated them the most, right? [...] I think it's what I take the most from this training on a personal level and my practice will continue to change. (O-T1)

Relating to this, one change that has been developing along the process was that teachers started to talk more about themselves as important agents in the development of artistic languages:

First, they almost did not talk about themselves. They just talk about the children. And then we [artists/trainers] have been very articulated about you as the teacher. You are the key person to, you know, let them develop this kind of language. [...] They] developed their understanding and their way of articulating this kind of understanding. I think, or I noticed because when we got back, they talked about themselves now. Not only the children. That's, I think, that's a change. (I-A3)

All these new awareness and new ways of thinking about teachers' role in artistic practice with children, translated also into some impacts in teachers' practices, according to their perception and our observations. Most of them reported changes respect to their initial practices, providing examples; and these changes were related to their initial individual intentions and/or aligned with the initial school intention (stated in the meeting before the "experiential maps" workshops). Some of them are related to specific activities or tools that the artist/trainer provided during the workshops (such as voice techniques) and that teachers now use in their classroom, exactly as they were offered; and in other cases, we can see a deeper reflection about their own practice and role as a teacher.

Spontaneity was mentioned by teachers in the three schools, as initial intentions and also as a result of the learning process, referring to three different facets: to lose a sense of embarrassment while dancing or proposing anything to the children; to be able to follow, as a teacher, own intuitions and desires while being with the children (for instance, using some kind of material without having in planned beforehand); and thirdly, to draw upon children's initiatives and aesthetic practices, in order to improve them and involve all the group, regardless of what the teacher had planned:

Maybe they were hitting, for instance, on that sink that makes a lot of noise. Well, I could take some material, listen to this... The presence of being, being able to accompany them and participate in that moment. And the spontaneity to let things

flow, let go and let everything roll. (I-T9)

It is interesting that one teacher associated this spontaneity to the children's way of being; another expressed that they were inspired by the artists, they way to improvise on stage and in the aesthetic relation with the children in the "audience"; and another one said that it was the artist/trainer who held the workshop at the nurseries, who taught indirectly this spontaneity, by example, working with the teachers' inputs without having the activity completely planned.

The enjoyment in the artistic experience was also visible during the last classroom observation, when the teacher was involved in the activity with children; not only controlling the materials, pupils' behavior, etc.; but actively experimenting with paints, textures and rhythm, alone and with children. In the words of this teacher, this change is important because it allows the children to see the teacher in another way, as an adult human being enjoying art; and this enhances children's motivation to participate, in their own way.

Specially towards the end of the training process, teachers started to propose new activities to children, involving artistic languages, and including themselves into the proposals: singing, dancing, painting with them... Some of the new activities were almost directly transferred from one of the performances proposed by a teacher, in the last workshop: an expressive activity with music on, where all participants painted on the floor, covered by a green paper, with different colors and supplies. This led to a rhythmic, joyful moment that four teachers would re-create, the next week, with their groups of children. They experimented with different choices of materials and interacted freely with the painting; the activity was videotaped for feedback, and a moment was discussed when toddlers integrated the music, rhythms of brushes and dance to express themselves.

The elements that, according to the teachers, facilitated learning and its transfer are aligned with the factors for collaborative learning activities to be effective, following Thurlings and den Brok (2018):

- *Participation in active learning activities.* Full presence was sought by artists from the very beginning, when they invited teachers to enter the stage without any objects, not even watches or mobile phones.
- *Iterative process:* participation in a high-quality performance, observational feedback by artists, individual tasks and team reflection, and experiential workshops:
- To experience it first-hand, update yourself, refresh ideas that fade away day by day...

And constantly train, share and reflect together. (Q-T18)

- *The alignment with the interests and needs of the staff and the nursery.* They manifest that this link to their day-to-day life would facilitate learning transfer:
- *Sessions were very individualized and according to the teams' interests.* (Q-T9)
- *The sensitive feedback from the trainers and artists to their pedagogical practices,* from the video fragments, teachers' narratives and direct classroom observation.

Finally, a topic that was intensively brought up by teachers were the emotions that arose during the training process, that were identified as a factor that facilitated learning; and that allowed them to better connect with their peers and with the children:

The workshop moved us and made us feel. (Q-T13)

I have experienced many emotions [...] I started to cry when my colleague explained her feelings, then I empathized a lot with that feeling, just as I empathized with everyone. Because at some point or another, I've experienced them. (I-T9)

What appeared evident from the observations was that these moments and the aesthetic environment that the trainer/artist facilitated responded to a need for team cohesion, self-care and a break from the everyday rush. In that aesthetic, symbolic space, emotions flowed in a peculiar way; and through the expression of emotions, new ways of relating to each other opened.

On the other hand, both teachers and artists experienced some challenges in this co-designed process. First of all, mostly headteachers mentioned the open-ended nature of the project as a difficulty; since they were not sure about what the next steps would be, and the exact responsibilities of professionals from laSala, the researchers, the artists, and the teachers. Secondly, material conditions of nursery educators constituted an element that could hinder actual changes in daily activities: namely, group sizes and children-educator ratio; fixed timetables and calendars. On the other hand, both educators and artists recognized that the limited artistic repertoire of teachers made it difficult to recognize and foster different artistic expressions. Headteachers stressed as a potential barrier the lack of initial training in visual and performative arts; which, on the other hand, was addressed in another action from Interstice project, with the involvement of artists in the university degree of Early Childhood and Primary Education.

Conclusions

The Interstice project demonstrates the transformative power of collaborative artistic practices in early childhood education. Through the engagement of nursery educators, pre-service and in-service teachers, professional artists and mediators, and university researchers, the project built an ecosystem of shared learning where arts and education are co-constructed. Participants engaged in immersive training, co-designed learning activities, and participated in reflective dialogue, fostering a relational pedagogical approach that places art at the core of early educational experiences.

As educators and artists, our shared aspiration is to embrace the transformative potential of the arts to reimagine our reality. If, as Greene (1995) suggests, the arts enable us to inhabit the world more vibrantly, art must not be confined to experiences beyond the reach of most children. Instead, learning experiences through the arts should be integrated into the common learning environment for all, which is the school.

Interstice collaboratively works to place the arts within educational contexts, blurring the boundaries between art and education, and assuming the mutual responsibility that they both understand art as a methodology of thought and education as a space of culture and empowerment. Sharing the notion of Paris (in LaEscuela, 2022) that education "can be an act of resistance or a protocol for discovering new ways of being together, and that art is an area of knowledge through which we can redefine being together as no longer an obligation", we have designed a space for interaction among children, teachers, and artists: offering opportunities to co-design creative learning scenarios, interstitial spaces where children can develop in a creative and critical educational space where research through the arts has a place.

Indeed, this project is deeply rooted in its relational aspect, as we have built an architecture among us—teachers, artists, families, and children—recognizing the transformative potential of art. Therefore, we have not only carried out a series of actions but also evaluated the relationships that formed and the significance each participating professional brought to the project. This aspect is challenging to convey because it is not based on a single methodological tool but on working together with a collective vision. Through their respective roles as artists, children, and teachers, everyone has actively participated, contributed, and learned through experimentation and dialogue within the relationships fostered during the project. We had developed different pedagogical tools—a book, audio-visual material, peer-learning research, and a virtual museum (open access from the project webpage: <https://www.interstice.eu/results>) that other artists and educators can use in their different practices to build educational praxis creatively and critically.

This collective effort repositioned educators as active creators of artistic experiences, empowered artists to adapt their practice to educational settings, and supported researchers in facilitating change processes. As a result, the project fostered more spontaneous, reflective, and creative environments for both teachers and children, despite systemic constraints.

Interstice offers a replicable model that embeds arts within education through cooperative networks, promoting professional growth, critical thinking, and relational well-being in schools.

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