Art Education and Development Cooperation: A Project in Educational Centres for Children with Special Needs in India

Carlos Escaño, Ana Maeso-Broncano and Julia Mañero

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine *Art Education and Human Development*, a development cooperation project carried out during the period 2015–2018 in Ananthapuramu, India and implemented between the University of Seville, Spain and the Fundación Vicente Ferrer (Vicente Ferrer Foundation) – Rural Development Trust (FVFRDT). Drawing on action research methods, the participants were children with disability and resident teachers, in accordance with the schools involved in the study. The aim of our work was to accomplish a set of art practices so as to develop empowerment and human values in order to offer an artistic and pedagogical training to the local teachers involved in the project. Broadly speaking, our results approach the notions of development cooperation and art education, understanding art education as a vehicle for emancipation and social transformation. Therefore, art education for development cooperation is comprehended as a process that encourages social inclusion, respect for diversity, education in values, cooperation and whole-person development. As a result, the experiences presented derive from a process of action research and favour the development of guidelines for possible good practices.

Keywords

Art education, cooperation, human development, special needs education, teacher training, India.

1. Introduction

This article presents the main results of action research process carried out as part of the development cooperation project entitled *Art Education and Human Development*. The project was supported by the University of Seville, Spain and the Fundacion Vicente Ferrer (Vicente Ferrer Foundation) – Rural Development Trust (FVF-RDT), and it was conducted between 2015 and 2018 in Ananthapuramu, India. The cooperating team involved in the project was composed of teachers of FVF-RDT in collaboration with faculty members of University of Seville, University of A Coruña and other educators and researchers of different educational levels. All participants contributed to the different tasks carried out under the management of the art education group Communiars (see https://communiars.org). The project was implemented through an action research methodology that was characterised by a teacher training programme related to didactic and artistic practice with children with disabilities.

Good pedagogical practices committed to the action of development cooperation and Arts Education were taken as a reference. Inspiring educational experiences such as the ones carried out by Fundacion Voces (in Haiti and Mali), Asociacion Caja Lúdica (in Guatemala) and the Open Cultural Center (working in the Greek context within the midst of the migratory humanitarian crisis) (gathered in Escaño 2018). All these inspiring practices are part and parcel of an art education action within a cooperation framework. From this perspective, the contemporary pedagogical action of arts will always be understood as an intimately social fact that transforms the context, which is linked to a development education oriented to the solidary creation of the common world we inhabit. As suggested by Wildemeersch (2019), what matters is the creation of a space that fosters imagination, discussion and experimentation without single answers. The ways to direct such educational and artistic processes lie in theories crossed by the concept of art

mediation proposed by Ascensión Moreno (2016), who emphasised the integral development of the person and his or her potentialities, that is, a crossroad between social education, art education and art therapy. It is also worth highlighting studies from the perspective of human development (Díez del Corral 2005), creative action as a practice of individual and social transformation (París & Hay 2019), and the approach of the so-called critical perspectives within art education (Barbosa 2009; Desai 2017), which favours an integrative process within development education, from an open and flexible pedagogical point of view. José María Barragán (2005) summarises that such approach involves attending to the following aspects:

- Cooperative learning. Promoting reflection and action linked to group collaboration abilities and capacities, dialogue, criticism, argumentation, negotiation...

- Perspectives of social constructivist learning. Attending to the relationships between educational practices and social context, taking into account their cultural diversity and the subsequent deconstruction of hegemonic approaches.

- Fostering coexistence with diversity. Contributing to the creation of identity involving coexistence with plurality.

- Integrating transversality of values. Art education linked to controversial and transversal topics, thus promoting critical thinking.

- Strategic learning. Less emphasis on conceptual contents and greater emphasis on strategies to learn to learn.

To sum up, art education not only favours a cooperative practice but also a social constructivist, critical and strategic learning that promotes coexistence in diversity and integrates transversal values. This is a way of understanding art education, naturally situated in educational processes, either formal, non-formal or informal, that encourage

solidarity citizenship committed to a human and sustainable development against social exclusion.

Within the paradigm of development education, social inclusion is fundamental. Official international organisations, such as the Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission (from 2021 DG International Partnerships), strengthen the link between education, culture and social inclusion, approaching active policies of equality and attention to people with disabilities. Art education can act as a vehicle that crosses the territories of education, inclusion and culture, and, in turn, it is important to highlight the ethical responsibility of the implementation of such relationships. That is, education must assume the commitment to inclusion, and the critical social pedagogies applied to the work related to gender, race and class must expand to the scope of disability in order to promote critical commitment through art education (Penketh 2014). This commitment involves the recognition of students with special needs as what they really are, that is, active people with a potential identity and a life that must be filled with experience and empowerment, just as any member of our social whole. In this context of action, art educators must foster the development of the art identities of their students with disabilities. Hence, special attention must be paid to them with the aim of recognising such identities in the artistic production and practices of such students. To that end, the artistic methodologies of art education must foster the recognition of the merits of artistic activity, encouraging students with disabilities to find their own symbols and metaphors, carriers of emotions, achievements and internal conflicts, instead of tackling it as a tool for diagnosis or normalisation (Wexler & Derby 2015). The development of an artistic action that strengthens such identity foundations will require a shift from the strategic and pedagogical multidisciplinary approach to a transdisciplinary approach (Derby 2012),

favouring linking strategies between social sciences, humanities and art. As a result, paradigmatic barriers and conceptual corsets would be removed, promoting a hybridisation including but not limited to tradition, propositions for the future, theory and creative expressions through performing, visual and literary arts.

2. Materials and method

2.1. Approach and context of the project

Art Education and Human Development is a development cooperation project that was carried out between 2015 and 2018. This project intends to determine the extent in which art education could contribute to the development of the educational community in the context where FVF-RDT works (focusing on children with disabilities). To answer this inquiry the fundamental objective of this project was to strengthen art-culture education for the integral development of children in the social context of Ananthapuramu, India. In order to understand the relevance of this objective, it is therefore important to highlight some data that contextualise the development cooperation work carried out by FVF-RDT. FVF-RDT initiated its development cooperation project within Ananthapuramu region in 1969, under the direction of Vicente and Anna Ferrer. It currently comprises over 3,600 villages (in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), and attends to millions of people in the different scopes of social action in projects of education, healthcare, women, ecology, habitat, fair trade, development education and people with disabilities.

FVF-RDT is governed by a model of cooperation and international reference committed to one of the most impoverished areas of India, where this organisation has implemented a rich and exemplary set of dynamics based on community and targeted to

the people of the lowest castes, mostly dalits – once called the untouchables – and tribal groups (FVF n.d.).

2.2. Summary of the project matrix

The project matrix was presented on the basis of three phases:

- **Preliminary phase of identification (2015 – August).**

This phase maintained a general and a specific goal. The main objective of the project entailed strengthening art and cultural education for the integral development of children in the social context of Ananthapuramu. On the other hand, the specific goal was focused on designing a plan to reinforce art and cultural education for the integral development of children in the social context of Ananthapuramu. To carry out this plan design, an approach to the social and cultural reality of the community was made, through visits and meetings with professionals and FVF-RDT organisers, as well as the implementation of a pilot artistic educational experience. Activities that functioned as indicators, which were recorded in an audiovisual way, thus served as a source of verification.

- **Development phases: Phase 1 (2017 – February to April. October) and Phase 2 (2018 -–February and October).**

After the identification phase, the next two phases were developed. As the body of the project, both maintained the same objectives, indicators and sources of verification. In relation to the project goals, likewise the overall project objective was pursued in the same way as identification phase. In relation to the specific objective, the agents and teachers involved in FVF-RDT were required to have specific knowledge of arts

education in order to teach children in that specific context. The outcomes included basic training in arts education for education agents in localised centres and the implementation of sessions for their students, as well as the development of teaching materials and resources to support arts education. A conference was also organised on Arts Education, Cooperation and Social Development in the University of Seville as a closure of the project. The different activities were graphically documented and annual reports were developed and submitted to the subsidising university institution as sources of verification.

2.3. Phases, work contexts and population

The cooperation project comprised three interrelated phases:

A) IDENTIFICATION/DIAGNOSIS AND PRELIMINARY PHASE: AUGUST 2015	
Work context: 16 interviews including teachers, carers and school leaders, as well as the president and executive director of the FVF-RDT, the Volunteers Coordinator and development workers and the director of the education area.	
Centres visited for preliminary study	
Place/Village	Centres
BUKARAYA	- Speech and Hearing (SH) - Intellectual Disability (ID) - Visual Impaired (VI) - High School (HS) Boys
KANEKAL	- Speech and Hearing (SH) - Intellectual Disability (ID) Boys - Intellectual Disability (ID) Girls - Cerebral Palsy (CP) - Orphanage
KUDERU	- Speech and hearing (SH)

	- Cerebral Palsy (CP)
BATHALAPALLI	- Orphanage
KURUVALLI	- Government School
BYRAPURAM	- Government School
CHENNAM PALLI	- FVF-RDT Supplementary School
NARPALLA	- FVF-RDT Supplementary School

Table 2. Phase 1.

B) PHASE 1: FEBRUARY TO APRIL AND OCTOBER. 2017		
Work context : Pedagogical work developed in different contexts.		
Centres visited for preliminary study		
Place/Village	Centres	Participants
BATHALAPALLI	- Intellectual Disability (ID)	44 girls + 6 teachers
ANANTAPUR	- Visual Impaired (VI) (Inclusive School of Primary Education)	60 children (age: between 6 and 11 years old) + 5 teachers
KANEKAL	- Speech and hearing (SH)	55 girls + 4 teachers

Table 3. Phase 2.

C) PHASE 2: FEBRUARY TO APRIL AND OCTOBER. 2017		
Work context: Pedagogical work developed in different contexts.		
Centres visited for preliminary study		
Place/Village	Centres	Participants
BUKARAYA	- Speech and hearing (SH)	70 girls (age: between 6 and 13 years old) + 5 teachers
ANANTAPUR	- Visual Impaired (VI) (High School for Inclusive Education)	60 children (age: between 11 and 15 years old) + 4 teachers

2.4. Development of methodology by phases

2.4.1. Methodology for the preliminary phase of identification or diagnosis

Every cooperation project requires a diagnosis or identification step. For the realisation of this identification process, we used as part of our methodology the analytical tool of the Logical Framework Approach (LFA). An LFA aims to organise the process of conceptualisation, design, implementation and evaluation of a cooperation project (Ortegon et al. 2015). This is how it is used in numerous research projects. The LFA has four analytical stages in its methodology: analysis of the involved agents, analysis of problems, analysis of goals and analysis of alternatives.

In our study, the identification practice served us to analyse the cultural, social and educational context with the aim of detecting the possibilities of a development education project related to art. In this process, in addition to the contextual study of the activity of FVF-RDT in other areas of cooperation, the diagnostic analysis was focused on its educational dimension. Observation techniques and semi-structured interviews were conducted in the working contexts mentioned above.

2.4.2. Methodology for the development of the project: phases 1 and 2

As a result of the preliminary phase, we drew up a design for an educational action. This action involves students and teachers of the area in order to strengthen art education for the integral development of children. The development of this pedagogical task, which was carried out in phases 1 and 2 of the project, was put into practice regarding an action research approach. Following Grundy, in his classic typological classification of research modalities, the educational process is approached from a critical perspective, seeking a type of emancipatory knowledge that participates in social transformation (Grundy 1982).

Rachel Mason takes up the words of Reason (2002) and states that in general terms, we understand educational action research as a qualitative, practical, participatory, and reflective practice which is concerned with social change. She circumscribes action

research in the field of art educational practice, but this approach is not limited to improving practical skills; it is also intended to help teachers articulate their underlying curricular philosophies and rationales, as well as facilitating the development of a critical stance (Mason 2005). Likewise, this study proposed action research as a 'participatory' practice because it was carried out by a team. Accordingly to Elliot (1991), action research – focused on process and collaboration – seeks to free the educational agents involved from the dictates of tradition. For this project, we also relied on Mason's (2005) perspective, which follows Lewin in his methodology, and explains action research as a process that involves a spiral of self-reflective cycles, which is developed into different phases:

- Observation

- Reflection

- Planning

- Action

- Evaluation

The specific aim of phases 1 and 2 was to extend learning about art education among teachers within the area. This goal was horizontally accomplished in a group formed by foreign co-operating teachers and teachers from the region. We implemented action research dynamics where we all agreed on the educational practices to be carried out.

3. Results and discussion

Within this project, we focused on the education area FVF-RDT, specifically in the attention to people with disabilities. The educational project of the foundation began

in 1978, comprising all educational stages, from primary and secondary education to higher and professional education. Regarding the links between development, cooperation and education, the region of Ananthapuramu is clearly favoured by the correlation of such concepts and practices. The achievements of FVF-RDT result from the current efforts and goals of this organisation, which aims to maintain the rate of school enrollment at 100 per cent in all levels of primary education, ensure and improve the continuation and conditions of primary, secondary, higher and professional education, fight for the levelling of female and male literacy; lastly, FVF-RDT focuses on the re-schooling of school dropouts and on making education accessible to children with disabilities (FVF n.d.).

In recent years, several educational spaces have been approached in the *Art Education and Human Development* project, always focusing on two lines of work that respond to two specific educational dimensions. The first of these dimensions is a co-educational work, which is a pedagogical view that empowers women and girls of India (in the same way as in any other country in the world): a necessary and urgent educational dimension. The second dimension is an educational attention to children with disabilities. The focus on these two dimensions was already essential in the work of the Vicente Ferrer Foundation, and the *Art Education and Human Development* project potentiated its development. It is worth highlighting the participation in the Inclusive Primary Education School and in the High School for Inclusive Education, both sited in Ananthapuramu, the orphanage for girls with HIV in Bathalapalli, the Centre of Intellectual Disability of Bathalapalli, and in the Schools for girls with Speech and Hearing Impairment of Kanekal and Bukkaraya Samudram.

From the identification study (reviewed in the next epigraph), it was concluded that the practice of art education within the institutionalised forums in the district of

Ananthapuramu does not have a high level of professionalisation. There is no art educational training for teachers, and schools do not provide a practical-theoretical corpus to their students. Achieving the main objective of a cooperation project of this nature required a methodological and pedagogical training action targeted to the teachers involved, with the aim of impacting the viability and sustainability of the work, such as other types of educational cooperation projects. Under critical and art pedagogical parameters (Desai 2017), the pedagogical methodologies developed for teacher training imply that the work carried out emerged from the praxis. Teachers of the region and collaborators associated with the project worked directly with the students, collaboratively agreeing upon the strategies that would be implemented. Everything results from a pedagogical action directly implemented from the practice, with research-action principles. Action research is understood as a reflective educational research method that aims to enhance conceptualisations from the perspective of action of the participants, that is, teachers and students (Elliott 1991). Therefore, the approach of the project avoids the model of excluding transmission in which teachers from outside of the community, with no contact with the eventually benefiting students, arrive to the context to teach master classes to local teachers about the ways of carrying out teaching dynamics, and then these teachers are the ones who exclusively interact with the students. In the current case, the action model was different. The model was close to the joint learning derived from practice, where teachers of the region and cooperating teachers developed the pedagogical dynamics from the direct context with the students, and they all learned reciprocally. According to Elliott (1991), action research is a community practice that aims to modify a set of shared circumstances. At the same time, it is a social reflective practice, in which there is no distinction between the community practice and the research practice, thus considering social practices as research actions. The key of methodological

legitimation is determined by the idea of Freire which claims that every educational act is a political act (Freire 1985): it is about considering education as a fact that is inexcusably inherent to society and to the individual, where learning is clearly revealed as a social and community action. A political educational approach facilitates the exploration of methodologies that transform the educational space into a suitable terrain for a real and meaningful learning committed to its time and for an art education that is sensitive to its context and to the lives involved in such context (Mesías-Lema 2019).

3.1. Development of results

3.1.1. Identification /diagnosis phase (2015)

After the study developed through the LFA, it was agreed and proposed the implementation of a project that advanced until 2018. It resulted in the design and planification of an educational schedule focused on the art education of children with disabilities, thus fulfilling the specific objective of this stage which took place intermittently in different months of 2017 and 2018. By working directly with the children and through an action research approach, teachers in the region participated in the dynamics for joint learning of art educational dynamics and practices.

In this phase, pilot educational experiences were also carried out using different artistic resources such as: drawing, photography and video, as well as a group pictorial mural practice, which was the main pedagogical axis, working for and through the transversal idea of the relevance of education in the life of a person. The pedagogical experimental intervention was carried out in the girls' orphanage of the foundation located in Bathalapalli (Ananthapuramu). These girls suffer a quadruple discrimination, that is, by gender, orphanhood, caste and HIV infection. The audiovisual work *Art, Education and Hope* (https://vimeo.com/139054620) resumes the dynamics conducted,

which the spirit of the cooperation project results from (the conclusions of this first phase are contained in Escaño et al. 2016).

Figure 1. Photogram of *Art, Education and Hope*, an audiovisual document (https://vimeo.com/ 139054620) about the activities carried out in the orphanage for girls with HIV of Bathalapalli, India. Image from Communiars.

3.1.2. Phase 1 (2017)

- **Making future**

Making Future was the first set of artistic and educational practices conducted in phase 1, which were based on the ideas of fostering the self-esteem and value of the person within the group. We worked with girls of the Intellectual Disability Centre of Bathalapalli with the aim of building future and potentiating personal growth through artistic activities. In line with this idea, the methodology applied in the different sessions was implemented in relation to playing, the importance of the process and the relevance of group work. The activities were mainly focused on procedures such as drawing,

painting, moulding and photography, using these always as expressive models that favour personal and group development, the visualisation of emotions and creativity.

- **Ways of making worlds**

The educational and artistic activities proposed in the Primary School for Inclusive Education of Ananthapuramu had a special challenge that was approached with special attention and hope. This school is a pioneer in inclusive work with children with partial or total visual disability and who learn along with children with full vision. Inclusive methodologies with synesthetic perceptive attention focused directly on cooperative learning, with the basic and transversal reflection of recognising human diversity as a differentiating feature within equality and its importance for the common creation of new worlds. Practices such as three-dimensional collage, the plasticity of working with clay and its moulding, group pictorial creation and dramatisation were essential.

- **Inhabiting shared spaces**

The work entitled *The Connected Nest* (https://bit.ly/2HOEZD5) was not only the result of an entire set of artistic but also social and pedagogical processes. In any art educational process, the procedure itself is the most relevant element regardless of the quality of a final product/result. In the case of the practices that converged in this connected nest, the process served as a metaphorical and real pedagogical meeting point. It was an experimental summary of aesthetic educational dynamics and a living reminder of the common space we inhabit. With the girls with hearing impairment of the School for Speech and Hearing Impaired Children in Kanekal, educational strategies were conducted with the focus on drawing, photography, performance and installation. These

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strategies transmitted values such as the importance of building egalitarian relationships, collectivity and common good.

Figure 2. *Ways of making worlds* activities, carried out in the Primary School for Inclusive Education (2017), Ananthapuramu, India. Image from Communiars.

Figure 3. *Inhabiting shared spaces* activities, carried out in the School for Speech and Hearing Impaired Children (2017), Kanekal, India. Image from Communiars.

3.1.3. Phase 2 (2018)

- **If we join hands**

'If we join hands we will transform this world' is a reflection of Anna Ferrer, president of FVF-RDT. An idea that supported an art educational work which, with the participation of the School for Speech and Hearing Impaired Children in Bukkaraya Samudram, connected the Vicente Ferrer Foundation and the Sor Angela de la Cruz Early Childhood and Primary Education School of Seville, in Spain. Under the premise and question 'What do you want to be when you grow up?', the girls of both educational centres drew and exchanged their artistic productions, intertwining very similar stories and aspirations. Such drawings speak of the need for and conviction of an education that substantially empowers the girls of the present and future women. A tour around these artworks can be found at the following website https://ifwejoinhands.wordpress.com/, which was organised by educators who work in India and Spain.

- **We will**

The We will document (https://vimeo.com/266101895) audiovisually summarises the dynamics carried out in the School for Speech and Hearing Impaired Children of Bukkaraya Samudram. In this phase of the project, we focused with special relevance on audiovisual and photography activities. In Bukkaraya, the main purpose was the empowerment of girls through education, and we conducted photographic activities in which the participants reflected on the construction of our cognitive and emotional worlds, as well as videographic actions through the stop motion technique, or the direct creation of a short movie with the participation of the almost seventy girls, which was entitled *The 11 Powerful Girls* (https://vimeo.c om/264952748).

- **Exploring the invisible**

The last set of dynamics was organised in the High School for Inclusive Education (Ananthapuramu). The educational centre is a mixed-sex space, in which a large percentage of students have visual functional diversity. The pedagogical dynamics carried out thematically connected origins, identity, culture and community, facilitating a methodology that provided empathetic, playful and creative situations. These activities tackle transversal ideas, such as self-knowledge, self-acceptance, self-esteem and the appreciation of difference. The actions were organised in three groups: the first individual phase approached the idea of self-knowledge and self- portrait (*seeing the invisible*); the second phase explored the common space and exchange (*go beyond the invisible*); the third and last phase collectively tackled the concept of habitat to build the final installation (*inhabit the invisible*).

Figure 4. *We will* activities, carried out in the School for Speech and Hearing Impaired Children (2018), Bukkaraya Samudram, India. Image from Communiars.

Figure 5. *Exploring the invisible* activities, carried out in the High School for Inclusive Education (2018), Ananthapuramu, India. Image from Communiars.

4. Conclusions about the project

There are no scientific results to configure a homogenous theoretical and practical corpus of educational action in the crossroad between cooperation and art education. Therefore, there is no consensus in the matter of pedagogical, methodological and conceptual structures. However, there are experiences that serve as orientation in this art educational practice, thus favouring guidelines for possible good practices from which very positive aspects can be extracted, always justified, although in an experimental context. The *Art Education and Human Development* project aims to position itself within these parameters or cooperation and development, focused on the education of children with special needs. This article presents and describes the collaborative educational work carried out by the University of Seville and FVF-RDT.

The project maintained as its main goal to strengthen art and cultural education for the integral development of children in the social context of Ananthapuramu, through the implementation of two specific and concrete objectives: to design a plan to strengthen

art and cultural education for the integral development of children and, also, to ensure that agents and education personnel linked to FVFRDT acquire specific knowledge about art education so that they can train these children in the context of Ananthapuramu. Analysing the results as well as indicators and sources of verification, it has been possible to accomplish a cooperation work, which in quantitative terms covers the development of six sets of different activities developed during different years. The activities performed throughout the years 2017 and 2018 can be seen on the communiars.org web platform. The interventions were evolved in five different educational contexts, involving a population of around 25 teachers and 270 students linked to the training plan developed: a laborious work in a hard and complex context. However, the most significant indicator to confirm the achievement of the proposed objectives is not the quantitative data but the qualitative nuances.

For this reason, it must be taken into account that all development cooperation work is bound to a social inclusion practice that proposes biopolitical relations for the construction of the common in a world where the social breach is growing. In this space of educational and artistic making, pedagogical development strategies are proposed in which the potentiation of the capacities of people is the focus of the pedagogical action (Nussbaum 2011) for the sake of social equality within the diversity of realities that exist in an unprivileged context such as the region of Ananthapuramu. As has been described, there is a very conscious effort fully focused on the practice of social inclusion through arts, a task where cooperative learning, from a socio-constructivist perspective, values the person and his or her social interdependence, and promotes equality, the development of identity and the promotion of social and cultural hope. The *Art Education and Human Development* project engages with the perspective that Wexler & Derby (2015) proposed, in which they state that children with disabilities are capable of promoting their own

symbolic and metaphorical universe and building their identity from their shared space and time. In view of all this, in order to emphasise these qualitative nuances, there is an intention on the part of those involved, both the FVF-RDT and the Communiars collective, to perpetuate the project.

Prior to March 2020, contacts have been established between the two parties and proposals for continuity have been studied. The most outstanding fact that confirms our main objective is the finding that FVF-RDT intends to maintain and extend the art education project. FVF-RDT has detected the success and the advantages in social terms that an arts-based educational project brings to the community and the integral development of people.

Due to the latest events, the region of Ananthapuramu is maintaining all its attention and effort on the survival of and struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic. The current situation has forced the halting of the continuation of the possible art education project, but with the hope and intention of resuming it in the near future and also having the chance to contribute to the improvement of the consequences of the alarming situation we are experiencing.

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Carlos Escaño is an associate professor at the University of Seville, Spain. He completed a PhD in Fine Arts (University of Seville, 1999) and a PhD in education and communication in digital environments (The National University of Distance Education, 2017). His principal teaching and research interests are in arts education at the intersection of the arts and audiovisual and digital culture under a critical pedagogical approach and oriented towards social transformation. He is director of the Research Group Education and Audiovisual Culture (HUM401), coordinator of international cooperation projects developed in India and Greece, co-founder of the Communiars group and Editor in Chief of Communiars Journal. Contact address: Department of Art Education, Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Seville, c/Pirotecnia, s/n, 41013 Seville, Spain. Email: jcescano@us.es

Ana Maeso-Broncano is an assistant professor at the University of Almería, Spain. She completed a PhD in Visual Art and Education (University of Seville, 2017) and a Master's in Visual arts and education (University of Granada, 2011). Her principal teaching and research interests are creativity and art education in relation to performativity, performance art and gender studies. She is also interested in critical pedagogies and social transformation. She is member of: Research Group Education and Audiovisual Culture

(HUM401), the international cooperation project 'Art Education and Human Development' (India, 2015–18), co-founder of Communiars group and co-editor of Communiars Journal. Contact address: Department of Education, Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Almerıa, C/ Universidad de Almerıa, s/n 04120 La Canada, Almer~ ıa, Spain. Email: anamaeso@ual.es

Julia Mañero completed a PhD in Education (University of Seville, Spain, 2020). She is member of: Research Group Education and Audiovisual Culture (HUM401) and has collaborated as a teacher in Massive Open Online Courses and in the Master of Communication and Education on the Network at The National Distance Education University (UNED). A member of the Communiars collective and co-editor of Communiars Journal, her current research interests include art education and digital education from a critical and social perspective. She is an active member of the cooperation group: Critical Pedagogies and Art Education of the University of Seville, having been part of projects and research in India and Greece. Contact address: Department of Arts Education, Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Sevilla, c/Pirotecnia, s/n 41013 Seville, Spain. Email: juliamanero@us.es

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