

# Arts in a Post-Covid Educational and Communitary Context

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### Abstract

The triad education, aesthetics and expression provide people with abilities for life, freedom, aspirations, and motivations. When arts are integrated, well-being and quality of life become achievable. The pandemic has taught us various lessons such as the importance of deepening the study and reflection of our actions and the value of regaining the beauty of objects, confidence, and respect towards what surrounds us, including the environment. Therefore, artistic education is a medium through which educational action can be represented to imagine the experiences and situation of others. The making of an artistic project in the post-Covid educational and communitary context of a secondary school will help create practice communities and strengthen the social fabric through the attention to emergent issues.

### Introduction

There are three concepts that shouldn't be missed throughout the teaching practice, first education understood as the evolution that occurs as experiences are acquired in both formal and informal settings in which subjects develop and where knowledge opens perspectives and horizons. Second, aesthetics, closely related to the sensible and spiritual side of human beings, where sensations that evoke both what is beautiful and not so beautiful arise. Lastly, expression, considered as the channel that transmits thoughts, feelings, and ideas and through which communication becomes verbal and/or not verbal. Together, education, aesthetics, and expression, enrich human development by giving people abilities for life, full freedom, aspirations, motivations, and an aesthetic interpretation of reality [1]. It is sometimes mentioned that arts can heal any wound, they are the elixir that helps survival from all crisis and epochs, including the Covid-19 pandemic. If humanity hadn't looked for refuge in the arts, it would still be locked up inside itself with no way out. In that sense, arts as a practice enables well-being, quality of life, and consequently mental health. This fact has allowed reflection upon what is truly important [2], such as the rebuilding of family ties, being comfortable both in one's own skin and with what surrounds us, including people and nature. By leaning on artistic diversity, we can kill several birds with one stone. Thinking capacities will unfold, reaching those that are most complex, physical aspects, attitudes and values that play a role in motivation are worked with, re-discovery, reinvention when dealing with creativity and imagination.

In post-pandemic times, arts invite to express, activate, rebirth, acknowledge reached goals and get through the long lethargy caused by the pandemic. They offer a space for freedom to explore, remove obstacles and of adaptation to the new technological stages and digital contexts, which according to Miranda [3] have resulted in "THE deepening of the study and reflection of one's own practices" (p.25), looking for alternatives and new ways of creating those alternatives thanks to the plasticity of artistic thought. Through artistic education the beauty of things, lost due to the undoing of the social fabric, along with confidence, mutual respect for human beings and the environment can be regained. The work of developing social and self-consciousness will be arduous, but it must be done in order to incentivize a culture of peace. We agree with Abad [4] that artistic education becomes a means to represent educational action through which the situation of others can be imagined. This refers to empathy, exchange and transformation where status, conditions, and territorial limits are broken. Therefore, some aspects of the educational and communitary context for the post pandemic work in a middle school setting are described below:

### Physical conditions of the school

The school is spacious, it has two floors, green areas, installations for sports and artistic activities, such as a classroom, an auditorium and a sports field that simulates a stage. There are several classrooms, labs, and workshops to carry out special activities. However, there is a need to equip these spaces with the technological resources to keep up with the post-pandemic necessities related to the access to virtuality.

### Social aspects of communication within the school

Gradually there has been a return to in-person meetings and coexistence, social media and apps are still being used to communicate with school staff and parents, who due to their multiple activities and the distance between the school and their homes/ workplaces prefer to keep in contact through these forms of communication.

### Cultural and artistic aspects

During the pandemic and due to lockdown, artistic education fell behind and its teaching became complex. Some challenges were finding ways to adapt an in-person lesson to the virtual classroom and incentivizing the group participation, some students couldn't log in to on-line classes and those who did had poor quality internet connection or lacked functional cameras and microphones. This situation led to the search for new ways to work and advance in the contents of the course, which focused on giving a general view of the contents to generate knowledge, appreciation and practice based on the existing conditions and with resources easily available to each student.



Emerging issues of interest in teenagers

Sensitizing the school community with presentations and/or artistic productions about emerging topics that are of interest to the students might be useful to raise awareness about these topics and create action plans among the school community. An often-mentioned emergent issue between the students was fear due to the in-person return to school, so much so that some students continue to wear masks during lessons.

Possibilities of transformation or improvement

Teenagers can write their own stories about how they lived through the pandemic and represent them through a variety of artistic forms by organizing exhibitions and public presentations. Empathy, solidarity, dialogue, and reflection will be generated by getting to know how their peers faced lockdown and any other event that might have happened to them in this period. Getting to know this information through art will help build a sense of belonging and identity. Some students who spent their first and second year of secondary school during lockdown and attended classes virtually expressed nostalgia for their old school, their teachers, and classmates, so they took steps to have constant communication with their current teachers, transform isolation by spending time with other students and getting to know them. Some activities were expressing how they felt during lockdown while they finished primary school, they were interested in exploring how they experienced this period and how it affected them. Table 1 presents the proposal for the artistic project in a post-Covid artistic and community context, it seeks to attend priority issues of general interest in the community through its sensibilization by organizing stagings.

Table 1: Artistic Project “The necessities of my surroundings” in a community and educational context.

Table with 2 columns: Project Elements, Description. Rows include: Necessities, interests, or issues to be addressed; Actions; Location; Personal involvement with the project; Outcome; Participation of people from the internal community; Participation of people from the outside community.

Source: Own elaboration.

Conclusion

The proposed activity will allow disciplinary integration of several artistic manifestations. Senses, debilitated in everyday life and therefore turning people less alert and perceptive to what surrounds them, will be regained. Teamwork will be strengthened, and a practice community will be formed and the project will increase the level of psychological well-being of school children. The experiences of the in-person/synchronous sessions involved facing technological challenges and meant teachers had to continue their training and updating their knowledge to offer students meaningful experiences. After approaching the art class and aesthetics from an individual point of view, sharing them in a practice community will be a powerful tool to strengthen the school’s social fabric by using art to become a better person, addressing issues meaningful to the community through representations and organizing a group of students so they can take action in situations that require attention in their schools. It will also incentivize discussion and the reaching of agreements through consensus. School classrooms are not what they used to be, the teaching-learning channels have opened up even more. Students have become providers of knowledge by sharing what they know and master through apps and social networks, which according to Miranda & Vicci [5] “Have generated a new stage of bonding between individuals” (p.107) with whom they share, get feedback and appreciate by what is considered useful. These are tools that teachers must integrate to avoid being isolated by media.

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