

Acciones decolonizadoras para transformar el pensamiento: docentes en formación exploran prácticas artísticas performativas

Decolonizing Actions to Transform Thought: Pre-service Teachers Explore Performative Artistic Practices

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Resumen:

Se ha demostrado que los estudiantes que participan en programas artísticos presentan resultados académicos y sociales positivos. Además, el uso de las artes también puede desempeñar un papel integral en la creación y el mantenimiento de prácticas de aula culturalmente sostenibles. En este artículo compartimos las experiencias de docentes en formación que participaron en talleres en los que se sumergieron en el uso de la investigación performativa y artística como herramienta para la introspección y la exploración cultural.

Desde un marco arraigado en la educación antirracista, surge el llamado a ir más allá de un aula que se limita únicamente al nivel del reconocimiento de las culturas del estudiantado a través de manifestaciones superficiales, permitiendo así una verdadera disrupción de los sistemas opresivos. Estos sistemas opresivos pueden generar un contexto de aprendizaje que no solo no honra las culturas presentes en nuestras aulas, sino que, como resultado, las borra y permite presuposiciones etnocéntricas sobre lo que debería considerarse la norma.

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Abstract:

Students that participate in arts programs have been shown to have positive academic and social outcomes. In addition, the use of the arts can also play an integral role in creating and maintaining culturally sustaining classroom practices. In this paper we share the experiences of pre-service teachers who participated in workshops in which they were immersed in using performative and artistic research as a tool for cultural introspection and exploration.

Using a framework rooted in anti-racist education, comes the call to move beyond a classroom that only stays at the level of the acknowledgement of the cultures of students through surface level manifestations; allowing for true disruption of oppressive systems. These oppressive systems can make for a learning context that not only does not honor the cultures present within our classrooms, but as a result erases them and allows for ethnocentric presuppositions of what should be considered the norm.

Palabras Clave: *arte, educación, pedagogía performativa*

Key words: *sources, Art, education, performative pedagogy*

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Introduction

Students that participate in arts programs have been shown to have positive academic and social outcomes (Catterall et al., 2012). In addition, the use of the arts can also play an integral role in creating and maintaining culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017) classroom practices. In this paper we share the experiences of pre-service teachers who participated in workshops in which they were immersed in using performative and artistic research as a tool for cultural introspection and exploration.

Using a framework rooted in anti-racist education, comes the call to move beyond a classroom that only stays at the level of the acknowledgement of the cultures of students through surface level manifestations; allowing for true disruption of oppressive systems (Lee, 2024; Minor, 2018). These oppressive systems can make for a learning context that not only does not honor the cultures present within our classrooms, but as a result erases them and allows for ethnocentric presuppositions of what should be considered the norm.

Multicultural educational contexts are those that allow for students' cultures to be at the forefront of the learning through educators' choices made for activities, to the culturally responsive content selected, to the classroom environment itself. This type of integrated approach allows for a critical reexamination of the inequities that affect students' learning, which can ultimately lead to social change. It is not enough for people to come together in dialogue in order to gain knowledge of their social reality. They must engage with their environment through action and critical reflection, transforming it with each cycle of action and reflection. This process is what Freire (1968) referred to as *critical praxis*.

True multicultural education should be grounded in the lived experiences and backgrounds of students, not only as a means to explore and bring a diverse set of perspectives, but as a way to honor and empower students' voices (Au, 2024). Many students in the teacher education program in the context of our research, can recall experiences that allow them to understand the need and the call for settings grounded in multicultural education and anti-racist orientations. One student, for example, recalls not so fondly as a child being told to put her hand down when her 4th grade teacher, who in an effort to use superficial examples of what one could consider "teaching multiculturally", explained what a star fruit, or carambola was, in order to use it as an example in a math problem. She raised her hand in order to share that in the Philippines, where she had spent much of her childhood, this fruit was called *balimbing*. Her lived experiences and perspectives were not honored, and even worse, they were silenced.

This also brings about the importance of allowing pre-service teachers to look inwards and gain understanding of the collectivist and individualistic aspects of culture. Collectivist cultures, that make up approximately 70% of the world, are those cultures with orientations grounded in the interdependence and success of the group. On the other hand, individualistic cultures are grounded in independence and hold self-reliance and personal achievement as core values, while collectivistic cultures are rooted in the development and maintenance of a stable and mutually dependent group (Trumbull et al., 2001). These sorts of understandings can allow for introspective and reflective practices by pre-service teachers with intentions to honor and build on stories shared in classrooms in which a child's experiences with a *balimbing* are both

relevant and built upon, with an understanding that in coming from collectivist orientations, many of our students will hold “sharing” as an ingrained part of their cultures.

Accordingly, integrated with the philosophical underpinnings of anti-racist teaching and culturally sustaining pedagogy, comes the understanding and intentionality to allow our students to lead the way, to know that our classroom practice will and must have the flexibility to truly allow for the liberation process to occur. The process of liberation is one described by Montes & Fernández Álvarez (2022) in their explanation of having students engage with the concept of *conscientização* (consciousness raising), in which they simultaneously experience it themselves as they learn about it.

It is through students’ integration and collaboration with the learning process that they reach the level of liberation that can only be achieved through this intentional inclusion of students being given a space to truly be at the center of their own learning. This in itself could be seen as a pillar of the learning process, that of learning by doing, or in this case, a process of experiential learning in which participants utilize their own lived experiences to leverage their access to new cultural knowledge (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2011). As stated by (Freire, 1985) students at the center of this learning process engage in “reading the world before reading the word” (p. 20). Thus, by reading the world, students can best acquire knowledge, which they can then utilize to “read the world” with new eyes.

Research Context

The workshops that were the basis for this study took place in two sections of a course that is required for most pre-service and in-service teachers in the teacher preparation programs at a midsize Hispanic-serving institution in a large, midwestern city in the United States. The course explores the social and educational issues faced by teachers in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Particularly, students examine the different cultural groups to which students and their families belong, paying special attention to issues of race, ethnicity, gender, class, language, sexual orientation, religion, ability, geography and age. The course also explores instructional strategies and culturally responsive practices for diverse learners.

The choice to conduct the research in this setting was done with complete intentionality. This specific course offers academic freedom to instructors in the way they choose to present the course topics. Students in this course are assigned a presentation in which they explore and share their cultural autobiography. This assignment has always allowed for students to express themselves creatively, though very rarely do students independently choose to do so, and typically opt for slide presentations that tell their life stories in mostly linear fashion. Being as that the themes of the course lend themselves to allowing students to creatively explore the array of ways their present and future students’ multifaceted and intersectional identities can be honored, and as such, the array of ways they can imagine they will prepare themselves pedagogically for these settings, it was a clear choice for a research context. The workshops that were implemented aimed to go beyond the narration of life stories, offering tools for students to present themselves with artistic-performative actions, instead of telling themselves from the outside through words, connecting the ideas learned in the contemporary field, with those of the

practice of life as a space for self-realization, which implies the union between body, mind, and spirit (hooks, 2021). In this classroom context, the students were always encouraged to and participated in collaborative and inquiry-based learning as part of a teacher education program very much rooted in best practices that include the notion of teaching by doing, yet the students had never been invited to participate in a workshop experience like the one that is the subject of this paper. Despite having differing levels of understanding of what exactly is meant by “best practices” in education, which includes always being encouraged to integrate the arts, inquiry learning, and cooperative learning, the students almost always opt for traditional style of presentations, which would consist of slide presentations that were accompanied by their own oral presentations. The idea of incorporating performative artistic practices was not something that came naturally to most of the students who chose to participate.

Having to discover the world through different lenses and learning about topics that are outside of our comfort zone have been found to be quite challenging for both educators and their students. The challenge is to teach and learn outside of this comfort zone to explore the world in new and creative ways, as suggested by Kumashiro (2024) “to invite students to work toward change, educators need to teach students to address their own subconscious desires for learning only certain things and resistances to learning other things” (p. 16). With this at the forefront of our choice for this research context, came our desire to see the anticipated discomfort to be experienced by our participants as a part of the exploration and growth we hoped they would experience.

The workshop presented in this context lasted two sessions of three hours each, taught by one of the researchers, Alba Soto, an art specialist. The instructor of record, the other researcher, Amanda Montes, participated as if one of the students (thus taking the role of participant researcher), relating and showing vulnerability, and taking risks in the activities in the same way as the students did, thus strengthening the classroom environment as one of trust and horizontality. As suggested by Gallagher, Evans, and Sarpong-Duah (2024), horizontalism decenters hierarchical societal structures and emphasizes the idea of a network that is diverse. In a classroom context, this emphasizes an educational environment that is interactive and inquiry-based rather than a more rigid, top-down structure.

Methodology

Integrating the Arts with Culturally Responsive Practices

In contemporary university classroom settings, particularly within teacher education programs, creating an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment is essential to addressing the diverse educational needs of students. One promising pedagogical approach that has gained recognition is arts integration, which involves combining the arts with academic subjects. Arts integration is defined as an educational approach that allows students to engage in creative processes that link artistic expression with other subject areas, allowing for knowledge construction through artistic forms (Silverstein & Layne, 2010).

This method not only enhances educational outcomes but also aligns closely with the goals of the sociocultural framework of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), introduced by Paris (2012), which emphasizes the need to sustain and validate students' cultural identities while fostering academic achievement. Recent scholarship highlights that arts integration serves as a powerful tool for achieving CSP by embedding students' cultural practices and perspectives into the curriculum (Paris & Alim, 2023). In particular, arts integration offers students opportunities to engage with their cultural traditions and histories through creative expression, thereby fostering a more inclusive and affirming learning environment.

Paris (2012) discusses a shift in understanding cultural and linguistic ownership, recognizing that students in the early stages of adulthood practice traditional forms of cultural expression, but also create new ones. For example, the work of Irizarry (2007, 2011) highlights how educators can connect with Latinx students by embracing the fluidity and intersectionality of their cultural practices, which includes both traditions passed down through their families and communities, combined with contemporary and glocalized (Montes, 2014) influences such as hip-hop. Glocalization, in this context, is referring to something that is from a global influence that has been used in a way that is relevant for a local context, in this case, in Latinx communities in the US. Furthermore, the inclusion of contemporary artistic processes used as tools that enhance active listening, analysis, creativity and critical thinking into classroom practice, enables future educators to imagine how they themselves will foster more inclusive and representative curricula in their own practice.

Interweaving Methodologies

The methodology used in this research comes from exercises derived from performative artistic practices and is characterized by the experiential use with the surrounding elements. To lay the foundation, it is necessary to introduce three types of research that intersect from the dialogue of experience, whose main engine is to generate new forms of inquiry, aimed at raising questions rather than finding concrete answers: Arts-Based Research (ABR), Performative Pedagogy and Post-qualitative Research.

Arts-Based Research (ABR)

Arts-based research uses artistic and aesthetic elements to create new dialogues that offer innovative ways of observing and representing experience. Communicates in a more comprehensive way, using metaphors and symbols, without seeking definitive answers (Barone & Eisner, 2006).

A relevant aspect in our proposal is the concept of *reflexivity* proposed by Weber and Mitchell (2004), which suggests the use of artistic methods as tools for self-assessment in teaching studies and teacher training.

Reflexivity implies that researchers and teachers recognize their influence on the process and interpretation of the data, as well as their relationship with the participants, allowing them to understand and evaluate their own practices in a deeper way. In addition, it encourages the questioning of power structures and the meanings associated with the images and narratives that teachers construct about themselves, revealing aspects of their work that could go unnoticed with traditional approaches.

In the educational field, art does not seek to train artists, but rather to promote critical awareness and the ability to intervene in reality through play and exploration, overcoming pre-established judgments. (Campuzano, 2008). The elements of the environment and their relationships act as tools to stimulate the senses, creativity and questioning, facilitating significant learning. Artistic practice, by offering multiple meanings, intensifies sensitivity and promotes new forms of interaction and free experimentation in the environment.

Performative Research

Performative research is presented as an innovative paradigm, which places the main focus on the body as an essential vehicle in the creation and expression of knowledge. It offers an alternative to conventional practices, prioritizing the sensitive, the emergent, the intuitive and the relational as valid forms in the research process. (Vannini, 2015).

Haseman (2010) focuses on the idea that knowledge can be generated and transmitted through artistic practice, in this framework, acts of creation are not limited to being final products, but are also recognized as legitimate sources of knowledge, capable of revealing meanings. and generating understandings in specific contexts. Knowledge is not acquired solely through observation, it is generated through creative and performative actions, which allows a deeper exploration of the reality that occurs. This approach, therefore, challenges representational logic, opening new possibilities for understanding and exploring events, while questioning conventional structures and narratives, fostering a deeper and more complex understanding of the phenomena studied. (Haseman, 2010; Bolt, 2016; Arlander, 2018).

Post-Qualitative Research

The term *post-qualitative* was introduced by St. Pierre in 2010 and first used in a chapter of the fourth edition of the SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research (St. Pierre, 2011), although his thinking had already begun to develop with post-qualitative approaches a decade before (Pernille; Jusslin; Nodtvedt Knudsen; Maapalo; Bjorkoy, 2023). Post-qualitative research refers to those emerging proposals of the last two decades that question traditional notions of reality and knowledge in humanistic qualitative methodologies, promoting onto-epistemological and ethical perspectives that challenge the established norms of conventional research (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). This type of research is based on concepts such as uncertainty, unpredictability and continuous evolution, where performativity takes on a central role.

The theoretical basis of post-qualitative research is supported by the works of post-structuralist authors such as Foucault (1970), Derrida (1976), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Haraway (1988), Deleuze (1993) and Barad (2007). These approaches have been fundamental not only to post-qualitative research, but also to the development of the performative research paradigm. (Pernille; Jusslin; Nodtvedt Knudsen; Maapalo; Bjorkoy, 2023). In this context, the act of research is perceived not as a rigid structure, but as a practice that is developed through intra-actions with the environment, which enables a transformation in it. (Fernández, Leite and Márquez, 2019). Furthermore, artistic and performative research processes foster a deep connection with the intellect, emotions and senses, elevating everyday experiences to extraordinary levels. This, in turn, allows social, cultural and political issues to be addressed in a more accessible and understandable way. (Correa; Aberasturi-Apraiz; Gutiérrez-Cabello, 2020).

Differentiating Between the Interweaving Methodologies

The differences between Arts-Based Research (ABR), Performative Research and Post-qualitative Research lie in their relationship with art, knowledge and method: while ABR uses artistic practices to generate and represent knowledge in an innovative and aesthetic way, Performative Research emphasizes the body and action as forms of experiential and relational knowledge; In contrast, Post-qualitative Research challenges the ontological and epistemological bases of knowledge, integrating performativity as a transformative act that modifies reality and promotes inclusive and decolonial perspectives. In this context, the practices carried out have integrated different methodologies, combining artistic forms and proposing performative exercises that use the bodies of the participants and the surrounding space as sensitive tools for research, thought and transformative action. In the next section, we highlight the key concepts that underpin the aforementioned methodologies and support our action-research practice.

Key concepts to understand research

Corporeality

Corporeality is understood as the body's ability to experience and generate knowledge in a context of practice, where it acts as an expressive and cognitive medium, perceived and lived in an integral way. The experience of the sensitive body is a primary source of knowledge, focused on the creation of situations that stimulate movement, action, improvisation and creativity. This approach highlights the emotional, intuitive and physical aspects of the being, underlining the role of the body in the construction of knowledge that transcends the rational and is based on lived experience. (Haseman, 2010), Therefore, it is necessary to contemplate not only words, but also gestures, postures and sounds that, although subtle, produce significant information.

The narratives that we build about our experiences are fundamental to defining the reality in which we live, placing us before the possibility of intervening in it. (Rivas Flores; Márquez-García; Leite-Méndez and Marquez García, 2019). This perspective highlights how our emotions influence social and cultural organization, allowing research from a politically committed body contextualized by its gender, sex and social class. Thus, this body not only feels and experiences, but also impacts and is affected by its environment. (Correa; Aberasturí-Apraiz; Gutiérrez-Cabello, 2020), generating knowledge that connects the sensory, affective and reflective dimensions of shared experiences (False Borda, 1999).

Intra-actions

Karen Barad (2007) introduces the concept of *intra-actions*, which redefines the relationship between subjects and objects, emphasizing their interdependence. Unlike the *interaction*, which involves independent entities, the *intra-action* maintains that there are no clear boundaries between the participants; both individuals and objects are co-created in the process. This implies that reality is formed through these intra-actions, where subjects and objects shape their identities and capabilities.

Barad also argues that knowledge emerges from both discursive and material interactions, highlighting that the researcher does not act as a neutral observer. Instead, the researcher experiences a continuous transformation throughout the process, turning each stage of the research into a performative act. (Pernille; Jusslin; Nodtvedt Knudsen; Maapalo; Bjorkoy, 2023). This intentionality is related to a pedagogical capacity that generates affection and establishes new forms of relationships with others. (Hernández González, 2023) The notion of intra-action invites us to reconsider our relationships and recognize the active role that all beings play in the construction of knowledge. This challenges a belief system that limits our connection to the world.

This perspective suggests that knowledge is not an objective observation, but rather arises from shared experiences, intertwining ontology and epistemology. By reconfiguring our relationships, intra-action challenges traditional hierarchies and promotes a systemic ethic of shared responsibility, recognizing that our actions affect other beings, both human and non-human. In this context, performatively inspired practices seek to connect human bodies with their environment, highlighting the importance of being present and attentive to relate to it.

Complementing this perspective, Vera Tobin (2014) argues that learning goes beyond mental processes, since it is deeply linked to the interaction of the body with the environment. This approach highlights that learning is a situated process, influenced by context and connections with the physical and social environment. Furthermore, it highlights the active role that tools and materials play in this process, where interaction with them not only encourages the development of skills, but also transforms our way of thinking.

Sense and Meaning

According to Deleuze and Guattari (2004), The term *meaning* is related to a form of knowledge that seeks to “reproduce” reality in a fixed and objective way. This approach involves classifying and categorizing phenomena to understand them from an external point of view. For example, in traditional research, a concept or phenomenon is clearly defined and an attempt is made to fit it into pre-established categories. Thus, the meaning is associated with a static and defined interpretation. On the other hand, the second purpose mentioned, “continue”, is linked to *sense*, which refers to the lived experience and how we connect with events. This approach invites researchers to immerse themselves in the flow of reality, where they emotionally and intellectually engage with what is happening, creating active meanings. In this case, *sense* implies an experiential turn that generates meaning from interactions and personal experiences, allowing greater openness to diversity and the singular.

Interpretation in this context should be understood as the introduction of new meanings, which underlines that knowledge is a fluid and complex process. In a performative research paradigm, objects of study are not just things to observe, but phenomena to be explored and that enrich our understanding through the diversity of experiences. It is, therefore, about recognizing that knowledge is not just a set of static definitions, but a dynamic process that is built through the relationship between subjects and the environment. The notion of performativity in art and research helps us understand how we interact with the works and phenomena under study. According to Hantelmann (2014), This notion reveals how context and situation affect what happens in art and research. Referring to the text of Austin (1998) In these contexts, we go from analyzing what a work “says”, its message or explicit content, to what it really “does”, the impact and experience it generates.

Processes and Drifts

Post-qualitative and performative research is characterized by its exploratory and flexible nature, which allows unexpected discoveries to emerge through the researcher's interaction with the artistic material. According to Barrett y Bolt (2019), Artistic creation acts as a form of research that generates intuitive and tacit knowledge, in contrast to quantitative research, which follows a linear and predefined process. Calderón and Hernández (2019) highlight that this approach is not subject to a specific method, but rather continually redefines itself in the face of new challenges, adopting an undisciplined character that makes it receptive to what is diverse and emerging. This non-linear approach surprises and adapts, as indicated Hernández-Hernández (2019) according to Jackson and Mazzei (2012), Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2009, 2015) and Lather (2007).

Post-qualitative research also challenges the idea of a definitive closure, promoting a constant “becoming” that invites us to think, feel and act in new ways, in a constant interrelation between the data and the researcher. Deleuze and Guattari (2004) They conceptualize knowledge as an ever-changing plane of immanence, where post-qualitative possibilities favor an essential openness, understanding research as a “rhizome” that moves in multiple directions

and generates frequent decentering. (Hernández-Hernández, 2019). The intra-actions proposed by Barad (2007) and the lines of flight of Deleuze and Guattari (2004) They highlight uncertainty and openness as essential conditions in pedagogical contexts, suggesting that the researcher's position can be a space of "not knowing" and epistemological decentering. This approach highlights the processual and collective nature of knowledge construction, intertwining theory and practice in a reflective manner. It is presented as a device open to the singular and the variable, which allows the emergence of the subjective dimension of thought. (Hasenman, 2006).

Implementation

Having these four concepts as a fundamental basis for action, we introduce the implementation carried out during the workshops, being crucial the driving idea of making the participants more aware of themselves and their own experience during the proposed dynamics (Hantelmann, 2014). From the first moment, we sought to promote a safe and trustworthy space where playfulness, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking have a place as key drivers of learning, stimulated from unfamiliar places such as those offered by the artistic experience, where the voice, the experience, and relationships between the participants occupy a central place, conceiving the way of proceeding as a materiality in itself that from the beginning generates interactions, without the intention of reaching predetermined results. (Hernández-Hernández, 2019).

Three Stages of Activities

First Stage: Self, Space, And the Other

We expose this first stage for its revealing nature in relation to the key terms studied: intra-action, process and corporality. The main objective of the proposed dynamic is to carry out a performative analysis of the spatial structures of the classroom and the arrangement of bodies in that environment. Generally, the furniture in classrooms have a fixed distribution, which the students occupy automatically, without questioning the implications of the hidden curriculum. (Acaso, 2018). This leads them to assume rigid roles from the beginning, occupying the same space every day and reinforcing a passive posture. To encourage collaborative and multidirectional learning it is essential to rethink these spatial configurations. Creating an environment in which everyone actively participates promotes an exchange of knowledge that contributes to the achievement of common objectives and competencies, breaking with the traditional scheme and promoting a dynamic and participatory learning environment.

When students enter the classroom they find that the usual space is disorganized, the furniture has changed its usual position. Under the premise of "Sit where and how you want", "Inhabit the space you are in" (extending this context to both the physical and the symbolic), "Move through the space and discover something you have not noticed before" and "Look and let yourself be seen by the other", repeated several times to vary the position and perspective, a wide range of experiences enriched their perceptions, expanding their sensibilities by exploring diverse points of view. Under the premise of "Sit where and how you want", "Inhabit the space

you are in" (extending this context to both the physical and the symbolic), "Move through the space and discover something you have not noticed before" and "Look and let yourself be seen by the other", a wide range of experiences enriched their perceptions, expanding their sensibilities by exploring diverse points of view. This allowed them to become aware of themselves and their position in relation to what surrounded them, while reflecting on their ability to experience, modify, intervene, and interpret the context. These actions are driven through questions that open new trajectories and encounters: action, perception, reflection, action, perception, reflection, and so on (Soto, 2024). Thus, in what Merleau-Ponty (1993) called geometric space, which is a space that can be analyzed and represented conceptually, and lived space, referring to the tangible and dynamic experience that we perceive directly at the moment.



Figure 1. Multidirectional classroom.

Bodily presence plays a crucial role in our social interaction and in the construction of identity, since it acts simultaneously as subject and object, reflecting our relationship with the world. This presence leads us to integrate what Byung-Chul Han (2020) calls *ritual attention*, a type of attention that fosters a sense of belonging by connecting us with the present moment and relationships with others. This is opposed to the *serial attention*, which is fragmented and superficial, focused more on the multiplicity of stimuli than on the depth of experience. After previous research processes, students worked in groups to transform the space they inhabited. They modified the lighting, rearranged the furniture, used their own bodies to generate sound and movement effects, among other actions. This change provoked surprise among their classmates, triggering a dialogue about new possibilities of action, disposition and communication in the classroom.

Second Stage: Drawing As a Tool of Knowledge

We share the dynamics carried out in this second stage, given that its results have provided greater clarity to the student body regarding their artistic character in the field of graphics. Through two key activities around graphic expression, the learning of the first stage is resumed from a different perspective. The first activity is the making of individual drawings as cartography, conceived as a systemic constellation of the group's position in the class. In it, students used a different symbol to represent themselves, their classmates, and the professors in the space provided by a sheet of paper. The design of maps acts as an agent to investigate meanings, ideas, and perceptions of our relationship with the environment, providing meanings through composition, color and gesture.

The second is the Action Painting method (Soto & Karczmarzyk, 2022), in which a graphic dialogue is experienced in pairs, where both participants draw face to face simultaneously with their eyes closed, letting themselves be carried away by the moment. This co-creation process encourages spontaneity and an intuitive response. Both exercises function as narratives that emerge from one's own experience, instead of being representations about oneself (Hernández-Hernández, 2008). At the end, these productions are interpreted collectively, which facilitates joint reflection and generates significant findings at an individual and group level through shared experience. On the paper you can read the experience of a relationship created with the other, being able to read themselves and their experience through the trace of the interaction, in the form of a drawing, during the conversation.



Figure 2. Exercise “Drawing dialogues”. Student-student / Teacher- student.

Third Stage: Final Performances

We introduce the third stage due to its direct relationship with the understanding and development of the concepts *sense and meaning*. The last exercise is a small individual exhibition as a Performance Art exercise, where each participant presented some aspect of their cultural identity, experiences, through an action, involving their need to express themselves, the body in space, movement, and the chosen objects, forming a small piece of which the meaning occurred organically during the actual experience. These actions, being open to multiple interpretations, not only impacts those who carry them out, but act as a resonance that generates new directions, giving rise to shared discourses and collaboration. Narrative-performative spaces situate the voices of the participants in a space of inclusive transformation, promoting the creation of alternative realities (Fernández, Leite and Márquez, 2019). Thanks to the previous exercises, which foster a safe space for play and reflective dialogue – where active listening, creativity and trust are implemented as essential elements – the students (always including the instructor of record, the participant researcher, in the exercises) present, through simple performative actions, in a candid and concise way, their concerns and their ways of conceiving and inhabiting the world. These performances, by transgressing traditional conventions of presentation, such as oral slide presentations, as is usually the norm, become powerful means of personal and relational expression, by incorporating the experienced, the emotional, and the symbolic, thus allowing a more authentic and meaningful integration and approach.



Figure 3. Performance 1: *What's Next?* Performance 2: *Too much*. Performance 3: *I am a mix from everywhere*. Performance 4: I feel embarrassed and I just want my shoes to do the talking.

Students Reflect on The Three Stages

Once the students went through the workshop experiences, they were asked to fill anonymous questionnaires as a means to reflect on their experiences participating in this research. They were asked a series of questions related to both their experiences with the process, but also their introspections on how the workshops made them feel. The insights gained from these questionnaires worked as a way to gain a better understanding of trends, areas of discomfort, growth, and overall satisfaction and impressions of usefulness of the workshop experiences for future and a present classroom practice in their own classrooms.

Discussion

Findings Along the Path

Understanding the process of research is an evolving journey. Tangaard (2013) emphasizes that initial research plans are often restructured, with descriptions of research practices typically being retrospective, acting as post hoc rationalizations. Research inherently creates something new—concepts, narratives, or interpretations—that did not exist independently of the researcher. These understandings position research as a creative, non-representative act, challenging the notion of capturing a pre-existing reality. In her performance titled **Performance 3: I am a mix from everywhere**, the participant researcher embodied the vulnerability and creative expression that this research demands. By sharing personal aspects of her identity through performance, she broke down traditional classroom hierarchies and connected more authentically with her students. This act of openness not only made her feel closer to the class but also transformed her presence as an instructor—allowing her to engage more genuinely and responsively. It reflected the evolving, non-linear nature of research described by Tangaard (2013), and served as a lived example of how embracing uncertainty and personal truth can lead to deeper educational relationships.

In **Performance 4: I feel embarrassed and I just want my shoes to do the talking**, a participant placed her shoes on the table and sat quietly, avoiding eye contact. This understated yet powerful performance embodied a tension between vulnerability and agency, prompting reflection on the ways individuals navigate expression within academic spaces. Although the performer was not a researcher, her actions echoed the dynamic described by Jusslin and Østern (2020), wherein engagement with material—whether textual, embodied, or spatial—can be both passive and active. The participant's subdued presence and symbolic gesture shaped the performance's meaning as much as the act itself, illustrating how personal expression can invoke a deeper entanglement with the learning environment. In this way, the performance functioned as a site of reflective engagement, awakening memories, emotions, and associations in both performer and audience. Consistent with Lefevre and Lefevre's (2014) paradigm of discursive practices, the moment revealed how meaning is constructed through embodied and

relational acts. Participants later noted that such introspective performances enabled them to “rethink their relationship with the learning environment,” underscoring the potential of performative inquiry to transform both perception and presence within educational contexts. As the professor participated alongside students—both as facilitator and performer—she signaled a willingness to be seen, questioned, and emotionally present. This shift cultivated trust and mutual respect, positioning the classroom as a collaborative site of inquiry rather than a space defined by authority and passive reception. In doing so, the workshops contributed to a more inclusive and dialogic learning environment, where affect, identity, and reflection became even more integral.

Re-Centering and Transforming Perspectives

It is also important to note a reflection that resulted from this process, as it concerns the researchers: the research process inherently transforms the researcher, extending beyond intellectual cognition to include sensory and embodied experiences. Thus, the researchers also learned and grew alongside the participants, and resonated with reflections from participants that described moments of introspection and personal growth, such as realizing, “I learned that I am stronger than I think I am and capable of doing many things”. These transformations were facilitated by activities that encouraged vulnerability, such as collaborative performances and reflective exercises. One participant reflected on the importance of “inhabiting” a classroom not just physically, but emotionally and mentally, which required a sense of comfort and trust to fully engage in learning, which is directly tied to the tenets of which pre-service and in-service teachers should be mindful for best practices in their future and current classrooms.

Moreover, the workshops challenged traditional notions of pedagogy by emphasizing experiential learning, as described in Montes & Fernández Álvarez (2022), where the goal is not just to impart knowledge but to co-create it through action and reflection. This aligns with Freire’s (1968) concept of critical praxis, thus emphasizing the interplay of action and reflection to drive social and personal transformation.

Decolonizing Thinking and Doing

A critical component of the workshops involved decolonizing traditional paradigms. This approach challenges the perpetuation of Western-centric, hegemonic frameworks and promotes the inclusion of indigenous and marginalized epistemologies. For instance, participants engaged in activities like “drawing cartographies” and “action painting,” which used artistic expression to explore identity and cultural narratives in non-linear, non-representative ways.

A recurring theme in participants’ reflections was the creation of the classroom as a “safe space.” Many emphasized that safety allowed them to “freely express themselves and gain comfortability,” enabling honest dialogues about identity and culture, as well as the constant questioning of established practices, to inspire new ones from intuitive action and the possibilities of action offered by performance art.

The focus on breaking rigid classroom hierarchies—such as through reconfiguring furniture and bodies, arrangements and exploring lived spaces—fostered new structural, communicative and relational systems, which react to predetermined roles and judgments, awakening a deeper sense of community and shared purpose. This practice aligns with the culturally sustaining pedagogy of Paris & Alim (2017), which aims to validate and sustain students' cultural identities within the classroom.

Integrating Data into Pedagogical Practice

The data from the workshop questionnaires provided rich insights into the participants' transformative experiences and the pedagogical implications they were able to connect with. One such theme that emerged was trust and vulnerability. Several participants noted that engaging in performative exercises fostered trust, with one stating, "Our shared experiences made us more open to each other's thoughts and feelings". Another theme was that of performance vs. authenticity, of which participants distinguished "acting" from "performing", emphasizing the importance of authenticity. They found that performing allowed them to "present their authentic selves using symbolic gestures and elements" rather than rehearsed action that would feel more artificial and less spontaneous and genuine. The last theme that was very prevalent in the data was that of introspection and growth. Activities that included eye-contact exercises and collaborative painting pushed participants beyond their comfort zone, leading to personal revelations and moments of cultural introspection related to this sort of human connection. One participant noted, "I saw that I am more reserved than I thought, but this workshop helped me to be more open". Another expressed, "I learned that I am stronger than I think and that I am capable of doing many things".

These findings reflect the transformative potential of experiential, arts-integrated approaches in education. By promoting interdependence and allowing space for vulnerability, emerges the prospect for a creation of classrooms that empower pre-service and in-service teachers to engage deeply and authentically with their peers, with their trainers and mentors, and the course topics. Thus, and maybe most importantly, this interdependence and vulnerability can allow room for a transformative process of what it means to be an effective educator working in the settings and with the children they will soon (and already are) working with.

Conclusions

This discussion reveals the multifaceted nature of this sort of classroom experience, and its potential for transformative impact. Post-qualitative and performative approaches, as demonstrated in the workshops, highlight that research is not a static or linear process but a co-creative and reflective act. Decentering the researcher and embracing alternative epistemologies foster more inclusive and critical frameworks, which allow for deeply impactful introspection for both participants and the researchers attempting to understand the impact of those workshops.

The workshop findings underscore the importance of safe spaces and decolonial practices in education. Trust, collaboration, and vulnerability emerged as essential components of meaningful learning environments. Participants' reflections offer a roadmap for integrating these principles, from reimagining classroom configurations to embedding artistic, culturally sustaining practices in pedagogy.

It is essential to rethink our ways of perceiving reality, understood as a multi-faceted mirror that reflects multiple angles according to our perspective. This article highlights the need to change our perspective to encourage richer reflections and an expanded understanding of educational and social phenomena.

The performative paradigm, by conceiving knowledge as a dynamic and ethical process, promotes constantly evolving learning. These dynamics promote structural flexibility and facilitate inclusive and democratic communicative spaces. Thus, the students question the neutrality of the educational space, reinterpreting the invisible power that organizes it.

The development of a critical spirit and divergent thinking is key in the formation of reflective subjects. The provocation, inherent to performance, awakens dormant consciences and new ways of thinking, feeling and acting. Experimentation with situations and ways of thinking foreign to everyday life allows us to transcend stereotypes and discover new learning possibilities. From a collaborative approach, corporality is valued as a research engine, intra-action as co-creation of reality and the creation of meaning from experience, avoiding pre-established meanings. Uncertainty, in this context, becomes a fertile space for transformation.

The research process is not free of factors that imply resistance and frustration in some students, but these sensations and awareness of them are necessary as drivers of action in a paradigm shift. As Eisner (1972) states, the university must not only prepare individuals to adapt to society, but also aspire to transform it. Similarly, Sánchez (2019) emphasizes that the school, as a political space, must break the walls of established knowledge to build more fair, equitable and supportive alternatives. Through continued engagement with decolonial methods and reflective practices, educators can bridge gaps between theory and practice. As evidenced by the workshops, even brief interventions can reshape how individuals inhabit and perceive their learning environments, creating spaces that are inclusive, transformative, and empowering.

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