Epistemological communities and tensions in the integration of arts education practices in schools

Aurelio Castro Varela
aurelio.castro@ub.edu

Fernando Hernández-Hernández
fdohernandez@ub.edu

UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA

EXPECT_Art
EXPLORING AND EDUCATING
CULTURAL LITERACY
THROUGH ART

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The EXPECT_Art project

- Launched in January 2024

- Involves partners from 6 countries: Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain
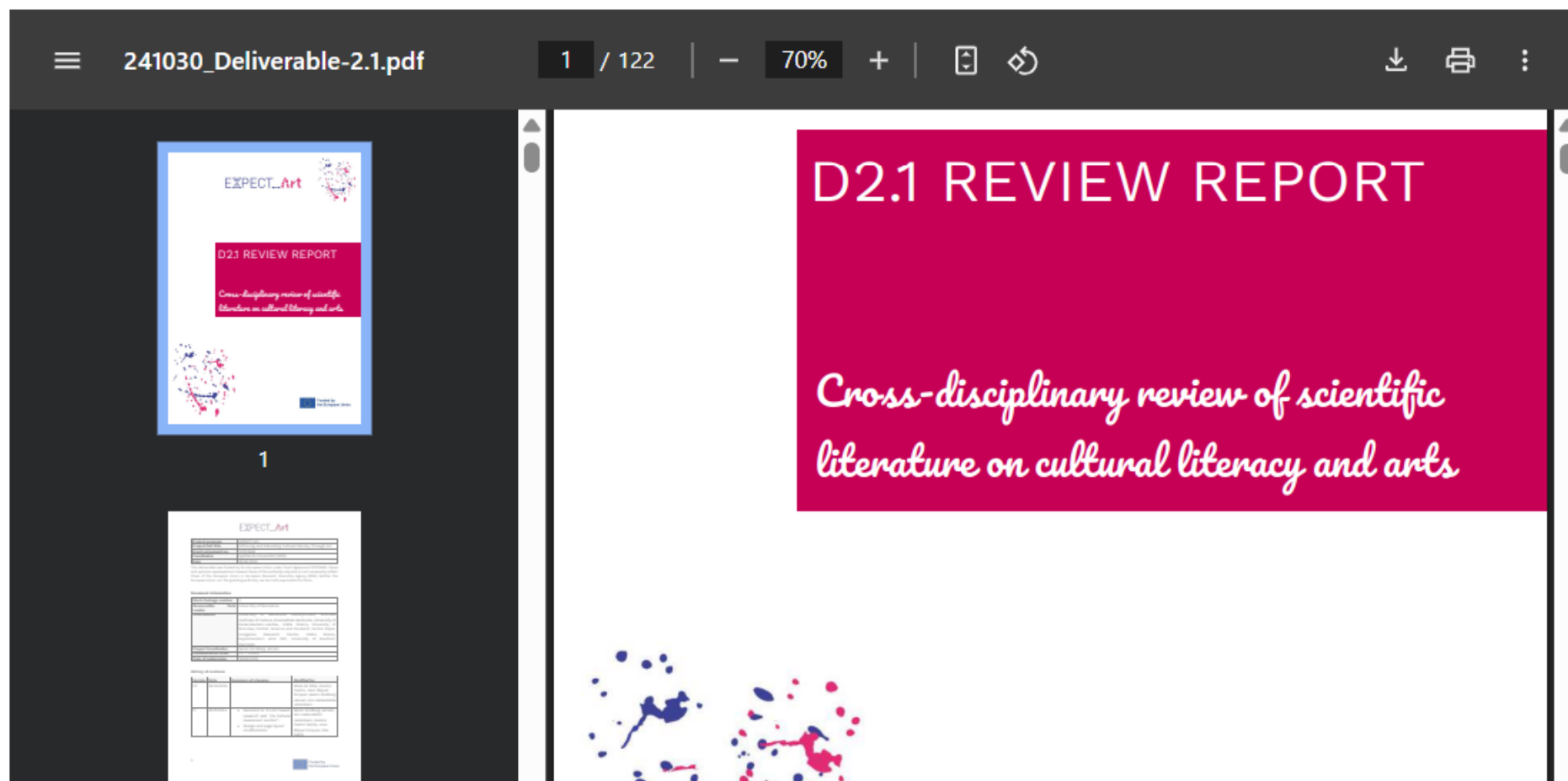
- Led by universities and cultural partners

Three main objectives of EXPECT_Art

- **To identify existing measures and barriers** to fostering critical cultural literacy.

- **To explore how arts and arts education** can nurture this form of literacy and contribute to the decolonization of school curricula. It implies fieldwork in 12 schools and local communities across the participating countries.

- **To design and disseminate several interventions and workshop formats** that promote CCL in both formal and informal learning settings.

The umbrella notion of EXPECT_Art is **critical cultural literacy.**

Section 1 consists of a genealogical review of the notion of critical cultural literacy (CCL) and it discusses each of the three terms: literacy, cultural literacy and criticality. Section 2 explores 6 key notions that are connected to CCL: decoloniality and curriculum, art education and curriculum, critical pedagogy, multiliteracies, arts-based and community-based research, and cultural awareness. Section 3 highlights the specific relationship between CCL and local perspectives in Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Spain.

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D2.1 REVIEW REPORT

Cross-disciplinary review of scientific literature on cultural literacy and arts

"A commitment to reshape literacy education in the interests of marginalized groups of learners who, on the basis of gender, cultural and socioeconomic background, have been excluded from access to the discourses and texts of dominant economics and cultures"

Luke (1997, p. 143).

Becoming critically literate involves developing an active and critical stance toward history, culture, politics, and social systems—particularly those shaped by dominant power structures (Shor, 1999).

Critical cultural literacy entails **ways of being, acting, and performing** that reflects the lived realities of marginalized/minoritized communities.

The recognition of the **linguistic, social, economic, and cultural capital** that students bring into the classroom (Walsh, 2007, cited in White, 2019, p. 32)

1. Engaging with the cultural practices and repertoires of marginalized groups.

2. Examining which groups continue to be subordinated within dominant frameworks (and understanding the mechanisms through which this subordination persists).

'Marginalized cultures' refers to the **meaning-making practices and creative expressions** of groups and communities historically excluded from mainstream narratives.

The pedagogy of CCL offers teachers, students, and cultural institutions a theoretical and practical framework for interrogating educational and cultural policies.

It's arts-based and starts by observing the role of arts in the collaborating institutions.

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Social perspectives of arts education are developing on the idea that the arts influence societies and cultures and contribute to people's understanding and mediation of sociocultural contexts, relations and challenges (Freedman & Hernández-Hernández, 2024)

How these perspectives are embodied in the epistemic conceptions of educators and in the practices they carry out in schools?

An epistemological community (EC) is a network or a group of academic or practitioners whose shared set of normative and cognitive beliefs form the basis of knowledge validation and purpose (Haas, 1992).

The theory of ECs was initially developed by Foucault (1969 [1972]) to explain how an 'episteme' is suitable for giving identity and purpose and enabling cohesion in a group.

Research in Arts Education offers different conceptual frameworks to name these epistemic communities:

Efland (1990): 'intellectual trends' refers to romantic idealism, social Darwinism, expressionism, reconstructionism, progressive education, excellence and critical theory.

Errázuriz (1997): 'forms of rationality': industrial, historical, foreign, moral, expressive, cognitive, perceptual, creative, communicative, interdisciplinary, and cultural.

Aguirre (2005) suggests logocentric, expressive, disciplinary, and cultural 'tendencies'.

These conceptual frameworks can be identified as guides for arts education practices in schools, museums or other arts education proposals.

Practitioners don't make them explicit, and different – and sometimes contradictory – epistemic frameworks coexist in an epistemic community.

This situation is the case in the two schools in our study.

The coexistence of different ECs may (or may not) generate epistemic tensions.

An 'epistemic tension' refers to the tension that arises when different knowledge systems within an organized entity contradict or make competing demands involving the beliefs views, and preferred methods of generating knowledge between different units, groups, teams, or communities.

Visual Culture

Painting

Craft

Drawing

Aims of the research:

a) locate, observe and name the practices of arts education, education through the arts and the use of the arts in education in two schools participating in EXPECT_Art;

b) identify the epistemic communities to which those art educational practices are linked;

c) account for the epistemic tensions that inhabit arts education practices and how teachers deal with them;

d) situate how critical cultural literacy can be framed on these epistemic communities and tensions.

Research strategy:

Fieldwork were carried out in two schools from October 1st to December 19th by 4 researchers in each school.

Based on the field diaries, we made a list of all the artistic practices ordered according to the three criteria set out at the beginning of this entry.

The schools:

The two schools (D. and M.) are in two districts of the city of Barcelona inhabited, above all, by populations in 'particularly disadvantaged socio-economic situations that require additional resources to guarantee the well-being of the pupils and their optimal development in the educational system' (Generalitat de Catalunya [n/d])

The schools:

School D.	School M.
Pupils from 3 to 12 years of age (infant and primary).	Pupils and Student from 3 to 16 (infant, primary and lower secondary).
It has been developing an educational project for 8 years, in which the arts play a structuring pedagogical role.	It has been developing a project for the last 3 years that has prolonged what was previously only primary school to create continuity towards secondary education.

The arts serve as a cultural reference or framework that influences how core subjects are taught. |

Epistemic comunities

- **Craft:** linked to handicrafts, e.g. making a doll out of textiles.
- Drawing: Although it is an artistic discipline, it stands out because it is a medium widely used in schools to observe reality and account for everyday experiences in the classroom.
- **Arts disciplines:** it is linked to artistic practices related to painting, narrative, dance, music,... or the combination of several of them.
- **Self-expression:** It links to practices that use the arts as a form of self-expression and emotional self-knowledge.
- **Arts as language:** as well as being linked to knowledge of the language of art, it has to do with using art to learn to see, observe, and establish relationships.
- **Visual Culture:** It is related to using images from different sources to make experiences of understanding (sometimes critically) of reality.
- **Social Justice:** It involves realising artistic practices and projects that confront inequalities, favour dialogue between cultures, and promote common life projects.

Frameworks for arts education practices

- **Practices of Arts Education:** This is linked to using the arts 'per se' to carry out activities related to an artistic discipline.

- **Education through Arts:** This is linked to the carrying out of artistic practices in the framework of projects and proposals that go beyond the arts. These proposals take the arts as mediators or as multimodal possibilities.

- **Uses of Art in Education:** This is related to artistic practices in which the school participates but is mediated by cultural institutions, museums, art centers or community collectives.

School D: Epistemic comunities on 16 activities observed

Practices of Arts Education:21	Education through Arts: 17	Uses of Art in Education 7
Craft: 3 **Drawing:** 4 **Arts disciplines**: Sculpture (3), Tainting (2), theatre (1), Music (4), Collage (1), Dance (2), Literature (1)	**Craft:** (1) **Drawing**: (1) **Self-expression**: (2) **Arts disciplines**: Narrative (1), Music (1), Dance (1) **Art as language**: (5) **Visual Culture**: (4) **Social Justice**: (1)	**Arts disciplines:** Music and Dance (1), Music and Visual Arts (1), Music (1) **Art as language:** (4)

School M: Epistemic comunities on 45 activities observed

Practices of Arts Education:5	Education through Arts: 8	Uses of Art in Education 3
Arts disciplines: Painting and Music (1), Drawing and Print (1), Music and Dance (1), Watercolour, Pencil and Pointillism (1), Music (1).	**Drawing:** (1) **Arts disciplines:** Photography and dioramas (1), Fashion (1) Music (1), Collage, Drawing and Sculpture (1), Modelling clay (1), Literature (1) **Art as language:** linked to Art History movements (1) and art curatorship (1)	**Drawing:** (1) **Arts disciplines**: Music and Dance (1), Theatre (1)

- School D. promotes workshops where pupils carry out art practices articulated in conceptual frameworks ranging from craft, expressive practices, and reproductive actions to proposals linked to visual culture.

- Given that the school focuses its pedagogical framework on collective practices linked to contemporary arts and social justice we observe some epistemic tensions:

    a) difficulties in understanding the meaning of contemporary artistic practices on the part of the teaching staff,

    b) the constraints of expanding other artistic ways of knowing, and

    c) the tensions to align these practices with EXPECT_Art's proposal to promote a critical cultural education.

- At school M., work is promoted to foster collaboration and shared leadership in the pedagogical practices developed at the school.

- The perceived epistemic tensions arise from the contrasts between the purpose of art practices and how they are applied in school's contexts.

- This situation poses a double challenge, as these experiences must be adapted each year to the school reality, considering the subjectivities of the pupils and, at the same time, their integration with the pedagogical practice of arts educators.

- In the case of secondary education, the experiences designed from or through the arts are based on materials developed yearly as the school grows in secondary education grades.

- Once developed, the pedagogical resources from previous years are replicated with new classes, allowing for sustainability in terms of teaching efforts but at the same time limiting the arts education processes.

In conclusion,

Identifying the ECs and the tensions that these carry, allow us to reflect on how diverse epistemic approaches in the same educational context can affect and frame the possibility of a critical cultural literacy education.

This strategy has been valuable because it has allowed us to highlight the epistemic frameworks that organise art education practices in the two schools.

The presence of the arts in the pedagogical practices of both schools reflects a diversity of epistemic frames linked to schools' educational projects.

Through a process of critical reflexivity (Ng, et al.2019), it possible to point out different epistemic tensions that, by revealing and sharing them with the schools, can contribute not only to aligning them with the purpose of EXPECT_Art but also with the educational projects of the two schools.

Thank you for your attention