

**LUIS HERNÁN ERRÁZURIZ, GUILLERMO MARINI
AND ISIDORA URRUTIA**
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

Reconsidering the purposes of art education: Insights from a 2014 questionnaire in Chile

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this article is to describe and analyse the importance that elementary teachers attribute to diverse purposes of art education based on an investigation carried out during 2014, in the Los Lagos Region,¹ located in southern Chile. First, the article illustrates some considerations of the aims of art education. Then, it presents the methodology used in the investigation. Next, two tables are discussed: one on the importance that teachers assign to purposes according to the school's administrative dependence (public, subsidized and private) and the other related to the importance that teachers attribute to purposes by zone, province and type of art teacher.² Finally, the article concludes by identifying some findings that may be significant for teachers, school authorities and teacher education institutions.

KEYWORDS

purposes of art
education
comparative
perspectives
socio-economic
contexts
cultural-geographical
contexts
art teachers
Chile

1. Los Lagos is one of Chile's fifteen regions, and its capital is Puerto Montt, located approximately 600 miles South from

PALABRAS CLAVE

propósitos educación
artística
perspectivas
comparadas
contextos
socio-económicos
contextos
geo-culturales
profesores arte
Chile

Santiago, Chile's
capital.

2. In the Chilean education system, there are two types of teachers who teach art courses: on the one hand, primary school teachers who teach art education among other subjects (such as languages, mathematics, and sciences) and on the other, specialized art teachers who teach only art courses in some schools. For this investigation, the questionnaire was applied to both types of teachers, generalists and specialists.

3. Other examples from different decades include:

[...] the prime value of the arts in education lies from my point of view in the unique contributions it makes to the individuals' experience with and understanding of the world. The visual arts deal with an aspect of human consciousness that no other field touches on: the aesthetic contemplation of visual form.

(Eisner 1972: 9)

Studies in, about, and through the arts help students lead fulfilled lives. Students who lack arts experiences

El objetivo principal de este artículo es describir y analizar la importancia que los profesores de escuela básica atribuyen a diversos propósitos de la educación artística, a partir de una investigación realizada en el año 2014 en la Región de Los Lagos¹, ubicada en el sur de Chile. En primer lugar, el artículo ilustra algunas consideraciones sobre los propósitos de la educación artística. Luego, presenta la metodología utilizada en la investigación. A continuación se analizan dos tablas: una relativa a la importancia que los profesores asignan a los propósitos según la dependencia administrativa de su escuela (pública, subvencionada y privada), y la otra relacionada con la importancia que los profesores asignan a los propósitos por zona, provincia y tipo de profesor². Por último, el artículo concluye identificando algunos hallazgos que pueden ser significativos para los maestros, las autoridades escolares y las instituciones de formación de profesores.

THE NEED TO JUSTIFY ART EDUCATION

Among school subjects, art is probably the one that has had to develop the most theory to justify its existence in the curriculum. As a result of this constant search for justification, numerous purposes and ideas have been progressively introduced throughout the twentieth century, so that at present there are many aims and ideas about why art should be taught in schools. If we consider benchmark texts such as *The History and Philosophy of Art Education* (Macdonald [1970] 2004), *Arte-Educação no Brasil* (Barbosa 1978), *The Arts in Schools* (Robinson 1982), *History of Art Education* (Amburgy et al. 1992), and *A History of Art Education* (Efland 1990), together with current research handbooks (Eisner and Day 2004; Bresler 2007; Wilson and van Ruiten 2014) and comprehensive literature reviews (Upitis 2011; Bamford and Wimmer 2012), it seems that there is an ongoing need to plead in favour of the existence of art in schools.

Such a defence often addresses issues related to the nature of the arts, their past and present social standing, their unique contribution to children's lives, the peculiar challenges of teaching and learning art within the curriculum, among others. Overall, what seems to be constantly at stake is the identification, defence and promotion of the purposes of art education, for instance: 'It is the function of art to make values vivid and persuasive as no other medium can' (Smith and Smith 1970: 49); '[f]or young people aesthetic has become a key issue of their everyday life. Not to take that into account makes schools not just unattractive but irrelevant' (Bamford and Wimmer 2012: 6);

The postmodern world is pluralistic, with no single meaning, purpose or direction for arts education; indeed, there are many. In this context, it is necessary to look closely at the frameworks upon which much current practice in art education is built, and to re-examine some fundamental principles.

(Hickman 2000: xv)³

Bearing in mind this variety of purposes and justifications, together with their evolution and change throughout history and their significance in diverse geographical and cultural contexts, fundamental questions such as 'why must we have art in the curriculum?' or 'what is the relevance of art in education?' continue to be significant and pertinent. In fact, they sparked the motivation that originated and guided this present inquiry: *why is it*

important to reflect upon the aims of art education? How do elementary school teachers prioritize these aims?

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING PURPOSES OF ART EDUCATION

Current international and Chilean literature (Orbeta 2015; Silva 2015; Errázuriz 1998) helps depict at least three key aspects of the purposes of art education that seem relevant for the sake of framing the present discussion.

1. *Ways of justifying the purposes of art education*: providing reasons for the field's main objectives is a complex enterprise. It entails a commitment with ways of knowing, making, perceiving and criticizing in the context of art education that may yield genuine educational achievements. Such a task allows the development of a preliminary frame of reference that aids organization of different purposes. For example, according to Eisner (1972) there is a distinction to be made between 'contextual' and 'essential' purposes.

Contextual purposes focus on transferring artistic qualities to non-artistic areas, and aim at achieving outcomes such as industrial and economic development, higher academic results, improved school climate and the like. Building on Koopman (2005) it is likely that this trend grew to defend art education's existence within the school system by means of justifications that match the logics and metrics of regular public debates on education.

Essential purposes are those that deal with intrinsic artistic qualities such as the enhancement of aesthetic awareness and the exploration of feeling and emotion. The emphasis here is on the type of ways of knowing and experiences that would be lost if the arts were not present or neglected in school life.

Bearing in mind different educational frameworks and orientations, it is important to be aware that these distinctions tend to manifest in an intertwined way (Marini 2016a, 2016b). For example, even though the predominant purposes of Chilean art education have been based on a practical and utilitarian conception of the arts (mainly concentrated on the teaching of drawing, which sought to prepare human resources capable of supporting economic growth), throughout the development of the Chilean educational system, national authorities have also included the teaching of art in elementary and high schools, 'to encourage its cultural development by means of a moral and perceptual refinement' (Errázuriz 1994: 96, 102).

2. *Impact of the purposes of art education on teaching*: considering the aims of art education is not only important from a philosophical and theoretical perspective but also because, when taken seriously, they may have a deep influence on teaching and learning. Among others, Eisner (1972) has argued extensively about the way in which different conceptions of the fundamental objectives of the field impact teacher education, teacher provision and, certainly, curriculum development. As a recent example, when Bastos and Zimmerman claim that 'creativity has captured the educational imagination of the art education profession and of many other segments of society' (2015: 202), such a statement not only lends voice to something that the entire world expects from the arts but also expresses the long-standing prominence that

in their schooling will emerge undernourished by the end of their education. By contrast, those students whose schooling includes the arts will benefit throughout their lives, in a multitude of ways, by the intrinsic benefits that the arts bring to the quality of our lives.

(Upitis 2011: 9)

creativity has had as one of the key objectives of art education curricula in the west.

From another point of view, considering the issue of how attractive art teachers find their jobs, Bamford and Wimmer (2012) identified the need that art educators have to feel synergy between their personal abilities and the classroom's objectives and challenges. This fact helps relate the purposes of art education with those personal attitudes that are decisive in dealing with teacher commitment and classroom management among other pedagogical dimensions. Building on the example above, if a community of teachers considers creativity as a fundamental purpose, it would feel frustrating to work in a system that guides lesson plans through fixed templates. Beyond the fact that purposes provide a guideline of *why to teach art*, they may also have an effect on both the personal and the professional development of *those who teach art*.

In this sense, it is worth mentioning that after a large-scale revision of the coherence between teacher education in the arts and the Chilean national curriculum standards, the Secretary of Culture has identified a significant gap between how higher education institutions educate future art educators and what the visual arts and music national curriculum demands teachers to know, be able to do and assess on a daily basis. As of today, the preparation of future elementary school teachers seems ambiguous and weak, specifically in terms of the actual pedagogical capacities that teachers require to cover an utterly ambitious curriculum (Chilean Council for Culture and Arts [CNCA] 2015).

3. *Quality art education and purposes*: until now, what has become a strong hypothesis is that the task of identifying and discussing purposes influences the achievement of quality in education (Biesta 2014). As recently reviewed by Harvard University's 'Qualities of Quality Project', art teachers and administrators concerned with developing exemplary art education practices usually associate quality with attaining certain purposes. They state, 'what constitutes high quality arts education is inextricably linked to the question of why we should be teaching the arts in the first place' (Seidel et al. 2009: 17).

Although the study affirms that high-quality art programmes tend to serve many purposes, it also stresses that accomplishing several of them 'consistently and reliably' is complex (Seidel et al. 2009: 27). Even though one can think of a variety of legitimate purposes, valuing all of them as equally important would risk dissolving the very meaning of 'purpose'. In other words, while no single purpose is sufficient to secure quality in art education, not all of them are equally relevant or even necessary in a specific context.

As in the past, contemporary art education seems to dwell in competitive scenarios where each curricular discipline needs to account for its use of time, spaces, materials and public or private funds. In fact, if one studies the history of art education in Chile, one of the aspects that calls for special attention is the constant and almost obsessive effort of art educators to demonstrate the value of teaching art in schools (Errázuriz 1998). Because the subject has had a minor place in the curriculum and has often been under threat of extinction, there has been a constant need to justify its existence. For this reason, the way in which the field announces its specific contribution before other academic subjects is a major factor that impacts on its legitimacy in the school curriculum and society.

METHODOLOGY

As previously stated, the main objective of this article is to describe and analyse the importance that art educators assign to diverse purposes of the arts in education in the Los Lagos Region in southern Chile.

Source of data

The data come from an exploratory investigation conducted in 2014.⁴ One of its objectives was to understand the importance that teachers attribute to diverse justifications for the role of art in the school curriculum by means of the following question: *In your opinion, how important are the following purposes⁵ for the role of art in the school curriculum?* To further compare, describe and analyse teachers' assessments of the purposes of art education, teachers had to evaluate two sets of purposes. Each set corresponds to a different curricular period in Chilean education, 1982 and 2012, respectively. A five-point Likert scale was used, and responses ranged from 1 = 'very important' to 5 = 'not important'.

The first set consisted of twelve purposes (see Set 1 in Table 2) coming from a Chilean study carried out in 1982.⁶ The second set consisted of eight purposes (see Set 2 in Table 2) and derives from the new curricular designs and orientations promoted by the educational reform that has been taking place in Chile for the last two decades since the recovery of democracy in 1990 (MINEDUC – Chilean Ministry of Education 1999, 2012).⁷

Participants

Thirty-six schools were selected using a stratified random sampling method. Each stratus corresponded to one of the three administrative dependences present in the Chilean educational system: public schools are fully funded by the Chilean state and are administrated by the respective municipality (district local government); subsidized schools are administrated by private organizations (non-profit or for-profit) that receive a public subsidy per student; and private schools are administrated by private organizations (non-profit or for-profit) that do not receive public subsidies.

4. Demanded by Teatro del Lago, a cultural corporation located in Los Lagos Region, and funded by the Chilean National Council for Arts and Culture (CNCA).
5. We use the word 'purpose' bearing in mind its meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary, 'why you do something or why something exists' (see <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/purpose?q=purposes>).
6. The study's main objective was to investigate from a historical perspective the evolution and change of aims in Chilean art education, considering North American and English purposes of the field that have been influential in Chile (Errázuriz 1989).
7. In 1990 Chile began a transition towards a democratic system that included several educational reforms across the school curriculum that implied new design of guidelines and emerging purposes for the arts in education. For further information, see Cox and Lemaitre (1999).

| Socio-economic group | Schools | | | Students | | |
|----------------------|------------|----------------|-------------|------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Public (%) | Subsidized (%) | Private (%) | Public (%) | Subsidized (%) | Private (%) |
| Low | 23 | 8 | 0 | 9 | 3 | 0 |
| Mid-low | 25 | 8 | 0 | 21 | 9 | 0 |
| Mid | 6 | 14 | 0 | 10 | 21 | 0 |
| Mid-high | 0 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 10 | 0 |
| High | 0 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 7 |
| National total | 54 | 40 | 5 | 41 | 53 | 7 |

Source: MINEDUC – Chilean Ministry of Education (2013).

Table 1: Distribution of schools and fourth-year students according to socio-economic group and school administrative dependence.

8. For a detailed description of the Chilean educational system, see Santiago et al. (2013). According to the Ministry of Education, during 2014, the distribution of schools in Los Lagos Region was as follows: public 59%, subsidized 38% and private 3%. See, <http://centroestudios.mineduc.cl/index.php?t=96&i=2&cc=2036&tm=2>. It is significant to point out that, as of today, there are no studies on art teacher's demographics in Chile. The total number of school teachers in Chile is 218,144, of whom 158,548 (73%) are women and 59,596 (27%) are men (see <http://eligeeducar.cl/radiografia-de-los-profesores-en-chile>). For further information, see Rosas and Santa Cruz (2013).
9. Chile uses a multidimensional poverty index that complements traditional monetary measures of poverty with other factors that affect individuals such as school dropout, malnutrition, lack of social security and household conditions (see <http://www.bcn.cl/siit/actualidad-territorial/tasas-de-pobreza-regionales-casen-2013>).

In addition, it is worth stressing that these administrative dependences are often taken as a proxy for socio-economic levels. As shown in Table 1, almost all public schools belong to low and mid-low socio-economic groups, whereas all private schools belong to a high socio-economic group. Similarly, while most students from public schools belong to a low or mid-low socio-economic group, students from subsidized schools belong mainly to the middle classes, and all students from private schools belong to a high socio-economic group.⁸

Within each stratus (public, subsidized, private) the number of schools randomly selected was proportional to the percentage that each dependence represented regionally. Due to the small proportion that this type of school represented regionally, private schools were slightly overrepresented for comparative purposes. As a result, eighteen public, thirteen subsidized and five private schools composed the final sample.

Within each selected school, teachers who teach art courses had to complete a questionnaire. Because of practical issues such as geographical distances, time restrictions and teachers' availability, the teachers who answered the questionnaire were not randomly selected. This is why their answers are not representative of teachers who teach art courses at a regional level. The respondent sample consisted of 73 teachers (N (total)=73), 60% female and 40% male, 68% belonging to urban schools and 32% belonging to rural ones, 55% belonging to public schools, 33% belonging to subsidized ones and 12% belonging to private ones.

Context

According to the latest national census, the Los Lagos Region has a population of 857,000 inhabitants, with an annual gross per capita income of US\$4728 (INE – Chilean Statistics Institute 2012). The region's poverty level reached 21.9% in 2013, 6% higher than the national level (16%) (BCN 2013).⁹ The Los Lagos Region comprises four provinces; cities such as Osorno, Castro and Puerto Varas; the country's second largest island, Chiloé; and one of the largest lakes in Latin America, Llanquihue. Its economy is dominated by productive activities such as fishing, aquaculture, forestry, cattle, farming and tourism, and associated services for these same activities.

Analysis

To describe teachers' evaluations, descriptive statistics using a one-sampled t-test were employed. Due to the small sample size, comparisons were not always statistically significant. Frequency counts were used in some cases to reveal possible trends when comparisons were not statistically significant. Although this sample is not statistically representative of the teachers who teach art in this region, the analysis aims to illustrate possible trends and/or singularities among teachers' opinions and attitudes towards the purposes of art in education.

RESULTS

Ostensibly, as table 2 shows on page 346, teachers attribute a high degree of importance to all purposes: the average of total purposes considered 'very important' in Set 1 (1982 purposes) is 68%; for Set 2 (2012 purposes), this is 63%. This calls for further considerations on whether all these purposes are equally relevant to justify the role of art in the school curriculum. Furthermore,

such evidence poses serious questions about the type of instruction that teachers have been receiving during their professional education. We will get back to these points in the discussion section.

As stated before, the administrative dependence of Chilean schools is often taken as a proxy for socio-economic levels constituting a relevant variable to take into account in this type of analysis. From this perspective, the most noticeable fact is that teachers belonging to public schools considered 'very important' almost every purpose in a higher proportion than respondents belonging to private schools. For example, 'To provide therapeutic aid and to contribute to special education' (Public: 65.9%, Private: 11%), and 'To contribute to the development of natural and cultural environmental awareness' are 'very important' for public school teachers in a significantly higher proportion than private school teachers (Public: 82.5%, Private 44.4%). Surprisingly, 'To promote knowledge about Latin American art' is the only purpose that was evaluated in a significantly higher proportion as 'very important' by private school teachers compared to public schools (Private: 89%, Public: 50%). This may suggest that while public and subsidized schools may have a deeper local and national awareness and sense of belonging to Chilean society, private ones might be more connected to regional and global issues.

Beyond socio-economic-based interpretations, there is another relevant aspect that calls for attention: 'To develop the capacity for free, creative, critical thinking' is the only purpose that receives a consistently high evaluation (90.7%) from teachers working in all types of schools. Such a salient result supports Bastos and Zimmerman's claim that 'creativity has captured the educational imagination of the art education profession' (2015: 202). In an education system like Chile, increasingly dominated by standardized testing and accountability pressures, it is not surprising that art teachers vindicate creativity as one of the main aims of liberal education. In this sense, the arts become an alternative to innovate from a reproductive or an imitative system towards a more imaginative one, that is to say, one based on the belief that a person must expand his or her inventive and expressive faculties.

To consider the relationships between the importance that art teachers attribute to emerging purposes and school location (urban/rural), school province (Chiloé/Llanquihue¹⁰) and type of teacher (specialist/general teacher), table 3 is presented on page 347.

In terms of school zone, all purposes were valued as 'very important' in a higher proportion in rural areas than in urban locations. Significant differences were found in 'To develop civic and democratic awareness' (Rural: 78%, Urban: 45%), 'To promote linkages with new technologies, media and emerging languages' (Rural: 78%, Urban: 53%) and 'To develop consciousness towards natural and cultural environments' (Rural: 87%, Urban: 64%).

The geographical locations of schools also seem to condition teachers' perceptions. For instance, when in Chiloé the purpose 'To contribute to the development of local and patrimonial awareness' was evaluated as 'very important' by 87% of respondents; in Llanquihue it was only 63%.

Finally, when comparing specialist teachers – who only teach art courses – to general teachers – who teach art courses among other subjects – the former assessed 'To promote knowledge about Latin American art' and 'To promote knowledge about contemporary art' as 'very important' in a significantly higher proportion than the latter (Specialist: 78%, General: 42%; and Specialist: 61%, General: 40%, respectively). This could be an indication that specialist teachers find purposes regarding the intrinsic value of arts more relevant than

10. It is necessary to consider that Chiloé is an archipelago that, due to its physical isolation from the rest of the country, has a very distinct local culture and architecture, whereas Llanquihue houses the region's capital city, has an international airport and a highway that connects it to the rest of the country.

| | Purpose | Administrative dependence | | | |
|--|--|--|----------------|-------------|-----------|
| | | Public (%) | Subsidized (%) | Private (%) | Total (%) |
| Set 1 1982 purposes | To develop the ability of free, creative, critical thinking | 90.2 | 92.0 | 88.9 | 90.7 |
| | To cultivate feeling and emotion through expressive forms | 82.9 | 80.0 | 55.6 | 78.7 |
| | To enrich life and help in the development of well-integrated individuals and contribute to personal fulfilment | 75.6 | 80.0 | 55.6 | 74.7 |
| | To provide opportunities for self-expression, thus helping people to better understand themselves (self-awareness) | 70.7 | 76.0 | 77.8 | 73.3 |
| | To develop aesthetic experience and an understanding of cultural and moral values | 73.2 | 60.0 | 66.7 | 68.0 |
| | To develop perceptual sensitivity towards the environment | 67.5 | 72.0 | 55.6 | 67.6 |
| | To provide a form of knowledge and mode of awareness that aids intellectual development | 70.7 | 64.0 | 55.6 | 66.7 |
| | To provide the means to develop skills and abilities that may be used for artistic or other purposes | 61.0 | 60.0 | 66.7 | 61.3 |
| | To provide the opportunity to explore the unique intrinsic value of the arts | 60.0 | 56.0 | 55.6 | 58.1 |
| | To provide a source of pleasure and enjoyment through the opportunity to use leisure in a constructive way | 52.5 | 68.0 | 44.4 | 56.8 |
| | To provide therapeutic aid and to contribute to special education | 65.9* | 52.0 | 11.1 | 54.7 |
| | To provide the opportunity to explore and the possibility of becoming an artist and helping other professions | 50.0 | 60.0 | 33.3 | 51.4 |
| | Set 2 2012 purposes | To promote knowledge about Chilean art | 72.5 | 72.0 | 66.7 |
| To contribute to the development of natural and cultural environmental awareness | | 82.5* | 64.0 | 44.4 | 71.6 |
| To contribute to the development of local and patrimonial awareness | | 75.0 | 68.0 | 55.6 | 70.3 |
| To promote connections between the arts and other areas of the curriculum | | 67.5 | 64.0 | 66.7 | 66.2 |
| To promote the relation with new technologies, media and emergent languages | | 62.5 | 56.0 | 66.7 | 60.8 |
| To promote knowledge of Latin American art | | 50.0 | 64.0 | 88.9** | 59.5 |
| To contribute to the development of civic and democratic awareness | | 60.0 | 52.0 | 44.4 | 55.4 |
| To promote knowledge of contemporary art | 50.0 | 48.0 | 55.6 | 50.0 | |

*Significantly higher than private schools ($p < 0.05$); **significantly higher than public schools ($p < 0.1$).

Table 2: Importance that art teachers attribute to purposes of art in education by administrative dependence of schools (% 'very important').

| Teacher purposes | School | | | | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|
| | School location | | School province | | Type of teacher | |
| | Urban (%) | Rural (%) | Llanquihue (%) | Chiloé (%) | Specialist (%) | General (%) |
| To develop consciousness towards natural and cultural environments | 64.7 | 87.0** | 71.4 | 73.9 | 72.2 | 71.1 |
| To promote knowledge of Chilean art | 68.6 | 78.3 | 69.4 | 73.9 | 77.8 | 65.8 |
| To contribute to the development of local and patrimonial awareness | 64.7 | 82.6 | 63.3 | 87.0 | 66.7 | 73.7 |
| To promote links between the arts and other areas of the curriculum | 62.7 | 73.9 | 63.3 | 69.6 | 66.7 | 65.8 |
| To promote linkages with new technologies, media and emerging languages | 52.9 | 78.3** | 65.3 | 56.5 | 63.9 | 57.9 |
| To develop civic and democratic awareness | 45.1 | 78.3** | 63.3 | 43.5 | 55.6 | 55.3 |
| To promote knowledge of Latin American art | 56.9 | 65.2 | 63.3 | 47.8 | 77.8** | 42.1 |
| To promote knowledge of contemporary art | 43.1 | 65.2* | 55.1 | 43.5 | 61.1* | 39.5 |

*Significantly higher ($p<0.1$); **Significantly higher ($p<0.05$).

Table 3: Importance that art teachers attribute to the emerging purposes of art in the curriculum by zone, province and type of art teacher (% 'very important').

generalist teachers. In this respect, it is relevant to note that even though almost half of the surveyed participants were specialist art teachers, they were not evenly distributed among school dependence. Within public schools, most participants were general teachers (63%), whilst within private schools, most were specialist art teachers (89%).

DISCUSSION

As Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate, there are many rationales and some conflicting ideas that come together in justifying the role of the arts in education. Such rich diversity could help us appreciate the complexity and relevance of reconsidering the purposes of art education. However, in Chile there have been few investigations and minor discussion of this issue. This becomes problematic not only when considering the implications for the education of future art teachers but also regarding what is actually going on in school practices.

In this sense, the questionnaire's results show that there is a strong tendency to value almost all of the purposes as 'very important'. In fact, the total aver-

age of all twenty purposes that were valued as ‘very important’ is above 60 per cent, which suggests that teachers have difficulties in identifying the key, fundamental purposes of art education. In other words, if everything looks like a key purpose of art education, the very notion of ‘purpose’, conceived as a criterion that allows for the organization, focus and continual assessment of educational practices, becomes fragile. Building on Project Zero’s argument (Seidel et al. 2009), one is bound to say that in such a diverse and sometimes dispersed environment, securing quality in art education would depend to a higher degree on the personal and professional efforts of individual teachers than on the guidelines that the different Ministries of Education have produced.

Paradoxically, while ‘To develop the capacity for free, creative, critical thinking’ receives the highest evaluation (90.7%), ‘To contribute to the development of civic and democratic awareness’ (55.4%) and ‘To promote knowledge about contemporary art’ (50%) obtain the lowest. In other words, it would seem there is a very weak or no connection between the importance assigned to creativity, the development of democratic values and knowledge of contemporary art. In this respect, it would be interesting to further explore why there is such a gap between these purposes. Anticipating possible viewpoints, perhaps teachers assign proportionally less importance to contemporary art because they have had little opportunities to engage with it; hence, it is not surprising that they do not recognize its creative potential. On the other hand, although Chile was under a dictatorship regime from 1973 until 1990, still there is much to reflect and discuss about the relationship between art education and the promotion of democratic values. In other words, one would expect a twenty-first-century robust democratic society to demonstrate a real commitment to the development of creativity at different levels and areas – in terms of both material and human resources – and consequently, a strong support for contemporary arts as a fundamental source of imagination and energy for such a society.

One of the most significant findings is the association between the geographical location in which schools are situated and the importance attributed to certain purposes. For example, depending on the school’s setting, the perception of the importance of the arts concerning ‘democratic awareness’ varies (Urban: 45.1%, Rural: 78.3%). Perhaps in a rural area such as Chiloé Island, such a difference might relate to local demands of political autonomy and decentralization. Likewise, in terms of ‘linkages with new technologies’, rural areas in Los Lagos Region might look for more and better technological development and connectivity (Urban: 52.9%, Rural: 78.3%).

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this article was to describe and analyse the importance that elementary teachers attribute to purposes of art education. The guiding questions were as follows: *Why is it important to reflect upon the aims of art education?* and *How important are the purposes of art education for the role of art in the school curriculum?*

This research has shown that purposes of art education constitute a complex issue due to their epistemological scope and thematic diversity. Hence, there is a need for more knowledge and discussion, on the one hand, in terms of what purposes of art education might mean at the level of teacher education and professional development and, on the other, to design art education public policies.

Considering the great variety of purposes of art education (which respond to diverse historical, sociocultural contexts and theoretical backgrounds), there is a real demand to prioritize the most pertinent and relevant among them. After all, in a way the selection of purposes should be the editorial orientation of art education objectives, contents and teaching practices. This becomes a major challenge in a geographically large and diverse country such as Chile, and also an opportunity to reconsider the main aims of art education according to the country's different regions (North–Centre–South), school administrative dependences (public, subsidized, private), art teachers' backgrounds and everyday experiences. In other words, contemporary Chilean art education should manifestly take into consideration the above conditions to respond more adequately to present education and cultural challenges.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Luis Errázuriz, Ph.D., is a lecturer and researcher in the Instituto de Estética, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. His research interests include history of art education, aesthetic education, everyday aesthetic, visual culture and the relationship between art society and politics. He received his Ph.D. degree (1989) from the Institute of Education, University of London. His most recent publications are the books *El Golpe Estético: Dictadura Militar en Chile 1973–1989* (2012) and *El f(a)ctor Invisible* (2015), editor.

Contact: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Jaime Guzmán Errázuriz 3300, Providencia, Chile.
E-mail: lerrazur@puc.cl

Guillermo Marini, Ph.D., is associate professor at the School of Education, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Currently, he is PI of a research project that problematizes the connections between school everyday aesthetics and overall educational projects in urban and rural schools in Chile. He has published articles in *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, *Tran/Form/Acao*, *Visual Communication* and *Educação & Sociedade*.

Contact: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Vicuña Mackenna 4860, Macul, Chile.
E-mail: gmarini@uc.cl

Isidora Urrutia Steinert is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Hispanic, Portuguese and Latin American Studies, University of Bristol, UK. Until 2015,

she was lecturer and research assistant at the Sociology Institute, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Her main research focuses on cultural sociology, Latin American identities and material culture studies.

Contact: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Vicuña Mackenna 4860, Macul, Chile.

E-mail: iurruti1@uc.cl

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