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# Artistic pedagogies in an emergency: Perspectives from nine visual arts teachers in the north, centre and south of Chile

## ABSTRACT

*Due to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–21, schools in Chile suspended face-to-face activities. This led to an 'educational emergency', generating proposals for what some authors have called Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT). This article describes the teaching experiences of nine visual arts teachers from northern, central and southern Chile, who implemented their pedagogical proposals by dispensing with the workshops and materials commonly used in visual arts classes. The study examined the processes of uncertainty experienced by the teachers by collecting and analysing 'in situ' accounts and arguments using a qualitative approach. The main results indicate that the teachers showed agency and*

## KEYWORDS

remote teaching  
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didactics in crisis  
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*a great capacity to be flexible in response to changing scenarios. It can also be observed that ERT emphasizes the ambivalent position of visual arts as a subject in schools and demonstrates the difficulty that some students experience accessing and using certain technologies, questioning the belief that they are 'digital natives'.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The restrictions on movement due to the health emergency and the risk of COVID-19 infection since 2020 have given rise to a series of problems worldwide that are still affecting many of the normal activities of societies in general. Even though school facilities were forced to close, schools continued to operate (Dussel 2020). This produced an educational emergency that exerted stress on the usual conditions of teaching and learning in pedagogical contexts (Aguilera and Nightengale-Lee 2020; Mae-Torquero 2021; Green et al. 2020). The new scenario led to an overload at the structural, organizational and systemic levels, as well as for teachers and their pedagogical practices. In the wake of these changes, which were intended to be temporary, distance education or what authors such as Hodges et al. (2020) have called *Emergency Remote Teaching* (ERT), was implemented.

In this context, one of the curricular areas most affected was visual arts. In response to this, our study sought to answer the following questions: what changes have visual arts teachers made in teaching? What difficulties and opportunities do visual arts teachers experience when implementing the remote teaching modality for this emergency? And, finally, what aspects of this experience could be continued or replicated when the pandemic is over?

The study was carried out at the height of the pandemic in Chile, with the largest amount of data collected during 2020 during the confinement measures, a time when ERT was established in a large part of the country. The researchers conducted interviews with nine visual arts teachers who taught in the north, centre and south of Chile and were working in the three types of school in the Chilean system: municipal (which are free public schools that receive state funding and are administered by municipalities or the recently implemented Local Public Education Services – SLEP), subsidized private (which are free and receive state funds, but depend on a private provider) and private educational institutions (in which an enrolment and monthly fees are paid).

## 2 BACKGROUND

The educational crisis caused by the pandemic has been a concern expressed by many organizations involved in education (OEI 2020; OECD 2020; ECLAC 2020; UNESCO 2020). The schooling of children and young people has been jeopardized, even though classroom attendance has resumed in many educational establishments around the world. Considering the harmful effects of potential mass deschooling, non-governmental organizations have warned of the need for governments to support educational institutions using available resources, particularly in Latin America, which was already showing deteriorations in the social situation because of increased rates of poverty, inequalities and collective discontent (ECLAC 2020). In 2020, more than 160 million students at all levels of education stopped having face-to-face classes

(UNESCO 2020), which led to significant levels of dropout. The implementation of distance education was recommended as one way of reducing the impact of the restrictive measures associated with the pandemic.

For pedagogical reasons, it is important to address the concept of ERT. In this modality, the design and specific purpose of each course and lesson is considered during the process, unlike traditional online and face-to-face classes. In fact, in many cases, there is only a shift from a face-to-face design to virtual teaching without further adaptations. Based on Hodges et al. (2020), it can be inferred that, during this social and health crisis, emerging proposals and adaptations have been generated in both the design and implementation of dissimilar didactic initiatives, affected by multifactorial problems associated with each context, such as geographical conditions, cultural and socio-economic differences, a lack of digital skills, the connectivity divide and teachers' digital background.

The virtualization of teaching, which is mostly carried out in the homes of students and teachers, tends to reduce the school experience to the actions that take place in the online class, to the detriment of the multisensory and intercultural experience of attending an educational institution. This change encourages a questioning of the elements that constitute teaching (Dussel 2020), such as the authority of teachers, the role of space and time, the significance of the physical body in pedagogical interaction, the role played by families or caregivers and the place of teachers in this new educational context.

This scenario has been conducive to rethinking the nature of teaching and learning. Questions regarding the use and influence of new technologies in everyday life are beginning to emerge. This reflection can be situated in the 'postdigital', a conceptualization that departs from the so-called 'digital revolution', moving away from the idea that the use of new technologies has a positive effect by itself (Cramer 2015; Jandrić et al. 2019; Klein 2021). This perspective of the digital problematizes technologies based on their uses and tangible consequences in social, individual and material contexts. In relation to this, authors state that the contemporary practices of students are produced from articulations between analogue and digital technologies, dissimilar spaces, activities and times (Ryberg et al. cited in Jandrić et al. 2019), blurring the boundaries between formal and informal learning. Based on the approaches we have reviewed, it is possible to envisage a scenario that is open to reflection and proposals for change in teaching and learning practices, which involve all disciplines, including the visual arts.

## **2.1 Remote teaching in visual arts**

The massification of visual arts teaching in the remote modality was an unexpected and new situation. During the pandemic, in some places, the amount of time devoted to visual arts learning became more uncertain. However, countries such as Argentina, Scotland, Ireland and the United States began to promote the importance of ensuring that the subject was implemented in the school context, regardless of whether it was carried out online or in face-to-face mode, as it was considered part of a comprehensive and equitable education (Arts Council – Ireland 2021; Dirección General de Cultura y Educación – Gobierno de la Provincia de Buenos Aires 2021; Education Scotland – Foghlam Alba 2021; Mississippi Department of Education 2020; National Art Education Association 2020).

Many visual arts teachers were obliged to abandon their previous plans and teach in an unknown context (Kraehe 2020) and in uncertain situations (Coleman and MacDonald 2020). They had to move towards a scenario where adaptations were made, but they also began to envisage the challenges and opportunities that this educational modality offered. One of the most significant challenges in the Chilean context was to transfer the traditional 'hands on' centrality of art education to the virtual mode.

In the context of the educational emergency, some international publications approached the digital medium as an opportunity for arts education, since, among other aspects, it allowed students to be positioned as critical users of visual content (Huerta and Domínguez 2020). This situation presented opportunities for experimentation with curriculum and pedagogies centred on visual culture (Kraehe 2020). As a result, many teachers had to rethink the way in which their students could do their work (Lee 2020; Vagner 2020). Meanwhile, there were critical aspects for visual arts teachers on an emotional level. There are multiple accounts of the stress and anxiety caused by the need to adapt rapidly to the new situation, in addition to the lack of time to prepare for remote teaching (Kraehe 2020). In short, the various actions, adaptations and the use of new technologies made remote art education possible, but at a significant personal cost and still without evidence of its real effectiveness (Ularu 2020).

Whilst there has been very little research on virtual arts education in the Chilean context, a study which examines arts education in the Metropolitan Region of Santiago, conducted by the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI 2011), could be considered a precedent. This study shows evidence that there is a 'lack of training in updated methodologies and the use of technological didactic media, which limits quality technical work in educational units' (OEI 2011:17), and concludes that there is a lack of teacher training in the design and implementation of technology-mediated strategies.

In 2020, the Chilean Ministry of Education implemented curricular prioritization in all areas, in order to avoid overloading students and teachers and to ensure minimum learning (MINEDUC – Chilean Ministry of Education 2020a, 2020b). However, according to data from Elige Educar (2020), a non-governmental public-private organization, most teachers considered that they had to work longer hours than their usual workday after the closure of schools (46 per cent of women, 35 per cent of men). Based on this, it is possible to observe that the policy implemented did not imply a real reduction in the load perceived by teachers.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This study sought to understand the teaching experiences of nine female visual arts teachers at primary and secondary levels in the educational emergency and confinement period caused by the pandemic. The research explored their accounts, narratives and arguments 'in situ' (Boltanski 2012), as teachers are key agents of educational processes. It set out to investigate the uncertainty experienced by visual arts teachers. An exploratory, qualitative approach was adopted; an iterative process that achieves a good understanding of the phenomenon studied by getting closer to the meanings constructed by individuals (Aspers and Corte 2019). In this study

“reality” is defined through research participants’ interpretations of their own realities’ (Hernández et al. 2014: 8).

The research consisted of two phases. Initially, an up-to-date review of the literature on this topic was conducted. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely through the Zoom platform. In order to organize the interviews, the ‘snowball’ or ‘chain’ sampling technique was used, since the sample involved a specific group of education professionals (Baltar and Gorjup 2012; Pérez-Luco et al. 2017). This study was approved in December 2020, by the ethical committee of Universidad Alberto Hurtado. The data collection instrument was validated by experts in art education outside of the research team and, to ensure an ethical process, the participants completed an informed consent.

### 3.1 Study participants

A total of nine female in-service visual arts teachers were interviewed. Although male and female teachers were contacted, only female teachers responded. This aspect may be important to point out since, according to data from the Ministry of Education of Chile (MINEDUC) (2023), the teaching of visual arts in school institutions in Chile has been exercised mostly and progressively by women (1/3 male teachers vs. 2/3 female teachers). Regional diversity was ensured (north, centre and south of Chile), as well as types of educational establishments in which the participants worked (private, subsidized private and municipal). Their distribution is shown in Table 1:

*Table 1: Distribution of participants by zone, years of teaching, qualifications, type of administration of the institution in which the teachers work and geographical location.*

Zone	Teacher	Years of teaching	Qualifications	Type of administration of school institution	Geographical location
North	T1	5	BA in visual arts and pedagogy in visual arts	Private	Antofagasta
	T2	4	Pedagogy in visual arts	Subsidized private	Alto Hospicio
	T3	11	Pedagogy in visual arts	Municipal	La Serena
Centre	T4	10	Design and pedagogy in visual arts	Private	Santiago (Vitacura)
	T5	8	BA in visual arts and pedagogy in visual arts	Subsidized private	Santiago (Puente Alto)
	T6	4	Design and pedagogy in visual arts	Municipal	Santiago (Estación Central)
South	T7	5	BA in visual arts and pedagogy in visual arts	Private	Puerto Varas
	T8	6	Pedagogy in visual arts	Subsidized private	Villarrica
	T9	18	BA in visual arts and pedagogy in visual arts	Municipal	Ancud

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2021.

### 3.2 Analysis

An analysis was carried out based on Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 2002), beginning with coding and grouping in family networks in order to systematize the data obtained. Relevant aspects were established that made it possible to thematize results based on an analysis of individual teacher accounts and also comparative analysis across participants.

## 4 RESULTS

The results of this research are presented below. Inductively, it was possible to organize the findings into three dimensions, which were broken down into emerging themes. These dimensions are: (1) conditions of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) in visual arts, (2) pedagogical and didactic aspects implemented 'in emergency' and (3) post-emergency projections.

### 4.1 Conditions of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) in visual arts

One generalized situation that was experienced because of the urgency to provide ERT was the intrusion of work into the private space and the need to manage both in the same physical place. The teachers interviewed emphasized that their routines were altered from one moment to the next, as was their perception of space and the time structure of their daily lives. This aspect caused certain disorientation and a constant requirement to adapt rapidly to changing scenarios. In this dimension, it was possible to observe two emerging themes: *uncertainty and the need to 'manage as best as one can' and students and their difficulties in using technologies.*

#### 4.1.1 Uncertainty and the need to 'manage as best one can'

The participating teachers stated that, because the pandemic had led to the temporary closure of the schools at which they worked, there was a great deal of uncertainty about how teaching would be provided, something that some interviewees saw as 'starting anew'. Although several teachers did receive training, the majority reported that they did not receive consistent support from their institutions, having to use their own resources, including the internet and technological devices. So, on the one hand, they were required to continue teaching and, on the other, given insufficient institutional support and guidance on how to do so in this emerging context. This involved great effort and personal exhaustion:

And this year the pandemic came upon us out of the blue, like the tele-classes, we were told to manage as best we could because there was no training. So immediately it was like, well, how do we do it?

(Teacher 4, private school, central zone)

As regards the regional conditions, although there are no major differences between the zones (north, centre, south) since they are heterogeneous in themselves, there may be locations that are more remote – with low internet connectivity – and others that are more central – with greater connectivity. Likewise, there are schools with greater or lesser resources, and students with greater social and economic advantages or disadvantages. Some teachers who worked in remote locations or in settings with greater economic and social disadvantages mentioned that one of the main obstacles to remote

teaching was the difficulty or absence of access to the internet and technological devices on the part of their students. For this reason, some of the educational institutions provided such resources to students who required them:

We had a lot of connectivity problems, but we also had a lot of support from the school and the congregation, and they gave the students tablets and data plans, so we were able to attract more students. But it was difficult at the beginning.

(Teacher 2, subsidized private school, northern zone)

Implementing remote teaching in a diversity of scenarios was initially part of the uncertainty to which the teachers and the institutions had to respond.

#### 4.1.2 *Students and their difficulties in using technologies*

One interesting aspect observed by some teachers was the opportunity to see perspectives of their students which were not previously common knowledge. For example, they discovered that they were not the 'digital natives' (Prensky 2001: 1) as has been widely claimed, but instead were active users of social media:

And we also realized that maybe the digital natives, [...] weren't that native for everything, but they were really good at social media, but they had a hard time with other things that were really simple, like sending an email and writing everything in the subject line.

(Teacher 8, subsidized private school, southern zone)

Faced with the common problem of having to teach visual arts classes at a distance, all the teachers participating in this research reacted quickly, even before the institutions at which they worked. According to their accounts, we can observe that an attempt was made to balance the closure of the institution, the circumstances in which students learn, the means available and their own professional and personal limitations to address this context of uncertainty.

#### **4.2 Pedagogical and didactic aspects implemented 'in emergency'**

Regarding the implementation of teaching, we identified three modalities: *synchronous*, which refers to education mediated by a digital device where students have the opportunity to learn and interact in the moment with their teacher and peers; *asynchronous*, where, mediated by a digital device or not, there is no real-time interaction between the teacher and students in learning; *pedagogical delivery*, which consists of sending work guides, study guides or instructions to the homes of students who did not have access to the internet. The latter was the least common and was done with students living in remote areas. In all three modalities, class time was reduced in comparison with face-to-face classes. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of the different class modalities according to geographical area and school type.

Analysis and interpretation revealed two relevant topics in this dimension: *disappearance of presence, alteration of corporal and non-verbal codes; adaptation and/or construction of didactic proposals and evaluation of artistic learning.*

Table 2: Teaching modalities according to locality and school type.

Zone	Teacher	Type of administration of school institution	Class modality		
			Synchronous	Asynchronous	Pedagogical delivery
North	T1	Private	x	x	
	T2	Subsidized private	x		
	T3	Municipal	x	x	x
Centre	T4	Private	x	x	
	T5	Subsidized private	x	x	
	T6	Municipal	x	x	
South	T7	Private	x	x	
	T8	Subsidized private		x	x
	T9	Municipal	x	x	

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2021.

#### 4.2.1 Disappearance of presence, alteration of corporal and non-verbal codes

This remote modality also involved changes in the students' corporeality and presence, an issue that was disconcerting for some teachers initially, but which later became part of their everyday experience: '[s]o, it was also difficult to convince them to switch on the camera, many of them didn't want to switch it on, so you were doing classes like in a black vacuum' (Teacher 4, private school, central zone). Similarly, based on the interviews, we also verified that physical presence – characteristic of face-to-face classes – among other aspects, allowed greater control of the students' behaviour and enabled a pedagogical approach based on the possible relations between corporeality and artistic materials, something that seems to disappear in the virtual modality:

So, of course, in the face-to-face class you can gesticulate, you can move, you can, I don't know, look. Something I use a lot is that sometimes there's a child who's not paying attention to the class, and I don't stop the class to say 'hey, listen to me', but I go over, touch them on the shoulder, and that immediately rouses them, but in the virtual class I can't do that.

(Teacher 9, municipal school, southern zone)

'You can show them materials, they can touch things, and that's very complicated in this remote situation that we have now' (Teacher 3, municipal school, northern zone).

#### 4.2.2 Adaptation and/or construction of didactic proposals and evaluation of artistic learning

Another aspect seen was the diverse range of adaptations made by the teachers to make up for the lack of access to certain traditional artistic resources and/or materials. From the accounts, we observed that there were adaptive didactic



proposals in which teachers taught one artistic medium through another, such as working on the constituent elements of photography through drawing:

We also worked with photography in seventh grade, and there are many who perhaps didn't have access to it, or didn't dare to, so talking about the fact of giving them several options to develop, for example, if we saw the different camera shots, giving them the possibility of drawing instead of taking photographs and they also did that.

(Teacher 8, subsidized private school, southern zone)

In addition, teachers had to adapt their didactic strategies by trial and error or by using a certain investigative approach in the process of implementation. So, an instructional step-by-step methodology was used as an educational proposal that produces results, although it had certain limitations:

I mean, for example, I'm here, I put up an easel, I put up a flipchart, I give the word, we do it during the videoconference. [...] I went back to take an activity context that had stages, like the project format, but with a much lower level of complexity so it could be resolved mostly in videoconference. [...] What happened to me? What happened was that the 45-minute synchronous exercises worked well, but then I realized that we couldn't go any deeper, you see? So, we had to vary the stages.

(Teacher 4, private school, central zone)

Regarding the assessment of artistic learning, the uncertainty related to the duration of the pandemic and the different legal provisions recommended by the Ministry of Education resulted in a lack of clarity in marking and graduation procedures. In this scenario, the teachers stated that feedback was the instance that was most difficult in assessment:

The students who had internet could send me an e-mail and I would answer them. If they were doing well, if they were doing badly, they would send me a photo. But the 'delivery' students didn't have that possibility. They sent their work finished, so I didn't have the opportunity to correct them, perhaps at the time, or when I was going to send the message it was too late, it caused frustration, and that's something we had to resolve.

(Teacher 8, subsidized private school, southern zone)

Based on this, it can be stated that the teachers interviewed faced an unprecedented teaching situation, different from what they were used to and for which they had not been trained. However, although they were not used to working in a remote modality, they faced this challenge proactively and professionally. They learned to use new technologies and pedagogical resources, considering the different places, meanings and purposes they assigned to the teaching of visual arts (Errázuriz et al. 2018).

#### **4.3 Post-emergency projections: 'The class can't go back to the way it was before'**

Two key aspects can be identified in the teachers' projections about what will happen once the pandemic is over: *continuing what has been 'discovered'* and *the virtual permeability of the school*.

#### 4.3.1 *Continuing what has been 'discovered'*

Most of the teachers interviewed mentioned that the emergency allowed them to discover and learn about a series of strategies, tools and methodologies associated with technologies and virtualization. In this respect, the physical closure of the schools and the exhaustion due to having to teach from their own homes involved efforts that opened up a series of possibilities and led to professional learning. Continuing what has been learned, therefore, seems to be considered valuable and essential. On this basis, most of the teachers projected the following ideas:

I think I'm going to continue most of the things I've discovered because I think it's very necessary. The class can't go back to the way it was before. No doubt about it. The [Google] Classroom, for example, I've already told the students that it's going to be continued, because, as it's a platform, any student who misses class will be able to find the class material.

(Teacher 9, municipal school, southern zone)

One of the main reasons for continuing this kind of practice is to keep a record of the assignments, with their instructions and tutorials, in addition to the classes, so that students can access these resources at any time: 'I've always been one to model the activity. So, I think it would be good to continue doing tutorials, for me to do it myself. Let them see that I'm doing practical activity' (Teacher 8, subsidized private school, southern zone).

#### 4.3.2 *The virtual permeability of the school*

One interesting aspect mentioned by the teachers is continuing the practice of virtual connection with art-related people or situations which are located in places far away from their schools. Using the internet in this way, it is possible to break down the walls of the school, making the public and the private more permeable, allowing students to access other cultures that are outside their own school culture:

I'd like to maintain these connections with the environment. With people. With other people who are from other areas. Now everybody is more used to getting together by Zoom to have meetings in this modality [...] some artist who's in another part of the world, and I can make the connection.

(Teacher 7, private school, southern zone)

It is important to note that the experience of the pandemic and the related educational emergency allowed some of the teachers interviewed to think about pedagogy differently, problematizing school boundaries and thinking about how the educational space can be permeable by being in contact with people who are located elsewhere. In the same way, their didactic proposals were expanded through the use of and experimentation with new tools, everyday supplies, resources and platforms, elements that could remain after the return to face-to-face teaching.

#### 4.4 **Limitations of the study**

Some limitations of the study relate to the sample size which, being qualitative research, focused on in-depth study of participants' accounts rather

than generalization. Even so, it was ensured that the sample was equitable and heterogeneous in terms of the geographical zones and type of school in which the participants worked. Another limitation was the fact that the interviews were online and not all interviewees had good connectivity, which in one case led to difficulties in the flow of the narrative. This was due to the confinement which made it impossible to conduct the interviews in any other way. These aspects reduce the possibility for the study to be representative and to make generalizations from its results. For future studies, the sample could be expanded and interviews and field observations could be carried out in-person in order to contrast the results obtained.

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a series of problems at the social and individual level. Due to the closure of educational establishments and the strict confinement measures enacted for several months in Chile, both the physical space and the art materials were not accessible in schools. Nevertheless, classes had to continue. This research sought to collect accounts of the experiences of nine visual arts teachers who were obliged to overcome these unexpected limitations and continue to deliver their classes.

Regarding the implementation of ERT, one of the first situations mentioned was the intrusion of work into the private space. There appeared what some authors have called 'domiciliation' (Dussel 2020), which refers to the imperative of carrying out all the constituent activities of daily life – including work – from one's own home. This space was not always appropriate for teaching and learning visual arts. This leads us to infer that there are unequal spaces for remote education. In addition, the reduction in class time and the decrease in the type of art materials and resources available resulted in limited experiences for some students and contributed to teacher burnout.

In terms of the pedagogical and didactic aspects of visual arts teaching 'in emergency', we observed that the teachers demonstrated great capacity for flexibility and agency. Interestingly, all the visual arts teachers participating in the study carried out research and experimentation with the teaching and learning strategies they implemented in their classes. Another aspect identified was an expanded meaning of 'instructional pedagogy' in visual arts. In this context of crisis, the success of 'step-by-step' instruction and regulated actions may have emotionally sustained the pedagogical process by offering some certainty to the students in an uncertain context.

A recurring narrative was that of uncertainty in the classroom resulting from not seeing the students and the subsequent loss of the regular cues – including corporeality and non-verbal codes – that allow us to know whether the students are learning. The teachers' accounts also allude to the destabilization of the positions of power in educational interactions, leading to difficulties in controlling the class and student participation, particularly in workshop visual arts lessons.

The visual arts teachers who participated in the study also observed that their students were not 'digital natives' (Prensky 2001) as the new generations have popularly been claimed to be. This aspect may account for a shift that involves new forms of pedagogical interaction as part of social, cultural and material changes (Klein 2021).

Regarding projections for the post-emergency scenario, we can infer that the pandemic caused losses, but also produced challenges and new

professional learning. With the disappearance of physical corporeality in the classroom and the appearance of the image of teachers and students on screens, there is, according to the teachers' accounts, a certain anxiousness and nostalgia for face-to-face teaching, especially when students do not switch on their cameras during the online classes. Following the ideas of Walter Benjamin, de Munck and Gielen argue that in remote education 'the aura' (2020) of the other is lost since images of the members of a class fail to evoke the same effect as the experience of bodily presence.

Finally, a key finding of this study points out that ERT is a valid option in the visual arts educational process when there is an ongoing crisis. However, the question remains as to whether what takes place in this modality can be considered part of regular school, since the types of corporeality, interaction and communication between students and teachers are unique in visual arts. Digital modalities involve other educational spaces and times, which are determining new kinds of presence (Lowenthal and Dennen 2017). Due to the emergence of this type of education, ERT is not yet clearly defined in school curricula and national education policy. This may be relevant to ensure education in countries such as Chile, which often have natural disasters (such as earthquakes) and political contingencies that destabilize the normal functioning of society and education.

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