

Arts-Based Laboratories for Compassionate Futures With Adolescents in Colombian Public Education

Miryam Cristina Fernández Cediél ^{1,2} 

¹ Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universidad Surcolombiana, Colombia

² Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Correspondence: Miryam Cristina Fernández Cediél (cristina.fernandez@usco.edu.co)

Submitted: 29 January 2026 **Accepted:** 27 July 2026 **Published:** 1 October 2026

Issue: This article is part of the issue “Compassionate Futures for Collective Well-Being” edited by Natalia Martini (KU Leuven) and Karin Hannes (KU Leuven), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.i477>

Abstract

Many adolescents in Colombia grow up in contexts of socioeconomic vulnerability, in a society marked by profound and painful experiences resulting from political violence, and with a fast-paced daily life that places them in the paradoxical situation of being forgotten and neglected. In other words, the pace of contemporary life and the expectations of their social environment regarding how they should behave and what they should be like, leaves adolescents with no opportunity, or few opportunities, to get to know themselves, recognise what is happening in their lives, and, in turn, take action to care for themselves and ensure their well-being. Within this context, the Conversations in the Garden programme was integrated into a public school as a laboratory for creative artistic expression, allowing adolescents to talk about and create from their emotions, bodies, identities, future projects, and opinions as citizens. This article presents the methodologies, results, and conclusions from four years of collaborative work, conducted in accordance with the principles of arts-based, narrative, and collaborative research. Among the results, this programme has promoted adolescents' socio-emotional well-being through art and dialogue, grounded in emotional recognition and management, and by addressing relational and interpersonal issues to cultivate empathy, interdependence, and mutual responsibility. Likewise, art-mediated conversations have promoted greater self-awareness, resilience, and life skills in adolescents. In short, the process, grounded in dialogue among stakeholders within the educational institution, has been slow; however, progress has been made in recognising the need to create spaces for shared care and to pursue compassionate futures.

Keywords

adolescents; arts-based research; compassionate future; narrative research; pedagogy of slowness

1. Introduction

The contemporary Colombian educational system is increasingly defined by a “pedagogy of acceleration” that prioritises neoliberal performance and the fragmentation of school time. This framework creates an ecosystem of constant pressure in which the system demands that pupils “be productive,” a requirement that often leads to the loss of their human essence (Fernández-Cediel et al., 2022). In this context, “human essence” is understood as a singular subjectivity and an inherent capacity for *sentipensar* (sensing-thinking) that precedes and transcends the roles of academic or economic utility; it is the core of human existence, enabling self-recognition and relational care beyond productive performance (Bastidas, 2020; Domènech Francesch, 2009). This focus on immediate results and “doing” leaves adolescents with little space to recognise their own identities or take action for their well-being. The urgency of this issue is underscored by national data from the Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education (ICFES)—the national agency responsible for standardised educational assessment tests. Results from the Saber Tests through the 2023 Socio-Emotional Skills Index show critical gaps in the development of skills such as empathy and self-regulation among students in vulnerable contexts (ICFES, 2024). Specifically, these indicators show that students in rural areas and in official (public) schools have significantly lower socio-emotional scores, confirming that the educational system often fails to provide adequate support to its most disadvantaged populations.

In response to these systemic failures, a growing national trend has emerged, utilising art and storytelling for social and emotional healing. This movement gained significant institutional momentum around 2016, when the Ministry of National Education introduced initiatives such as “Step by Step” and “Emotions for Life” to integrate social-emotional learning into the national curriculum. These programs arose from the need to address emotional awareness and regulation within a formal framework (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016). This trend has evolved through diverse applications, such as the 2021 programme Schools as Territories of Peace in Bogotá, which utilises restorative school justice and horizontal dialogue to move beyond punitive models. Furthermore, specialised interventions such as the “Unarmed Warriors” in Manizales (Lugo, n.d.) and the FutYouRes project (British Council, n.d.) have demonstrated since the late 2010s that arts-based approaches can facilitate the expression of traumatic experiences and foster resilience among conflict-affected youth.

The urgency of this issue is compounded by a convergence of historical and structural pressures. The legacy of Colombia’s 6-decade-long internal armed conflict is not merely a historical backdrop but a pervasive force that has normalised aggression and invisibility within the social fabric. This complex national reality frames the context for Conversations in the Garden, the creative-artistic laboratory and research project presented in this article. This initiative was implemented in the Department of Huila—located in the country’s southwestern Andean region—specifically in its capital city, Neiva. Here, socio-economic vulnerability is acute. The programme and subsequent research were implemented at the CEINAR Educational Institution, the only public school in the region specialising in artistic training. For these students, more than 75% of whom belong to low-income households, poverty represents a “critical crossroads” where material barriers fuel psychosocial stress.

Furthermore, the demands of late modernity impose a “pedagogy of acceleration” that prioritises immediate productivity and performance. This acceleration results in a profound “depersonalisation” of human

relationships, leaving students feeling like “objects” of educational policy rather than “subjects” with a voice. Contextual observations prior to the implementation of the Conversations in the Garden programme revealed that this environment generates an “emotional turmoil” characterised by a persistent sense of invisibility and loneliness, which adolescents describe as a “knot in the heart.” This distress is often exacerbated by the pressure to meet unattainable aesthetic standards, leading to severe self-criticism and shame regarding their own bodies. Consequently, the adolescent in Huila is often trapped between a resilient ambition for success and a reality marked by silence, domestic violence, and a lack of validation from the adult world.

Building upon this emerging national trend of utilising art for social-emotional healing, the research team proposes arts-based research (ABR) as a methodological response to the rigid, diagnostic intervention techniques of traditional experimental research. By integrating academic inquiry with artistic practice, ABR allows for a more imaginative and emotional understanding of school practices. Within this framework, the research method is assimilated to a concept of “style,” where the objective is not to obtain definitive answers but to use the expressive qualities of art to generate new conversations and convey complex meanings.

Complementing this, the pedagogy of slowness serves as a critical antidote to the neoliberal acceleration of performance that dominates contemporary education. While European scholarship emphasises finding the “right time” for deep, lasting knowledge (Domènech Francesch, 2009), this perspective is expanded by the “Slow Humanities” movement. Berg and Seeber (2016) challenge the “culture of speed” in the academy, arguing that deliberate reflection and a slower pace are essential for protecting the quality of thought and the integrity of the educational encounter. This aligns with South American scholars who offer a vital localised perspective. Bastidas (2020), drawing on the foundational work of Colombian sociologist Fals Borda (2009), proposes *sentipensar* (sensing-thinking) as an epistemological subversion of traditional utopias. For an international audience, it is crucial to clarify that *sentipensar* is not simply the addition of emotion to reason. As expanded by decolonial scholars such as Escobar (2014), it is a political and ethical stance that explicitly rejects Western Cartesian dualisms (such as the separation of mind/body and reason/emotion), validating lived experiences and bodily emotions as rigorous forms of knowledge. When linked to compassion, *sentipensar* transforms empathy from a passive emotion into an active, relationally responsive practice. It demands pedagogies of the pause that foster deep listening and mutual recognition. This framework allows adolescents to move from being “objects” of educational policy to “subjects” with their own voices, humanising a school environment often depersonalised by a pace of instruction that may not suit all students or allow for ample individual contributions, self-reflection, and optimal self-development.

Finally, compassion and the pursuit of “compassionate futures” provide a moral foundation for reimagining these systems. Drawing on Nussbaum’s (2013) conceptualisation of political emotions, “compassion” is defined here not as an individualised, passive feeling of pity, but as an active, relational driving force behind school coexistence. It involves a present-day praxis and a commitment to “being with” the other, validating their suffering, and co-constructing meaning. Consequently, a “compassionate future” is the *telos* (the ultimate aim) of this practice. It is not merely a distant, abstract utopia, but what Freire (1992) terms an “untested feasibility” (*inédito viable*)—a concrete reality actively built in the present through horizontal and dialogical relationships. As informed by the critical pedagogy of scholars such as Cabrera Hernández (2022) and Giroux (2014), we interpret the “compassionate future” as a form of ongoing political resistance: a call to transformative action that leverages present compassion as a means of denouncing inequality and rebuilding the social fabric.

Building upon these foundations of artistic inquiry, slow pedagogy, and compassionate ethics, *Conversations in the Garden* is presented as an intervention to restore human dignity within the Colombian public education system.

2. The Conversations in the Garden Programme: A Collaborative Laboratory for Compassionate Futures

Conversations in the Garden is a qualitative and collaborative intervention integrated into the CEINAR Educational Institution in Neiva, Huila. Since 2022, the programme has served an average of 433 adolescents annually, aged 11 to 20, most of whom navigate high socio-economic vulnerability. The programme was structured to operationalise its three theoretical foundations—ABR, the pedagogy of slowness, and the ethics of compassion—through an ecosystem of strategies that shift the focus from academic productivity to human existence.

The ABR methodology is operationalised through “creative-reflective workshops.” These workshops use symbolic tools such as metaphorical collages, timeline friezes, and graffiti murals to allow adolescents to materialise complex emotions that verbal language often fails to capture. Within this framework, artistic practice is seen as a primary means of examining human experience. For instance, adolescents use these artistic media to navigate “emotional turmoil,” expressing a persistent sadness and loneliness they describe as a “knot in the heart.” Through art, the programme addresses the shame tied to unattainable aesthetic standards and the daily fear linked to normalised physical punishment in their upbringing.

The pedagogy of slowness is integrated through the creation of “floating meeting spaces.” Unlike traditional corrective school models, these spontaneous, non-punitive conversations in corridors and green areas allow for a “necessary pause” from the relentless pace of academic assessments. This strategy validates the adolescent’s need for movement and meaning, turning the school into a territory of “being” rather than just “performing.” By adjusting the pace of learning to the individual’s uniqueness, the programme fosters deep, lasting knowledge rather than superficial results.

Finally, the ethics of compassion is enacted through “listening spaces” guided by postmodern collaborative practices. In these sessions, the mental health professional acts as a “conversational partner” rather than an authoritarian figure, recognising the adolescent as the expert on their own life. These horizontal relationships facilitate the re-narration of painful experiences, transforming pain into possibility. As noted by scholars, this compassionate future functions as a form of political resistance, denouncing inequality and rebuilding the social fabric through an ethic of care.

3. Methodological Design and Study Context

This article presents a comprehensive synthesis of the advanced processes and results obtained from the *Conversations in the Garden* programme. The initiative emerged organically in the post-pandemic context, when students returned to in-person classes and explicitly expressed feelings that had been unheard and marginalised within their school environment. In response to these institutional challenges, the director of the CEINAR Educational Institution—who is also a member of the CRECER research group—invited the

group to design and implement a tailored programme to address the adolescents' need for participation and emotional validation.

Therefore, this study is not a singular, isolated evaluation but rather a robust recognition of the programme's progress, drawing on evidence generated by multiple specific research processes developed within the programme's framework over four years. These embedded studies focused on distinct dimensions of the adolescent experience, including emotional regulation, bodily self-awareness, active participation, and the profound impacts of domestic violence.

3.1. The Research Team and Professional Positioning

The programme and its embedded research exercises were initiated and directed by the author of this manuscript, who serves as the creator, main implementer, and lead researcher of the initiative. Given the programme's longitudinal nature, the operational team rotates over the years. Under the author's continuous leadership, this multidisciplinary team has integrated psychology professionals, final-year practicum students in psychology, undergraduate student researchers (*semilleristas*) from the CRECER research group, and volunteer professionals from various social science disciplines.

The professional relationship between the research team and the school was collaborative yet independent. While the team actively facilitated the programme within the institution, they did not act as traditional school staff. Instead, they positioned themselves as "conversational partners," maintaining an independent, empathetic stance to foster horizontal dialogue.

3.2. Methodological Approach, Data Sources, and Participants

Methodologically, ABR was established as the programme's core foundation. However, it was operationalised beyond a mere data-collection tool; alongside social constructionism, ABR was adopted as an empathetic, accessible pedagogical strategy designed to bridge communication gaps with adolescents through alternative, artistic languages.

By utilising art as both a communicative bridge and an analytical source, the research design integrated Narrative Research (NR) to co-construct meanings from the students' life stories. The data sources discussed in this article—ranging from visual metaphors to narrative transcriptions—are the consolidated outcome of the aforementioned specific research exercises. The participant group generating these narratives ($N \approx 433$ annually) has a balanced gender distribution (45.5% female, 54.4% male). Notably, over 75% of these participants live in low-income households, constantly exposed to environmental stressors and domestic violence.

3.3. Operationalisation and Procedures

The intervention is structured into three work blocks:

1. Creative-reflective workshops: This component addresses identity, future projects, and emotions through symbolic artistic tools.

2. Listening spaces: This component involves individual sessions where adolescents propose their own narratives.
3. Floating meeting spaces: This component evolved from the initial implementation of “floating chats”—defined as spontaneous, informal, and non-punitive dialogues—into an emergent institutional practice known as “floating meeting spaces.” These spaces are strategically located in school corridors, sports areas, or green zones, where the program team engages with adolescents outside formal classroom structures to humanise educational practice and to identify emotional distress in real time.

3.4. Rigour and Ethical Considerations

Methodological rigour was ensured through a systematic triangulation of sources, cross-referencing field notes, photographic records, and adolescents’ visual works with quantitative data gathered from satisfaction surveys and registration platforms. The analytical process followed the six-phase thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Categories were constructed using a hybrid approach: deductive categories were derived from the programme’s theoretical foundations (ABR, pedagogy of slowness, and ethics of compassion), while inductive categories emerged from recurring patterns in the participants’ narratives and artistic metaphors. This process involved a recursive coding of field notes and narrative transcriptions to identify key themes in socio-emotional transformation.

Ethically, the programme strictly adhered to informed consent and assent protocols involving both students and parents. To guarantee confidentiality, all participants were identified through pseudonyms. Given the sensitive nature of the narratives handled—including domestic violence, coming-out processes, or potential suicidal ideation—the programme implemented rigorous referral protocols (*Rutas de Atención*). In the event of such disclosures, the team immediately activated school protection mechanisms and facilitated referrals to specialised mental health and social services. This ensured that the programme’s socio-emotional accompaniment served as complementary support to the formal institutional and legal frameworks, prioritising the safety and integrity of adolescents at all times.

4. Results

The implementation of “Conversations in the Garden” has generated significant positive changes in both adolescents’ socio-emotional well-being and the CEINAR institution’s internal educational dynamics. These impacts were achieved through the strategic integration of artistic mediation and horizontal dialogue.

4.1. Strengthening Socio-Emotional Well-Being and Self-Awareness

The implementation of Conversations in the Garden effectively promoted adolescents’ socio-emotional well-being by fostering emotional recognition and management through the strategic integration of art and dialogue. This impact was primarily achieved through creative-reflective workshops, in which artistic mediation enabled participants to cultivate empathy, interdependence, and mutual responsibility. As a result, adolescents demonstrated measurable growth in self-awareness, resilience, and essential life skills.

Significantly, this growth serves as a qualitative subversion of the national indicators reported by the ICFES. While the 2023 Saber Tests’ Socio-Emotional Skills Index highlights a critical gap in low-income

sectors—suggesting that material well-being is a primary determinant for developing skills like empathy and self-regulation—our findings demonstrate that narrative agency can bridge this divide. Despite more than 75% of our participants belonging to households with low income-generating capacity and high vulnerability, they successfully developed the very socio-emotional competencies that standardised assessments identify as lacking in their socio-economic demographic.

Furthermore, a significant positive change was observed in body self-awareness and identity construction. By using symbolic tools such as metaphorical collages to navigate social standards, adolescents reported feeling more confident and happier, recognising their bodies' functionality beyond mere aesthetic pressures. This process allowed them to externalise constant doubts in front of the mirror, such as: “Do I look ugly or pretty?” (*¿Me veo feo o bonito?*). Furthermore, the workshops revealed distinct gender nuances. While younger girls expressed discomfort at being taller than average (*más altas que el promedio*), boys' concerns focused on being too short (*muy enanos*) or lacking muscle tone. Specifically, male participants showed increased confidence and self-acceptance in their artistic productions. Likewise, the programme revealed distinct developmental nuances across the age spectrum (11–20 years). While younger adolescents (11–14 years) focused predominantly on body changes and peer acceptance—as exemplified in Figure 1, which illustrates the complex emotions experienced during discrimination or teasing—older participants (18–20 years) presented more nuanced narratives about career uncertainty and the transition to active citizenship. Within these narratives, digital interaction was identified as a core component of their emotional world, characterised by “multimacy”—defined here as the construction of shared intimacy and affective bonds across multiple digital interfaces and social media platforms.



Figure 1. Drawing about feelings when teenagers feel discriminated against or teased.

The programme also provided a vital safe refuge for the LGBTIQ+ community. Through art, these students found a safe space to express their feelings and narrate their coming-out processes. This facilitated the mitigation of fears regarding stigmatisation by the family and allowed students to view their sexuality as a “normal” and valid aspect of their identity.

The shift toward emotional autonomy was further catalysed by the “listening spaces” and “floating meeting spaces,” which provided a non-punitive environment for expression. Adolescents expressed the weight of social standards through powerful self-criticisms—“I discriminate against myself”—or described their emotional distress as a persistent “knot in the heart” (*nudo en el corazón*). A pattern of recurring discouragement often accompanies this feeling, which they refer to as “being bummed” (*bajoneadas*), stemming from a sense of being a “nobody in their homes” (*cero a la izquierda*), where their voices are often not validated. However, the programme allowed them to identify alternative supports, with many recognising music and pets as “cures for the soul” (*curas para el alma*). This means that by slowing the pace of school life and offering horizontal dialogue, the programme enabled adolescents to transform deep emotional distress into narratives of hope and agency. Ultimately, the use of art enabled participants to highlight their individual skills and talents, effectively reducing the stigma associated with their socio-economic vulnerability and empowering them to propose alternatives within their precarious contexts.

4.2. From Political Apathy to Active Citizenship

The programme achieved a significant paradigm shift in how adolescents perceive their role within the school community, moving from political apathy to active agency. This transformation was facilitated by abandoning rigid, adult-centred structures in favour of horizontal methodologies that aligned with the students’ realities. By positioning the programme team as “conversational partners” and recognising adolescents as experts in their own lives, the intervention effectively subverted the traditional passive role often assigned to students in public education.

This impact was operationalised through creative workshops designed to strengthen leadership and collective deliberation. For instance, the use of “emergency committees” allowed participants to negotiate solutions to fictional community conflicts. At the same time, specific sessions on “rights, responsibilities, and leadership” helped them understand their active role in renewing civic life. As a result, adolescents reported a marked improvement in their ability to engage in dialogue and negotiate agreements in conflict situations at both school and at home.

The success of this component is reflected in participants’ evaluations, which explicitly highlighted “having a voice and a vote” as the aspect they valued most after years of feeling like a “nobody” in their own homes and schools. In fact, 84% of participants reported high satisfaction with the experience, citing the validation of their opinions as a key factor in their empowerment. By integrating their tastes and life experiences into decision-making through murals and social cartographies, the programme effectively empowered adolescents to propose alternatives to their precarious contexts and take control of their own future narratives.

4.3. Humanisation of the Educational Climate

The implementation of Conversations in the Garden significantly humanised the educational environment by replacing punitive, corrective models with a culture of shared care and deep listening. This transformation was primarily achieved through the operationalisation of the pedagogy of slowness by institutionalising “floating meeting spaces.” This component evolved from the initial implementation of “floating chats”—defined as spontaneous, informal, and non-punitive dialogues—into an emergent institutional practice that provides a “necessary pause” from the neoliberal acceleration of performance. By legitimising these

encounters and ensuring terminological and procedural consistency, the institution evolved from a place of mere surveillance into a territory for “being” and “feeling.”

A decisive factor in this shift was the redefinition of the psychological team’s role from authoritarian figures to “conversational partners.” This horizontal relationship fostered a safe climate that allowed adolescents to express deep emotional discomfort and discuss sensitive topics and traumatic experiences such as future plans or the daily fear of the “slipper” (*chancla*) as a tool of domestic punishment. In these spaces, adolescents also revealed the deep impact of psychological violence, reporting that they were frequently treated with derogatory terms like “stupid” (*brutos*), “useless” (*inútiles*), or “good for nothing” (*no sirven para nada*), which had led them into a state of profound silence. For the research team, transitioning to “conversational partners” represented a profound personal and professional challenge, requiring an unlearning of traditional clinical hierarchies to embrace the vulnerability of the encounter. While this shift was initially met with institutional scepticism, the school administration progressively came to value the programme as it observed a reduction in punitive disciplinary interventions and a noticeable improvement in student engagement.

Consequently, the programme facilitated the early identification of extreme situations before they escalated into crises, effectively serving as a fundamental protective factor within the school. Ultimately, by validating students’ subjectivity, the programme succeeded in subverting adult-centredness and establishing the school as a setting for social justice and civic reconciliation.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the transformation of the Colombian public education system requires more than administrative changes; it demands a fundamental shift in the organising principles of school life. By moving away from a “pedagogy of acceleration” focused on productivity, Conversations in the Garden offers a blueprint for a school system grounded in the ethics of care and the construction of compassionate futures.

5.1. Compassion as Sentipensar: A political and Organising Principle

In the context of Colombian public education, compassion transcends a mere individual emotion; it emerges as a collective, political, and relationally responsive capacity to recognise the structural suffering of youth and take transformative action. This political dimension finds a profound local, emic resonance in the Latin American tradition of *sentipensar* (sensing-thinking). Rooted in the legacy of Orlando Fals Borda, *sentipensar* advocates for the subversion of dominant pedagogies by holistically integrating reason and emotion.

Conversations in the Garden demonstrates how compassion, understood as *sentipensar*, can function as an organising principle of social life within the educational domain. By integrating “floating meeting spaces” and “listening spaces,” the programme effectively institutionalises a framework in which human relationships are lived to the full, rather than fragmented by the demands of productivity. This shift subverts the “pedagogy of acceleration” and the “evaluation clock,” allowing for a pause that restores human dignity in contexts marked by exclusion (Anderson, 2019; Cabrera Hernández, 2022; Giroux, 2014).

By positioning adolescents as experts in their own lives, the programme operationalises this compassionate framework through the co-construction of new meanings. As proposed by Freire (1997), this process of consciousness-raising is fundamental for restoring human dignity in contexts marked by exclusion and violence. The shift toward a relationally responsive identity is evident when students move from being “objects” of educational policy to “subjects” with their own voices, utilising art and narrative to transform their “emotional turmoil” into collective resilience (Bastidas, 2020; Freire, 1997; Gergen, 2009).

International studies and reviews of the arts’ impact on resilience reinforce this idea (Malchiodi, 2020; McNiff, 1998; Stickley & Clift, 2017), demonstrating that creative mediation facilitates access to areas of thought that purely rational language cannot address. By externalising trauma through visual symbols, adolescents build a protective distance that allows them to re-narrate their stories from a position of agency rather than victimhood.

Ultimately, this localised understanding of compassion—as a relational and political practice rather than a diagnostic intervention—reinforces the idea that the future of education lies in fostering communities where compassion and social justice become the driving forces for a world free of discrimination and for transforming pain into collective possibility.

6. Scaling and Global Lessons

The positive changes initiated by Conversations in the Garden demonstrate that when educational processes prioritise emotional validation over neoliberal productivity metrics, adolescents undergo a transformative shift from political apathy to active agency (Fernández-Cediel et al., 2022). By identifying emotional distress in real time and transforming it into narratives of hope, the programme has established a foundational model for a more compassionate school climate, with 84% of participants reporting high satisfaction at finally having “a voice and a vote.” On a national scale, these lessons suggest that the reimagining of the Colombian educational system lies in institutionalising non-punitive “floating spaces” and horizontal dialogues as essential components of the curriculum rather than as peripheral interventions. Such an approach aligns with and strengthens existing national trends toward restorative justice and social-emotional healing. For an international audience, it is crucial to note that in Colombia’s post-conflict context, restorative justice in schools involves shifting away from punitive disciplinary models—which often mirror the country’s historical normalisation of violence—toward practices that actively repair harm and rebuild trust through horizontal dialogue. Concurrently, social-emotional healing addresses the intergenerational trauma and psychosocial legacies left by the six-decade-long internal armed conflict. By operationalising these frameworks, Conversations in the Garden provides a scalable model for educational institutions in regions still grappling with these historical wounds, demonstrating how schools can transition from inherited cycles of aggression to enduring cultures of peace (Secretaría de Educación del Distrito, 2022).

On a global scale, the success of this laboratory informs the reimagining of future educational systems by positioning the pedagogy of slowness as a universal antidote to the depersonalising effects of performance-driven acceleration (Domènech Francesch, 2009). By protecting the “right time” for reflection, error, and deep listening, schools worldwide can transition from sites of surveillance and performance to territories of being and feeling (Bastidas, 2020). Ultimately, building compassionate futures requires a global community of practice dedicated to social justice and civic reconciliation, in which the voices of

adolescents—as historical subjects—serve as the central driving force in institutional life (Bastidas, 2020; Domènech Francesch, 2009; Giroux, 2014).

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the CEINAR Educational Institution for opening its doors to this programme and for collaborating on an ongoing basis to provide adolescents with spaces for artistic reflection that improve their overall well-being. Likewise, the team comprises students, final-year psychology students from the Universidad Surcolombiana, and volunteer professionals who have joined this initiative.

Funding

This programme has received ongoing funding from the Universidad Surcolombiana through its annual calls for proposals to cover the team's travel expenses to visit the educational institution where the adolescents are located and to purchase materials for the artistic processes. Publication of this article in open access was made possible through the institutional membership agreement between Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Cogitatio Press.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The qualitative data (including visual arts and narrative transcripts) that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions regarding the adolescent participants, but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to ethical approval.

LLMs Disclosure

No LLMs were used in any stage of this research or the preparation of this manuscript.

References

- Anderson, H. (2019). *Conversaciones, lenguaje y posibilidades: Un enfoque posmoderno de la terapia* (2nd ed.). Amorrortu.
- Bastidas, F. L. (2020). Sentipensar el pluriverso: Legado del maestro Orlando Fals Borda para la sub-versión, la utopía y el buen vivir. *Collectivus*, 7(1), 63–74. <https://doi.org/10.15648/Collectivus.vol7num1.2020.2532>
- Berg, M., & Seeber, B. K. (2016). *The slow professor: Challenging the culture of speed in the academy*. University of Toronto Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- British Council. (n.d.). #FUTyURES: El proyecto que une a jóvenes de Colombia e Irlanda del Norte para construir paz a través del arte. <https://www.britishcouncil.co/sobre/prensa/futyours-el-proyecto-que-une-a-jovenes-de-colombia-e-irlanda-del-norte-para-construir-paz>
- Cabrera Hernández, D. M. (2022). Leer el mundo, experiencia y praxis. *Logos Revista de Filosofía*, 50(138), 75–92. <https://doi.org/10.26457/lrf.v138i138.3171>
- Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education. (2024). *Informe nacional de resultados de las pruebas Saber 3º, 5º, 7º y 9º: Aplicación 2023*. <https://www.icfes.gov.co/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Informe-Nacional-de-Resultados-Saber-3-5-7-9.pdf>

- Domènech Francesch, J. (2009). *Elogio de la educación lenta*. Editorial Graó.
- Escobar, A. (2014). *Sentipensar con la tierra: Nuevas lecturas sobre desarrollo, territorio y diferencia*. Ediciones UNAULA.
- Fals Borda, O. (2009). *Una sociología sentipensante para América Latina*. Siglo del Hombre Editores; CLACSO.
- Fernández-Cediel, M. C., Benavides-Calderón, Y. F., Tovar-Sandino, A. M., Leal-Acosta, K. J., & Polo-Morales, M. C. (2022). Conversación en el jardín: Etapa diagnóstica 1. *Revista Proyección Social*, 6(1), 76–88. <https://journalusco.edu.co/index.php/rps/article/view/3662>
- Freire, P. (1992). *Pedagogía de la esperanza: Un reencuentro con la pedagogía del oprimido*. Siglo XXI Editores.
- Freire, P. (1997). *A la sombra de este árbol*. El Roure.
- Gergen, K. J. (2009). *An invitation to social construction* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Giroux, H. A. (2014). *La guerra del neoliberalismo contra la educación superior*. Herder Editorial.
- Lugo, M. (n.d.). *Guerreros desarmados: Investigación-acción, lo dialógico y lo narrativo*. Universidad de Manizales.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (2020). *Trauma and expressive arts therapy: Brain, body, and imagination in the healing process*. Guilford Publications.
- McNiff, S. (1998). *Art-based research*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Ministerio de Educación Nacional. (2016). *Paso a paso: Estrategia de formación de competencias socioemocionales en la educación secundaria y media. Guía del docente (Undécimo grado)*. https://www.mineduacion.gov.co/1780/articles-385321_recurso.pdf
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2013). *Political emotions: Why love matters for justice*. Harvard University Press.
- Secretaría de Educación del Distrito. (2022). *Programa integral de educación socioemocional, ciudadana y escuelas como territorios de paz. Guía pedagógica: Diversidad e inclusión*. Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá. <https://repositorios.educacionbogota.edu.co/bitstreams/0c3edcb3-0886-4fd0-9c06-c13bab5a0c87/download>
- Stickley, T., & Clift, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Arts, health and wellbeing: A theoretical inquiry for practice*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

About the Author



Miryam Cristina Fernández Cediel (PhD, Vrije Universiteit Brussel) is a professor and Head of Psychology at the Universidad Surcolombiana, Colombia. Her research applies a social constructionist approach to explore how the arts promote peace, reconciliation, and psychosocial well-being among youth and vulnerable populations.