Structural violence and artistic education in Colombia. Arts and an emancipatory path towards peace

Daniel J. Barrera Pérez
Psicólogo (Universidad Nacional de Colombia)
Estudiante del M.A. Peace and Conflict Studies (U. de Magdeburgo - OvGU)   ✉ ⓘ

ᴱᴺᴳ **Abstract:** This paper investigates how artistic education (AE) in Colombia, often marginalized in public schools, can both reinforce and challenge social inequalities. Through the lens of structural violence, this research explores the emancipatory potential of the AE class, questioning how it might become a space for promoting social justice and peace.

The main objectives of the article were to identify a relationship between the arts, AE, and structural violence in Colombia, and to explore the idea that a quality AE class is necessary for everyone, transformative, and ideal for encouraging peacebuilding. The *focus group* methodology was used to gather insights from six participants with close relationships with arts and AE. The *focus group* transcription was then analyzed using thematic analysis. In the findings, two key concepts emerged: the *Comprehensive Notion of Arts* (CNA) and the *Limited Notion of Arts* (LNA); these contrasting views reflect broader societal attitudes toward art.

It is concluded that poor or absent AE is a violent phenomenon because it reduces people's scope of possibilities and tools to imagine and build a different, less violent future, limiting Colombian society's capacity to transform its conflict.

Keywords: artistic education, structural violence, peace studies, peacebuilding, focus group.

ᴱˢ Violencia estructural y educación artística en Colombia. Las artes y un camino emancipador hacia la paz

Resumen: Este artículo investiga cómo la educación artística (EA) en Colombia, a menudo marginada en las escuelas públicas, puede tanto reforzar como desafiar las desigualdades sociales. A través del concepto de violencia estructural, esta investigación explora el potencial emancipador de la clase de EA, al debatir cómo podría convertirse en un espacio para promover la justicia social y la paz.

Los principales objetivos del artículo han sido identificar una relación entre las artes, la EA y la violencia estructural en Colombia, y explorar la idea de que una clase de EA de calidad es necesaria para todos, transformadora, e ideal para fomentar la construcción de la paz. Se llevó a cabo un *grupo focal* para recoger las percepciones de seis participantes con relaciones estrechas con las artes y la EA. A continuación, se analizó la transcripción del *grupo focal* mediante un análisis temático. En los resultados surgieron dos conceptos clave: la *Noción Ampliada de las Artes* (CNA, por sus siglas en inglés) y la *Noción Limitada de las Artes* (LNA, por sus siglas en inglés); estos puntos de vista contrapuestos reflejan actitudes sociales generalizadas hacia el arte.

Se concluye que una EA pobre o ausente es una realidad violenta porque reduce el abanico de posibilidades y herramientas con que las personas cuentan para imaginar y construir un futuro diferente y menos violento, lo cual limita la capacidad de la sociedad colombiana para transformar su conflicto.

Palabras clave: educación artística, violencia estructural, estudios de paz, construcción de paz, grupo focal.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Conceptual horizons. 3. Methodology. 4. Findings and analysis. 5. Conclusions. and tasks. 6. References.

1. Introduction

In Colombia, access to artistic education (AE) in public schools is very limited, particularly in rural areas. While much research has been done on the role of education in fostering peace, the specific relationship between artistic education and structural violence remains under-explored in the Colombian context. Based on the idea that an intended or unintended act is considered violent if it thwarts the development of individuals and groups of people—as proposed by Johan Galtung—, I contend that AE can be violent if it reproduces types of social organization that promote exclusion and isolate arts and artists, but that there is also emancipatory potential within it, through the development of sensitivity and creative expression.

This research is guided by two primary questions: What is the relationship between the arts, public AE, and structural violence in Colombia? And how can AE challenge dynamics and ideas that result in unequal life chances? These questions arise from the theoretical proposition that poor quality AE or its absence contribute to structural violence by denying individuals—particularly in underserved regions of Colombia—the opportunity to engage in creative self-expression and critical thinking. Thus, I briefly investigate the situation of AE in Colombian public schools, I explore the role of AE in reproducing structural violence and fostering structural peace, and I propose certain practices to make AE a more inclusive and transformative force in Colombian schools. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate on how education, and particularly AE, can be a vehicle for social change in Colombia.

The paper begins with an elaboration of the conceptual framework, followed by a description of the methodology and the presentation of the findings and its analysis. I conclude with a number of recommendations and insights that researchers, policymakers and practitioners of the field might find valuable.

2. Conceptual horizons

2.1. On structural violence

Structural violence is often related to injustice, inequality and social exclusion (Karlberg 2012; Rylko-Bauer & Farmer 2017; Chrobak 2022), but it is difficult to actually "perceive" it in particular realities without resorting to theoretical abstractions. To begin with, I find it enlightening to take Galtung's general definition of violence:

> *Violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations.* ...
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> Violence is that which increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance (Galtung 1969, p. 168).

A clear example of violence is to deprive someone of food or education. It is violent because it broadens the gap between what the person can do while starving or in ignorance, and what they could do if properly fed or educated. In this sense, human interactions are violent when they harm, threaten or seem to threaten individuals' integrity, as well as when they cause individuals to feel unvalued or powerless. "I see violence as avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to *life*, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible. Threats of violence are also violence" (Galtung 1990, p. 292).

Now, Galtung (1969) pointed out that structural violence is a type of violence in which there is no visible perpetrator, not one single actor exerting power, but sets of social, economic and political dynamics leading to unequal life chances. This expands the aforementioned notion of violence, but follows the same path. Norms and expectations in a society, for example, can significantly impact individuals' lives. When norms thwart the development of humans' potential, affecting multiple people or groups, manifestations of structural violence appear. "When one husband beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence" (Galtung 1969, p. 171). In the same vein as Galtung, Chrobak writes that structural violence "refers to social and institutional solutions that limit the possibilities of realizing individuals' or groups' physical and mental potential" (2022, p. 173). Structural violence is linked to the organization of society, to prejudices and expectations that can easily disappear from sight (Chrobak 2022). An example is provided by Bourdieu:

> The structural violence exerted by the financial markets, in the form of layoffs, loss of security, etc., is matched sooner or later in the form of suicides, crime and delinquency, drug addiction, alcoholism, a whole host of minor and major everyday acts of violence (1998a, p. 40).

Bourdieu also points at the educational system: "the school institution *contributes* (I insist on this word) to the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital and, consequently, of the structure of social space" (1998b, p. 19), and asserts that the *habitus* leads us to conduct certain actions that help reproducing social order as it is.

> In other words, the action of the educational system results from the more or less orchestrated actions of thousands of small versions of Maxwell's demon who, by their well-ordered choices aligned with the objective order ... tend to reproduce this order without either knowing they are doing so or wanting to do so (Bourdieu 1998b, p. 26).

Structural violence is so harmful because it operates while making certain conditions seem "natural;" they do because, under normal circumstances, everybody carries out the same "orchestrated actions" day in and day out, so the structure remains pretty much unchanged: *it is what it is*. Hence, following Bourdieu and other

critical authors like Freire (2005) or Giroux (2022), education—especially in formal environments such as public schools or universities—tends to reproduce and legitimize established power dynamics. The question is then: Can it do the opposite? And, if so, how?

2.2. Artistic education in Colombia

In explaining the reasons for Colombian 2021 social outburst, Durán-Vélez (2023) mentions a general discontent with right-wing ex-president Iván Duque, the tributary reform he tried to set forth, and that "access to basic healthcare and education continues to be a privilege" (p. 24). Colombia's history is marked by a violent, protracted, internal conflict that has deeply affected politics, culture, and its social fabric (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. 2019), which has led to poor economic development, impacting, among other spheres, education. Indeed, access to basic education is still a struggle in certain Colombian regions and for certain communities (González Bustelo 2016; Carroll et al. 2020).

The report of González Bustelo (2016) and numerous sources (Paulson et al. 2007; Milton 2018; Lufty et al. 2019; Novelli et al. 2019; Palacios et al. 2023) point out that there is a correlation between education and peace. As discussed above, there is also a correlation between education and structural violence. The focus of this paper is AE and its own correlation with structural violence in the Colombian context. The AE I will be talking about is not the specialized one offered by universities or private schools that aims at training professional artists. I want to engage with the mandatory arts class of Basic Education, and Medium Education in Colombia, which encompass the time from first grade (age ~6) to eleventh grade (age ~17).

Since 1994, AE is considered an "obligatory and fundamental" subject in Colombian schools (Congreso de la República de Colombia 1994). The most recent official document regarding the arts class in Colombia is 2010's Orientations for Basic and Medium Artistic Education (MEN 2010). In this document, the central government adopted a form of education "for the arts." This means that AE must contribute to the integral formation of individuals based on the role that three specific competencies—*sensitivity*, *aesthetic appreciation* and *communication*—play in the development of basic competencies (MEN 2010, p. 16). In other words, AE has the goal of helping students (1) to develop certain sensitivities (kinesthetic, visual, hearing), (2) to aesthetically appreciate artistic objects—which has to do with the understanding of concepts, movements, techniques, genres, etc.—, and (3) to communicate, which belongs to the field of production itself, the result of combining sensitivity and aesthetic appreciation in the creative act (MEN 2010). Gallo Castro et al. (2018) note that, according to official communications and governmental decrees, AE should not only fulfil these objectives, but also play a key role in preserving and celebrating the diversity and multiculturality of the country, numerous local, artistic and cultural expressions that are oftentimes the heritage of native peoples.

However, the situation found in schools is disheartening. García Ríos (2005) provides a firsthand testimony in which there are not enough resources—such as equipment, materials, or workshops for the development of artistic activities—, and there are no instruments or suitable spaces for musical or theatrical rehearsals. Frequently, the principals of educational centers consider AE as a needless, extravagant space that generates unnecessary expenses, and not even students show interest towards arts class, they prefer to engage with tasks from other subjects that they consider "more necessary" for their future (García Ríos 2005, p. 86). With his research, García Ríos identifies that one of the main obstacles for AE in Colombia is the teachers' area of expertise, since it is common that a teacher who has no connection with arts must teach the AE class because of a structural lack of resources (2005, pp. 85-6). Thirteen years later, Gallo Castro et al. (2018) describe similar obstacles. They write that the appointment of arts teachers does not always correspond to their undergraduate training, but to conditions and particularities of both the teacher and the school. This is mostly the case in primary education, where some teachers, left without any academic load, accept a post in an area that is not theirs with the sole purpose of keeping their working conditions; generally, these teachers only carry out activities to keep students busy during the time intended for the class (Gallo Castro et al. 2018). My own artistic education in a public school in a small Colombian city took place one hour a week, in which the focus was always music. The class usually consisted of playing the flute, listening to music or singing, or preparing a parade for the end of the course. In that weekly hour, we never studied the history of arts, we did not engage with theater, sculpture, painting, cinema, nor with more recent forms of artistic expression like performance or graffiti[1]. The competencies of *sensitivity*, *aesthetic appreciation* and *communication* were not developed.

So, on the one hand, access to AE is not guaranteed, and on the other, when children actually have it, it is often of poor quality. This can be understood in a country where other basic services apart from education are also missing, but it does not minimize that fact that, for decades, artistic education has not been considered in the country's political decisions (Gallo Castro et al. 2018). Recently, the national government lead by center-leftist president Gustavo Petro launched a policy to strengthen the country's cultural and artistic education (MEN 2022). Nonetheless, the two ministers (Patricia Ariza, ex-Minister of Culture, and Alejandro Gaviria, ex-Minister of Education) who signed the decree are no longer in office—they were replaced after some months—and there is hardly any official information about the results and reach of this act, which was only signed by the president in April 2024 (Presidencia de la República de Colombia 2024).

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[1]　I allow myself to share this personal experience for two reasons. First, some of the participants in this research come from the same Colombian region as me, so they went through similar experiences. Second, the school I attended has +1600 students each year, making it a relevant sample.

2.3. Artistic education and peace

Coming back to Galtung's definition of structural violence, we can suggest that not guaranteeing education for citizens in general, and not guaranteeing AE in particular, can turn into a form of violence insofar as citizens—who are not getting it, in contrast to those who can easily have it, whatever their means are—are deprived of developing their full potential. In a country where there is a strong correlation between low levels of education and joining armed groups (González Bustelo 2016), securing quality education for everyone is a decisive step to combat structural violence or, in other words, to pursue structural peace. This is the more general, overarching dimension of the relationship between structural violence and education. To overcome it, major economic efforts within a decided political agenda are required. There is certainly a debt if the state that declares education and AE obligatory does not fulfil its own mandate. Nonetheless, as Bourdieu puts it, the reproductive potential of, say, the educational system works because of the "more or less orchestrated actions of thousands of small versions of Maxwell's demon." Hence, the transformation of an oppressive, exclusionary, unequal structure can only be achieved by the more or less orchestrated actions of thousands of people seeking change.

Certainly, efforts already exist in this regard. The work of the Colombian Truth Commission, for example, repeatedly highlighted the importance of cultural diversity and creative expressions in the path towards peace[2]. A narrow bibliography also includes matters related to AE and "imperfect peace", an approach that considers peace an unfinished process (Mejía Badillo 2015), AE and pedagogy for peace (Rebolledo Cortés et al. 2020), the potential of arts as amplifiers of victims' voices (Rivera 2020), or the books of Zepke et al. (2024), and Lufty et al. (2019). But despite the existing literature, structural violence is not mentioned once in Arias Ramírez' (2021) literature review of AE's research tendencies in Colombia, which comprises the 2010-2020 decade. My aim is also to add on to the existing discussion in this regard.

The ways in which arts and artworks are legitimized and distributed can be understood as forms or manifestations of structural violence. We tend to think that an insurmountable gap exists, that art, by its very nature, belongs to the elite or vanguard of each society: those who create are chosen ones who guide the people with difficult-to-decipher messages (Gómez del Águila et al. 2014, p. 394). Conceiving art as a quasi-mystical, almost sacred form of human activity is violent because it limits the possibilities of realizing certain individuals' or groups' physical and mental potentials—it teaches them that they can simply not art, whatever that is. I believe that the AE class in public schools could be the perfect place to challenge such ideas, and a deconstruction of the very notion of arts might be necessary to turn the AE class into an exercise of our right to peace. The more classical, passive way of "transferring" information from teachers to students has governed over a more active, dialogical type of education as set forth by constructivists, for example, but the accumulation of phenomena, facts, and data does not lead to learning, like Gómez del Águila et al. (2014) write. We know that art is not reached through reviews, but through real possibilities of living artistic experiences (Gómez del Águila et al. 2014, p. 393). This living of artistic experiences is endorsed by Marián López Fdz. Cao, who helps us define and understand an extended notion of arts and AE, as well as their role in the transformation of individuals and societies. In her 2015 book, *¿Para qué el arte?* [Why art?], she advocates for art and art education as a transformative action of human beings, all of them, especially those who have been disregarded by the dominant paradigm that uses gender and geographical or social origin as mechanisms of exclusion; in this sense, art is not only a response to personal passion or a vital impulse arising from the needs of a person or a collective, but also a response to a set of cultural and social factors, structures and power relations (López Fdz. Cao 2015, p. 103).

Learning compassion, welcoming vulnerability, imagining futures that might appear utopic and start building them with the help of diverse expression techniques, are some of the tasks that lie ahead in this rather novel understanding of an AE that also seeks peace. López Fdz. Cao affirms that the task of artistic education is not necessarily to turn boys and girls into artists; instead, AE has to do with awakening avenues of thought towards a better world within and beyond students, with helping them shape this world internally and externally, asking them to give, echoing Arendt, the new that they bring along (López Fdz. Cao 2015, pp. 114-5). In this sense, a central task of AE—but also of other subjects—is to allow individuals to become aware and recognize their own contexts and, most importantly, to think of alternative, more gentle ones, to make individuals feel capable or compelled to use their imagination, because the worst thing is not the ignorance of the conditions of exclusion, but the inability to begin to understand them (López Fdz. Cao 2015, p. 115).

3. Methodology

The bulk of my research was carrying out a focus group, also known as group interview. The definition that Janet Smithson provides is precise: "a controlled group discussion, on the basis that the group interaction generated through discussion is of prior importance to this methodology" (2000, p. 104). Similarly, "the hallmark of a focus group is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (Morgan 1988, p. 12). Focus groups are not aimed at finding concrete responses, but rather shared understandings and meanings, as well as potential confrontations between different views, they "can also be used successfully to aid respondents' recall or to stimulate

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[2]   The legacy of the Colombian Truth Commission contains all types of sources, from photographs to podcasts and short films, from interviews to games and pedagogical toolkits, from posters to their 10-volume final report, they can all be found on: https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/

embellished descriptions of specific events … or experiences shared by members of the group" (Fontana et al. 2005, p. 704). During the group interview, I tried to adopt a nondirective approach, with which researchers seek "to establish the widest range of meaning and interpretation of the topic" (Fontana et al. 2005, p. 704).

Six people took part in the focus group (Alma, Marina, Berta, Edgar, Leandro and Federico[3]). Their ages ranged from 26 to 31. They come from the center (Bogotá) and northeast of Colombia (department of Santander), and are acquaintances of mine who were chosen by convenience (Clark 2007). They have personally sought a means of expression in arts (Leandro, Federico), have been part of artistic groups (Edgar, Federico), have undergone specialized AE (Alma, Marina, Berta), or have been arts teachers in different areas such as music (Edgar), plastic arts (Alma, Marina), or photography (Marina). The discussants did not know each other, and there were no prearrangements or details shared with them beforehand regarding the flow of the interview. The meeting took place in August 2022 through the platform Google Meet, it lasted about two hours, and it was recorded. Consent forms were shared with the discussants to be signed, agreeing to their participation and to the subsequent use of the transcription as academic material.

The transcription was done following the system for simple transcription found in Dresing et al. (2015). While and after transcribing, I carried out a thematic analysis, "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 79). Reflection on the structure and themes that the inductive coding[4] provided, as well as on the impressions and connections that I elaborated while reading and rereading the transcription were key in this process.

4. Findings and analysis

4.1. Not-so-hidden violence?

In this research, I was particularly interested in the concept of structural violence, and in the ideas that the discussants could bring along without explicitly knowing that they were ideas about structural violence. Therefore, when the discussion was warm and all of them had participated, I asked, "In our experience as Colombians, what things are hidden that could be considered violent?" The replies of my interviewees included:

- unsatisfied basic needs, such as security, schooling, or infrastructure (Federico);
- the hopelessness, the uprootedness, and the limited aspirations of youngsters in rural areas due to state abandonment (Marina);
- an *emotional stagnation* fruit of our violent history and the lack of recognition and knowledge of our conflict and tragedies (Marina);
- the difficult access to cultural offers and its scarcity, which affects regions and social groups differentially (Federico; Leandro);
- the very way in which arts are defined, legitimized, and mobilized (Berta; Leandro);
- the centralist imposition of a particular set of subjects to be studied in schools without taking into account differences in the territories (Leandro);
- the impossibility to have an opinion about beauty or about poetry, to think of ourselves beyond artificial tags, such as 'engineer' (Alma).

Much of these replies is related to the absence of the state. Indeed, one of the claims that I seek to emphasize with this research is the limited presence of a strong institutional apparatus in some Colombian regions—this can translate into lack of infrastructure and security in the territories, in poor basic and health services or, for our case, in the absence or scarce access to arts and AE. The latter might seem like the least of problems, but I will suggest that thinking this way is also a form or consequence of structural violence. The fact that the group organically associated "hidden violence" with state absence takes us back to the definition of the concept: there is no single perpetrator in structural violence, it is violence "normalized by stable institutions and regular experience" (Winter et al. 2001, p. 99).

Based on my respondents' answers, structural violence seemed to be linked to a general organization of Colombian society that restricts the lives of people physically, mentally, and collectively, denying certain cultural contents to certain groups, and making it more difficult in certain territories or communities to develop freely in a stimulating and secure environment; in addition, structural violence related to unmovable truths, and a generalized feeling that life is what it is and cannot be changed.

4.2. The CNA, the LNA, and structural violence

When discussing the purposes of AE, two currents quickly unfolded in the group discussion. One of them was supported by Federico, while Alma, Berta, Leandro and Marina argued for the opposite; Edgar remained neutral, though his position tended towards the big group. I will next try to expose these two currents and some of their implications.

In the first answer I received, Alma said, "We can all be artists." She argued that arts have to do with the human soul, with a certain sensitivity to being in the world. This led to one of the currents, which I shall name the *Comprehensive Notion of Arts* (CNA). The other current was mainly defended by Federico. His idea was

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[3]   The names of the discussants were changed due to confidentiality.
[4]   I derived the codes *a posteriori* from the transcription, not from the theory *a priori*.

that not anyone can become an artist, and that arts must be delimited, otherwise its value would be lost. "To say that we are all artists is to totally distort the value of art," said Federico. I shall name this the *Limited Notion of Arts* (LNA).

Insisting on the CNA leads to certain conclusions regarding the objectives and purposes of AE. Here, arts are related to the very existence of human beings, to our ways of being in the world, exploring it, communicating it, and making life with one another. The discussants said things like: "Art cannot be excluded in any way, it is something that can alleviate many situations of human beings in their mental part" (Edgar); "Art ends up being the language of the soul" (Leandro); "Art is not only the great works, but also the greatness of the spirit" (Alma). With these ideas in mind, AE becomes central in any holistic formation, it turns into an activity that deeply connects with individuals, it helps them dialogue with their own personal experiences, it offers them ways to communicate and transform them. The fact that AE could also promote qualities such as responsibility and commitment, relevant to a holistic formation, was also mentioned by Edgar. The fact that AE has to do with learning certain techniques was more or less taken for granted in the answers of the discussants, it was barely mentioned. Instead, the priority was the training of the feeling, of "the gaze"—in the words of Alma—, of self-consciousness. The focus was on sensitive aspects of arts:

> I feel that, more than acquiring a technique, what is relevant in artistic training is the sensitivity and awareness that you acquire, this being in the world and exploring it through other forms, through questions about materialities, about what surrounds you, from what you feel, from the phenomenological. I think it's very important because it's not a linear process, it allows you to have processes that are a bit more abstract, from free exploration, from creation, imagination... without necessarily be waiting for a finished product (Berta).

On the other hand, there was the LNA. Here, assuming a contrasting viewpoint, Federico mentioned that AE should not be a priority in a country like Colombia, in which many vulnerability situations had to be addressed before being able to talk about art:

> Not everyone is an artist, not everyone is to produce art. If everyone were to produce art, I think it would lose all meaning. What should be promoted is to awaken sensitivity, but if someone doesn't have it, then they don't have it, and that's it. In current Colombia's situation, in a situation of vulnerability in a village, in a small town, there are more important basic needs to satisfy, and pragmatically I think that a person needs to solve the leak, or the latrine, or whatever it is, they need to solve that before understanding a painting by [Edvard] Munch. They need that before realizing that a park is necessary, or that it is necessary to have square meters of free space, or that it is necessary to understand a concert of Andean or classical music (Federico).

Federico claimed that not everyone can be an artist because not everyone has or can develop the sensitivity needed for it; either a person has it or not. Federico also said that art has a meaning because not everyone can produce it, and that people who miss a roof over their heads are excluded from art. Federico says, "Those who already have that [basic needs] solved can naturally dedicate their time to other things." Federico recognizes that AE is not only about producing, but also about receiving, so he proposes an AE that aids individuals in learning to feel, but this means *understanding* artworks: "It seems to me that the purpose of AE is ultimately to teach to feel; to teach to feel is to be able to understand a song, to be able to understand a painting, to be able to understand a street..." (Federico). Therefore, the LNA leads to another approach towards AE.

If learning to feel is learning to understand artworks, what Federico described as the purpose of AE resembles the *aesthetic appreciation* component that, in theory, AE in Basic and Medium Education in Colombia should teach, but it seems to leave the *sensitivity* and *communication* components out. While Alma, Leandro and Berta were talking about an experience that permeates every human existence and was like a balm for the soul, Federico adopted a position that was closer to the elevated value of the "high art" and the specialized AE that seeks to educate professionalized artists. This miscommunication did not find a resolution during the group discussion, but was helpful for identifying the ideas about art that turn it into this mystical, almost holy form of human activity.

In the following lines, I want to elaborate on how the LNA leads to a disparagement of AE, and can turn arts into a privilege that is of use for legitimizing and reproducing social exclusion, i.e., for structural violence. The LNA delegitimizes the artistic experiences and manifestations of certain communities or certain people. Berta says, for example, that because certain artistic expressions or cultural traditions are not labeled as art, they seem to be less valuable, and may even tend to disappear. Leandro adds to it presenting another feature of structural violence: making poor people think that what they do is not art, that their aesthetics or their sensitivities are not artistic. The LNA does not recognize that everyone has a relationship with arts; it might not necessarily be understanding a famous artist's painting, but it does exist. Leandro asserts that art is very present in everyone's lives, that it helps every human to overcome their sorrows and to make sense of their daily experiences:

> It makes me think that, even though one is in the everyday, earning one's bread on a daily basis, one is still human, one still feels and has to process what one lives, and one still has to nourish oneself with something, right? And they do it, and it is done! Despite the fact that the day laborer is working all day long, he surely has a relationship with music, he surely has (Leandro).

The LNA reinforces the idea that certain implements are indispensable for making art, and that poor people do not have them, hence, cannot make art. However, Marina narrates how some initiatives of the teachers at her rural school have allowed them to unseat the arts resources and find alternative painting and engraving methods with the materials they have at hand. Moreover, the LNA assumes that art cannot be made without having eaten or slept; it ignores that suffering or scarcity can be a source of inspiration and can promote resourcefulness[5]. The LNA would make us uphold that people need satisfied basic needs before realizing that a park is necessary, as Federico said, but such a statement does not consider that the sensitivity that artistic training can help flourish *is* something that allows individuals to be more careful with the spaces they inhabit, that it allows them to have another approach to the world (Berta). Lastly, in the LNA, the value of art is measured by its social recognition, and not by other dimensions, such as the process to achieve it, what the artist felt or feels about it, what its value is for a community, or what it represents for a small group of people. Alma shared a beautiful story regarding how valuable an intimate artistic experience can be:

> You arrived and the children were crying desperately, obviously, they had been through very traumatic moments. But trying to take care of them, to tell them, "Hey, nothing bad is going to happen today, today we are going to photograph the trees and look at the birds... I'm not interested in you painting well, I'm not interested in you becoming Rembrandt, I don't know, I'm not interested in you putting something in the museum. If you want to do it, you can do it, if that's what you want, but what interests me here is the moment that we are sharing." And I think that's what artistic education is all about (Alma).

4.3. Emancipation through AE

With this research, I wanted to gather evidence to affirm that there is a link between poor AE and structural violence. On the way, I learned that the basis of this link has to do with the very understanding of arts, let alone state absence. But I also wanted to explore how this issue could be turned backward, how AE could challenge structural violence or, in other words, foster the pursuit of peace. It is in this sense that I asked the discussants about AE and emancipation. If arts are understood as a language, a means of expressing life's happenings and a way of being in the world, if arts develop as a poetic experience, then AE becomes imperative and emancipatory because it allows individuals to recognize themselves, to express and alleviate their afflictions, to be conscious of the territories they inhabit, and to question the stablished order. Thus, the foremost purpose of AE must be to insist on this *Comprehensive Notion of Arts*. Alma says, for example, that the idea of the artist-genius must be "abolished," because art is much more than the art industry, its market, and the museums. In this sense, she shared how, thanks to art, she discovered that her way of loving—of showing affection—was through her artworks, and not necessarily by saying it. Berta also mentioned how, as a very quiet and shy child, arts helped her to explore different modes of expression, find her own languages and understand the world differently, autonomously.

The same way in which the CNA requires a departure from traditional ways of understanding arts and artists, an AE for peace requires a departure from traditional ways of understanding schooling and teaching. At least four themes that arose during the focus group are worth mentioning regarding this unorthodox way of understanding AE. **(a)** The first one was the idea that the contents of the AE class should not be imposed from a central government, but dialogued and negotiated with people in the territories, since locals will know better what their needs and strengths are. **(b)** In addition, a contribution mainly put forward by Marina had to do with interdisciplinarity in education. Because she works at a private school-foundation, Marina has been able to implement interdisciplinary forms of education in which arts, for example, are used to learn about other subjects. She narrated how a way of learning physics laws at her school has been taking pictures of plants or trees with different camera lenses, and then reflecting on the differences between the results. For her and the other teachers at her school, this has been a way of working through rurality's difficulties to make arts an essential part of education. **(c)** AE teachers must distance themselves from teaching methods that are based on transmitting information and meeting fixed criteria. A way to break with the difficulties posed by structural violence might be understanding that a certain pedagogy does not necessarily work with every student, or that teachers must "amuse, share with students the passion and desire through fun" (Edgar). **(d)** Finally, AE should be considered in context and in relation to differences between students. Edgar provides a good example when narrating that music was his life ever since he was an adolescent; even though he was "doing terribly" at high school, his teachers understood that his shortcomings in other areas were not an obstacle for him to develop and succeed as a musician. Some of these themes are already present in previous works (see Gómez del Águila et al. 2014; García-Ríos 2005).

Before the conclusions, I want to address the notion of resistance[6], which arose organically from the group discussion. Resistance had to do with returning to ourselves "in a system in which we are always very crammed and overwhelmed by the outside" (Alma; she was referring to contemporary living conditions under the rule of capitalist production and consumption). To resist could be to be able to explore and create our own languages (Berta), to look for spiders with a child (Alma), or to prepare a traditional soup the same way our

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[5] A precaution is due not to romanticize poverty under any circumstance. I want to make clear that I do not tolerate inequality, and that the point of this paper is precisely that arts must be accessible *for everyone*.

[6] Relevant here is the idea of togetherness, of being with others and allowing oneself to be vulnerable with them. This was of special importance when discussing what AE had to offer to children that lived in traumatic, impoverished, unstable environments. Alma argued that "only" being there with the kids, looking for animals, for example, was already some kind of artistic, poetic experience under the umbrella of AE.

grandparents did it, decades ago (Marina). In the context of a CNA, AE should aim at allowing all this and celebrating it in different forms, through different languages and techniques. AE becomes an appropriate space for resistance because it can help us notice "other places or needs that are not yet perceived" (Marina), and this might be where we find the alternatives to hopelessness.

In the beginning of the interview, Marina mentioned that Colombians were in some kind of "emotional stagnation" because the country had not confronted its history, had not allowed itself to know, recognize and process its own tragedy. In her last words during the focus group, she argued that AE was definitive to get over this "emotional stagnation," to build another country rejecting violence as our inevitable fate: "It seems to me that emancipation lies in the possibility of, as a country, re-imagining ourselves and building new myths" (Marina).

5. Conclusions and tasks

I have tried to argue that, guided by the LNA, AE's purposes, possibilities, and general scope could be narrowed down to the extent in which, instead of making arts available, it would transform them into an elitist device. On the contrary, following the CNA, some of the conclusions and tasks that I propose to explore how AE can foster the transformation of social structures are:

– AE in schools is not meant to produce Rembrandts, Da Vincis, and symphonies composers, as specialized AE does, but to encourage individuals to explore artistic experiences and to take advantage of them.
– Art is a language, a process, a way to know ourselves and the world around us through the exploration of its different disciplines and techniques.
– AE can be a way for people to become aware of their own contexts, question them, and imagine different ones.
– Art teachers must be aware of individual differences, try to accompany their students *sharing their vulnerability with them*, and facilitate a healthy obsession with the objects of the world and the topics they find interesting, whatever they may be.
– Educational contents should not be imposed from a central government that does not consider the diversity, opportunities and limitations of territories[7].
– Interdisciplinarity - arts can be a way to learn about different subjects, as well as other subjects can be useful to learn about art.

Additionally, I find it important to note that the CNA does not exclude or discredit any of the great artists nor their wonderful achievements. The CNA is all about making art a shared good, a right instead of an artifact whose value depends on how many people can apprehend it. It is for a reason that the 27th article of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads, "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits" (UN 2015, p. 56). We do believe that AE is strictly necessary in every human's education, and so does UNESCO, who state that not only creativity, but also collaboration, resiliency, and the possibility to bring people together are skills that can be developed by AE. "Art, in all its diversity, is an essential component of a comprehensive education for the full development of the individual. (...) Art brings us closer together" (UNESCO 2022).

I do not intend to suggest that all approaches to art fall under the CNA or the LNA. In the middle of the focus group, the notion of *artistic experience* arose. The *artistic experience* was somewhere between the poetic expression of the soul set forth by the defendants of the CNA and the more rigorous but also poetic understanding of beauty and arts set forth by Federico and the LNA. It would be interesting to dig deeper into this *artistic experience* as a concept. Zapata Restrepo (2019) carries out an interesting job in exploring precisely this *artistic experience* with signatories to the 2016 peace agreement.

Regarding further research, it is necessary to observe that this is an inclined paper because of the participants I invited; all of them are close with arts, they have found in it a reason to live, meaning, salvation, relief. What would the findings look like if we carried out a focus group with six discussants who live their lives away from art and AE? Is it possible to live a life apart from the arts, not to have everyday artistic experiences? Another opportunity for further investigation is to have non-hegemonic arts, such as graffiti, tattoos, or hip-hop culture at the center of the question for emancipation and education (see Rodríguez Álvarez et al. 2014; Pérez Torres 2021). The role of rurality would also be a matter to consider more in depth. There are enormous gaps between rural and urban education in Colombia, and AE is far from being a priority in either of them. How does differential harm look like in this regard, what arts and what AE exist in rural, remote regions of the country? It is again worth asking: Is it possible not to have a connection with arts, not to have everyday artistic experiences? And is it then not compulsory to aid people's natural sensitivities, so that everyone can enjoy a wider range of meaningful experiences?

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7   Current Colombian government, in head of Gustavo Petro, is advancing a decree to strengthen the cultural and artistic education sector countrywide. The decreet is focused on peacebuilding and coexistence, and considers territorial and ethnic differences (for more info, search SINEFAC). However, this initiative is in its first stages at the time of submitting this paper.

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