

**PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR CHILDREN  
THROUGH ARTISTIC METHODOLOGIES**  
**EL FOMENTO DE LA INCLUSIÓN SOCIAL INFANTIL  
A TRAVÉS DE LOS LENGUAJES ARTÍSTICOS**  
**A PROMOÇÃO DA INCLUSÃO SOCIAL DAS CRIANÇAS  
ATRAVÉS DOS LINGUAGENS ARTÍSTICOS**

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<p><b>KEY WORDS:</b> Artistic methodologies child welfare personal development vulnerability</p>	<p><b>ABSTRACT:</b> The main aim of this study is to reflect on how to encourage social inclusion through artistic methodologies and, specifically, to gather opinions concerning them from educational professionals working to promote social inclusion in the Centres Oberts (Social Service Primary Care Centres) in Catalunya, Spain. We performed a mixed study which combined the qualitative strategy of a group interview with the quantitative one of a questionnaire, 97 professionals from the Centres Oberts participated. The former dealt with subjective aspects of the participants' experiences with artistic methodologies whilst the latter was concerned with the professionals' requirements to structure, plan, and carry them out. The questionnaire was specifically designed for the study and had a 50% response rate. Our findings indicate the need to encourage emotional and social interventions, and the potential of artistic methodologies to carry these out, with children in situations of social vulnerability coming to our centres. The main results obtained demonstrate that artistic methodologies are strategies that encourage emotional development in individuals. Moreover, they have been shown to promote child welfare and may also encourage resilience in the individual, as a result, the relationship between art and resilience warrants further exploration.</p>
<p><b>PALABRAS CLAVES:</b> Lenguajes artísticos bienestar infantil desarrollo personal vulnerabilidad</p>	<p><b>RESUMEN:</b> El principal objetivo de este trabajo de investigación es reflexionar sobre la manera de fomentar la inclusión social a través de los lenguajes artísticos. En concreto, la finalidad es escuchar y recoger las opiniones de los profesionales que trabajan para promover la inclusión social desde los Centros Abiertos (Centros de Atención Primaria de Servicios Sociales en Cataluña). La investigación que se presenta es fruto de un estudio mixto que combina la estrategia cualitativa de la entrevista grupal y el instrumento del cuestionario desde</p>

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	<p>la perspectiva cuantitativa, en el que han participado 97 profesionales de Centros Abiertos de Cataluña. Los resultados permiten evidenciar y constatar la necesidad de fomentar el trabajo emocional y social, y las potencialidades que los lenguajes artísticos tienen para trabajar con niños y niñas que viven en situaciones de vulnerabilidad social y, que por ello, acuden a dichos Centros. La manera de acercarnos a las voces de estos profesionales ha sido a través de las entrevistas grupales con la finalidad de conocer los aspectos subjetivos y particulares de su experiencia profesional. Además, con el fin de poder detectar las necesidades de estos profesionales para promover la inclusión social a través de dichos lenguajes se ha elaborado un cuestionario, diseñado específicamente para este estudio, obteniendo una respuesta efectiva del 50% de los Centros Abiertos de Cataluña. El análisis de contenido de la información recogida ha permitido identificar los contenidos a partir de los cuales los lenguajes artísticos permiten favorecer la inclusión social y, por otro lado, los aspectos necesarios para estructurar y planificar una acción basada en los mismos. Las principales conclusiones obtenidas evidencian que los lenguajes artísticos son estrategias que promueven el desarrollo emocional de las personas. Por ese motivo, se evidencia la necesidad y el interés por explorar la relación entre arte y resiliencia, ya que si se ha demostrado que estas metodologías favorecen el bienestar infantil, se puede suponer que también podrían fomentar la capacidad de resiliencia de las personas.</p>
<p><b>PALAVRAS-CHAVE:</b> Linguagens artísticas bem-estar infantil desenvolvimento pessoal vulnerabilidades</p>	<p><b>RESUMO:</b> O principal objetivo desta pesquisa é refletir a forma de promover a inclusão social por meio dos linguagens artísticos. Especificamente, o objetivo é ouvir e recolher as opiniões dos profissionais que trabalham para promover a inclusão social dos Centros Abertos (centros de cuidados primários do serviços sociais na Catalunha). A pesquisa apresentada é o resultado dum estudo conjunto que combina a estratégia qualitativa da entrevista em grupo com o questionário a partir da perspectiva quantitativa, que envolveu 97 profissionais dos Centros Abertos da Catalunha. Os resultados apontam em confirmar a necessidade de promover o trabalho social e emocional, o potencial que os linguagens artísticos tem no trabalho com crianças que vivem em situação de vulnerabilidade social e que, portanto, acuden a estos centros. A maneira de abordar as vozes desses profissionais tem sido através de entrevistas em grupo, a fim de conhecer os aspectos subjetivos e particulares da sua experiência profissional. Além disso, a fim de identificar as necessidades destes profissionais para promover a inclusão social através de tais línguas se desenvolveu um questionário concebido especificamente para este estudo, a obtenção duma resposta efetiva do 50% dos profissionais dos centros Abertos da Catalunha. A análise de conteúdo das informações coletadas identificou o conteúdo dos linguagens artísticos que contribuem para promover a inclusão social e, por outro lado, os aspectos necessários para estruturar e planejar uma ação com base nelas. Os principais resultados mostram que os linguagens artísticos são estratégias que promovam o desenvolvimento emocional das pessoas. Por esta razão, a necessidade e interesse em explorar a relação entre arte e resiliência é evidente, porque se estas metodologias foram mostrados para promover o bem-estar infantil, pode-se supor que também poderia promover a resiliência das pessoas.</p>

## Introduction

The welfare of children in our society is the aim of everyone involved in education. It is of particular interest in those cases where the contextual situation may put children at risk in terms of social exclusion or quality of life. Due to this, the importance of promoting welfare in socio-educational interventions has become a major issue.

In present day society we have the responsibility to contribute with our progress and knowledge to an improvement in the lives of such children, which is where artistic methodologies and their diverse tools can play a key role in education and the possibility of developing emotional and social skills. For some years now, it has been considered fundamental within the area of social action to place particular emphasis on increasing the number of educational and artistic activities as they are capable of going beyond all social, cultural,

economic, and political divisions by interweaving and creating a common goal (Tyson, 2002).

One of the aims of the Spanish Social Services is the promotion of social inclusion for everyone, particularly vulnerable collectives, in order to offer all the community a guarantee of welfare. In Catalunya there are *Centres Oberts* (Primary Care Centres) regulated by the Catalan Government under the Social Services Law 12/2007 (*Llei 12/2007, d'11 d'Octubre, de Serveis Socials -DOGC 4990*), which provide accompanied spaces where children aged 3 to 8 years can develop all their capacities, attitudes, and opportunities. With this initiative, and employing proven artistic methodologies, the Social Services seek to empower families.

Our research aimed to explore how artistic methodologies can contribute to the promotion of social inclusion within the environment of the *Centres Oberts*. In concrete, it hoped to reflect the

way professionals involved in social interventions perceive the relevance of artistic methodologies in strengthening children's welfare and promoting social inclusion, especially in disadvantaged environments where socio-educational interventions are a fundamental element of their lives.

## 1. Fighting social exclusion and building more inclusive societies with artistic methodologies

Artistic methodologies are strategies of educational interventions that encourage social inclusion and, as a consequence, are able to fight against social exclusion. The present day social context is often marked by the pathologization of social unrest and precariousness at all levels (economic, social, emotional, and laboural) and social Darwinism. In general, such a context leads to what Baumann refers to as a liquid society in which its citizens find themselves in a fluid, volatile and/or uncertain state with respect to their lives and the elements that they are made up of (Bauman, 2003). In this context, social exclusion demonstrates an inequality that must be confronted and understood in all its magnitude and transcendence.

Social exclusion is understood as a way of being in society, a positioning in it that is reflected as an explicitly unequal relationship in terms of labour, economics, educational, and health amongst others. Such a relationship is determined by the comparison of all those elements that an individual does not possess or related to what he or she has lost. As a result, a new social status emerges: a non-citizen or excluded person. With respect to this, social pedagogy states that *the discipline (of pedagogy) works, theoretically and practically, at the complex borders of inclusion and exclusion* (Núñez, 1999:134).

It is difficult to establish the limits of these borders even though it is clear that wellbeing is to be found in non-exclusion situations, and that social exclusion is an adversity that can lead to individuals not being able to develop all their capacities and potential.

In this regard, it is important that the Primary Care Social Services perform interventions to promote welfare of children who live and grow in situations of vulnerability and/or social risk. These interventions should result in an empowering process that permits individuals to grow and become stronger from adverse situations (Barudy & Dantagnan, 2005; Manciaux et al., 2003; Munist et al., 1998) a capacity that can be encouraged and developed, providing elements to constitute

fundamental pillars on which those in situations of risk can lean upon (Vaquero, Urrea & Mundet, 2014).

## 1.2. Childhood at risk and the Open Centres

If we focus on children in circumstances that may lead them to live at the margins of society, Balsells and Alsinet define social exclusion as *establishing, in a procedural and dynamic way, an ideographic and inadequate interaction with their surroundings which does not cover their inalienable rights and places in danger their correct development, giving rise to the possible commencement of social maladjustment; and these surroundings are the family, the school, the neighbourhood, and the institutions* (Balsells & Alsinet, 2000:113). Such a risk could become a real situation of exclusion when the contextual conditions, amongst other causes, facilitate them.

In Spain 26.5%, and in Catalunya 23.7%, (FE-DAIA, 2012) of the children are at the limits of poverty and, as a consequence, have an elevated risk of suffering social exclusion. Article 27 of the Catalan *Children's Rights Convention* states that all children have the right to an adequate standard of living that allows them to totally develop as individuals. In order to help guarantee this right, the Catalan Social Services offer primary care socio-educational spaces, the *Centres Oberts*, to encourage the social inclusion of those individuals who, due to various causes, might be at the limits of social exclusion. The typology of the *Centres Oberts* gives support and orientation to children in situations of vulnerability or social exclusion and their respective families. From a systemic and holistic perspective, aspects concerning personal development such as autonomy, healthy habits (hygiene, food, and health), and social and academic skills are instilled, in addition to spare time activities and entertainment options. Within this context, artistic expression can become a form of methodology for social intervention and opportunities for observing, listening, experimenting, growing, and getting to know oneself and one's environment. The socio-educational tasks offered by these *Centres Oberts* thus provide support for an improvement in quality of life by strengthening the families' capacities, and encouraging their relationships, personal development, and integration all of which are critical to the community they belong to (Vallés, 2009). The final objective of these methodologies is, therefore, the socialization and freedom of individuals to live as citizens with full rights, that is to say, they fight for everyone to be empowered and capable of understanding

and acting in an autonomous manner within their context.

In summary, the children attending the *Centres Oberts* are at risk of social exclusion which could lead to their living on the margins of society. To combat this situation, the socio-educational interventions carried out have a number of aims, amongst others to make visible a collective that on many occasions is invisible, and to encourage learning and understanding of reality through feeling and experimenting (Ricart, 2014).

### **1.3. How do artistic methodologies promote social inclusion?**

In the context of vulnerability and/or social exclusion, what role can artistic methodologies play? What can they contribute to promoting the growth of individuals so that they live with all their rights in society?

One of the contributions of these methodologies that should be pointed out straight away is the opportunity to express and communicate oneself in a different way. Unlike the spoken word, artistic expression is indirect, implying subjectivity and the use of the metaphor and the symbolic for a collective that may find itself excluded in this previously mentioned condition of non-citizenship. It is, therefore, a way to shed invisibility and have the opportunity to speak, to have a voice, participate in society and, finally, become a person (Olaechea & Engeli, 2011).

On one hand, Acosta (1999) offers a general vision of artistic methodologies, referring to the visibility and inclusion of individuals who, due to their circumstances, have remained on the margins of society. In this way, for various reasons, artistic languages become highly valuable socio-educational strategies when employed with collectives that live in situations of social risk:

- For individuals who are accustomed to dealing with social service professionals and, as a result, are reluctant to attend and participate in activities promoted by the same services and with the same characteristics.
- For emotional and social deprivation together with a lack of ludic resources in these individuals.
- Because of the characteristics of these activities which involve the capacity to see things from another perspective, to try out alternative responses to the habitual, to experiment with new forms of interaction, communication and interiorization, and maintain a certain discipline and respect towards the group.

From this point of view, artistic methodologies position the individual at the centre thus implying a change in perspective and paradigm by highlighting aspects such as personal care, relationships, and dialogue, in other words, personal welfare, as the basis of educational practice.

This experience allows the individual to become involved in action and involvement, leaving to one side the external gaze. In this regard, socio-educational intervention through artistic methodology consists of transformational dynamics at many levels because they (Ricart, 2014):

1. Propose relational dynamics which question the positions taken by each individual with respect to them.
2. Link the proposals to a process-based development, and personal and social growth.
3. Consider the relationship as a knowledge strategy that enables individuals to position themselves in the intervention process.
4. Involve dialogue, negotiation, and interchange in order to jointly arrive at solutions and understand each other's position.

These methodologies are, therefore, understood as symbolic tools for personal, emotional, and social capacity, building that allude to an intimate world in a less invasive manner. They act as vehicles to help improve the quality of life of individuals and to develop and appreciate all those aspects considered to be of great relevance in integral education: personal relationships, emotional equilibrium, self-esteem, communication with oneself, self-knowledge, self-confidence, and capacity of expression (Navajas & Rigo, 2008; Del Río, 2009; Martínez, 2011).

In turn, the use of artistic methodologies as tools for social intervention in communities at risk of social exclusion has been acknowledged as essential given that individuals, within their process of vulnerability, can use their imagination to reflect what they feel, thus creating the opportunity to establish and create an atmosphere of security which encourages participation in society and creates personal networks (Bonilla et al, 2008; Suárez & Reyes, 2000; Mundet, Beltrán & Moreno, 2013).

Social work carried out with artistic methodologies has considerable potential to transform individuals which can lead to their modifying their own reality, and the social reality of their surroundings. As a result, it may be considered that *art may not transform reality in an immediate or practical manner, but it shows the possibilities of transformation. It shows us what we can become and how we can do this* (Lima, López & Rodrigo, 2004: 151). In this regard, individuals, within their process of vulnerability or social exclusion, can

use their imagination to reflect what they feel, activating their sentiments and getting to know their perceptions, sentiments, and emotions with respect to their surroundings (Mundet, Beltrán & Moreno, 2013).

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research objectives

The principal objective of this study is:

**To explore the role of artistic methodologies for children in situations of vulnerability or social exclusion from the perception of educational professionals.**

The specific objectives are:

- To define the perceptions of educational professionals with respect to the potential of artistic methodologies as strategies for socio-educational interventions in general and, more particularly, in relation to children in situations of vulnerability or social exclusion.
- To examine the needs perceived by these professionals in order to be able to apply such methodologies in the *Centres Oberts*.

Our research does not provide a concrete programme, what it does is to reflect on the potential use of these methodologies and the necessary elements for them to be developed.

### 2.2. Participants

The study sample was composed of 97 educational professionals (50% of the total population) working in the *Centres Oberts*. The *Centres Oberts* were located in the four Catalan provinces and the number of participants was proportional to their territorial distribution. In the province of Barcelona 56 responses were obtained which represented 51% of the total number; in Girona 12 (63%) out of a total of 19 participated; of the 11 centres in Lleida 5 took part (45%); and 22 (49%) out of 45 participated in Tarragona.

Most of the educational professionals were women (83%), aged between 25 and 39 years, with university studies encompassing pedagogy, social education, psycho-pedagogy and teaching. There were also professionals with other levels of study (vocational training and basic education) or with degrees such as philosophy and anthropology. Nevertheless, irrespective of their formal education, all participants all had working experience within the field of child protection from one to ten years (82.4%).

In addition, three professionals from the Open Centre *Joan Salvador Gavina*, located in the Raval, neighbourhood of Barcelona, took part. They had worked intensely with artistic methodologies as strategies of socio-educational interventions and we were particularly interested in their opinions concerning the issue. One participant was a man aged 32 years with a degree in Social Education and considerable experience in the *Centre Obert* where he was located, another was a woman, aged 26, also a social educator with a working experience of 6 years, and a 21 year old woman doing intern work for her degree in Social Education.

### 1.3. Instruments

Taking into consideration the characteristics of the research, a number of data-gathering instruments, both qualitative and quantitative, were employed. The complementary methodology of qualitative and quantitative instruments helps overcome the methodological dichotomy present in many scientific debates (Fuentes, 2007). A mixed design allows a better understanding of a problem than just one method. Moreover, it permits the integration of the description of a phenomenon and its amplitude with the particular vision of the participants in a concrete reality (Creswell & Plano, 2008).

In order to gather data, complementary qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed through a specially designed questionnaire and a group interview to obtain the perceptions of the professionals involved with respect to the relationship between artistic methodologies and socio-educational interventions and the possible benefits.

### The questionnaire

The aim of the questionnaire was to detect in a general manner the needs of the professionals at the *Centres Oberts* with respect to artistic methodologies as social intervention strategies.

The questionnaire was composed of an introduction that explained the functioning and finality of this instrument and pointed out that there were no "good" or "bad" responses. In addition, the participant's collaboration and sincerity were acknowledged.

The questionnaire, specially designed for our research, was made up of a series of items directed at educational professionals working in the *Centres Oberts*. They evaluated the potential use of artistic methodologies, their pertinence for socio-educational work in groups of children in

situations of social vulnerability, and the perception the professionals had of their own skills for implementation.

The questionnaire examined 5 items:

- The professional perception of these methodologies: their potential to promote the emotional and social development of children.
- The professional's perception concerning the potential of these methodologies particularly when applied in the environment of the *Centres Oberts*: their everyday use in the *Centres Oberts*; the adaptation of them for children in situations of social vulnerability; the educational objective of the activities that employ artistic methodologies.
- Resources and training: understanding of the benefits of employing these methodologies in this environment; the perception of the skills available in order to put them into practice; willingness to receive training so as to improve skills.
- Institutional support: the general perception of institutional support in order to apply these methodologies; space available in the *Centres Oberts* to carry out activities based on artistic methodologies.
- Narratives of personal experiences from professionals related to the use of artistic methodologies.

In order to ensure reliability and validity, the content was revised and the questions edited so that they were clear, concise and responded to the objectives which this instrument aimed to examine. In addition, the questionnaire was revised by two adjudicators specializing in methodology with established professional careers in the area of socio-education and experts in educational methods. They were also members of the Department of Diagnostic and Investigative Methods in Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Barcelona. Their comments led to some modifications in the editing and order of the questions. Later, there was a pilot trial with the questionnaire which was administered to four social educators who work within the field of child protection. After carrying out the pertinent modifications the questionnaire was considered to be valid and ready to be given to the participants. A template was set up on Internet so that it could be self-administered.

### The group interview

The group interview covered subjective aspects concerning the experiences of the professionals involved with respect to their feelings,

impressions, beliefs, emotions, and thoughts, all of which are difficult to observe and quantify.

It consisted of a script (a semi-structured interview) with the aim of examining the professionals' perceptions with respect to the benefits of artistic methodologies as strategies of socio-educational strategies. The questions were based on three items:

- The professionals' evaluation of the *Centres Oberts* with respect to socio-educational practice based on artistic methodology.
- The professionals' perception concerning the potential of artistic methodologies to work with children in situations of vulnerability or social exclusion.
- The professionals' perception with respect to the resources available to carry out socio-educational interventions based on artistic methodologies.

Once the first proposal for the script had been drawn up it was validated by two adjudicators specialized in methodology. Once again, they were two individuals who had established professional careers in the area of socio-education and were experts in educational methods. They were also members of the Department of Diagnostic and Investigative Methods in Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Barcelona. Once validated the group interview had a pilot trial with a participants from the socio-educational field in order to establish its scientific validity.

### 1.4. Procedure

After the definite data-gathering instruments had been established we contacted the professionals in order to explain the aims of the evaluation and remind them of the importance of their participation.

In order to apply the questionnaire, a list of all the *Centres Oberts* in Catalunya was obtained from The Social Services Portfolio at the Catalan Generalitat. From the 206 listed *Centres Oberts*, 184 were currently functioning and were asked to participate through a first telephonic contact. Information about participating in the study was sent and 94 professionals from 94 different *Centres Oberts* filled out the questionnaire. There was, therefore, a response rate of 51.08%.

The questionnaire was self-administered and sent by an online platform which allowed it to be correctly supervised.

A group interview was held with the professionals from the *Joan Salvador Gavina Centres Oberts*, they were reminded of the aims of the meeting, its approximate duration, the

commitment to confidentiality of both data-gathering and processing, and permission was asked to record the conversations in order to later transcribe them and carry out a rigorous data analysis.

### 2.5. Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis is a fundamental element in the research process. In our study it has consisted of contrasting and validating, in a three-cornered manner, all the gathered information in a quantitative and qualitative manner in order to provide a real perspective on how the professionals perceive the socio-educational potential of artistic methodology. Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analysed with the *SPSS* statistics programme version 20. Qualitative information gathered in the group interview was evaluated with the *Atlas-ti 6.2* programme.

The quantitative analysis was performed at two levels. The first was a description of the frequencies; the second was related to the search for statistical relationships among the qualitative variables in the questionnaire (age, gender, education and the like) and their evaluations in order to identify possible explanatory relations.

Chi-squared test could not be applied due to the reduced sample size; as a result, Fisher's Test was employed instead in the 2x2 tables.

Qualitative data, as it was textual, was handled following content analysis techniques. Such a procedure requires complex tasks of flow and interfacing between three basic operations: data reduction, presentation of information, and verification of conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1985). Two dimensions were identified: the contents to be addressed and the aspects necessary to do so. In each of these dimensions a series of related categories were identified.

## 3. Results

Analysis of the data from our research revealed the potential of artistic methodologies to encourage social inclusion as perceived by the professionals and, in addition, the aspects needed to structure and plan an intervention based on them. Statistically treated data came from the questionnaire whilst the information derived from analyzing the contents of the interview was textually presented

Table 1 summarizes the main findings which are detailed in the following sections.

<b>Table 1: Aspects to take into consideration with respect to a socio-educational intervention regarding the promotion of welfare based on artistic methodology</b>	
<b>THE POTENTIAL</b> of artistic methodology in socio-educational interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage emotional education (identification of emotions, management of the expression of emotions, intrapersonal communication)</li> <li>• <b>Intimate dimension:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encourage introspection to manage more positively and in a healthier manner adverse or difficult experiences that children in situations of vulnerability undergo.</li> <li>- Help emotional awareness.</li> <li>- Help to improve self-confidence.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>External dimension:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encourage social development (interpersonal relationships).</li> <li>- Develop educational values to live in the community.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>CONDITIONS</b> of a socio-educational intervention based on artistic methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Design and planning</b> of the activities (located in the present and the future)</li> <li>• <b>Context</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Institutional environment: Support and framework</li> <li>- Space and resources</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Professional</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specific training in artistic methodologies</li> <li>- Predisposition to artistic interventions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### 3.1. The potential of artistic methodologies in socio-educational interventions

In first place, according to the data from the questionnaire, it can be observed that 97.5% of the participating professionals consider that, in general, artistic languages are suitable as an approach to working with children who live in situations of

social vulnerability. Moreover, 92.6% affirm that from all the benefits that artistic methodologies have the clearest one is strengthening emotional education.

When this dimension is examined in the group interview, the professionals state that when referring to emotional education, introspection and

emotional awareness are most associated with artistic methodologies.

*“With these artistic methodologies it is possible to deal with the theme of emotions which is a key element for these kids, making it less direct and better for them, more from living their emotions and then identifying them. First living them, next experiencing them, and then speaking about them”* (C.A. A professional from the group interview).

Promoting emotional education through artistic methodologies allows children to connect with their emotional, internal, symbolic, and imaginary world in a less invasive and direct manner. Such a connection permits the development of emotional awareness as a first step in continuing with a broader perspective in the process of emotional education.

*“Artistic methodologies allow us to address the theme of emotional expression from a different perspective, from the indirect, emphasizing the symbolic and not the verbal”* (C.A. A professional from the group interview).

These processes are considered relevant by almost half the responders to the questionnaire with respect to working with children at risk. According to data from the questionnaire, 44.7% of the professionals believe that the mere fact of offering children a space to live and understand their emotions is a facilitating element so that they can manage their experiences in a more positive and healthy way. In general, they are individuals who have experienced complicated situations so that their emotional stability may be affected. As stated by the interviewed professionals, when dealing with these kinds of children artistic methodologies permit a connection with experiences which may, on occasions, be hidden, avoided, difficult to identify or explain with words. That is to say, artistic work allows access to the land of fantasy and symbolism and helps emotions associated with lived experiences flower, be identified, and expressed.

*“Doing this first from the experience and then the spoken word works very well with these children because they have undergone situations that are difficult to explain”* (C.A. A professional from the group interview).

The interviewed professionals consider, based on their knowledge, that artistic work permits a gradual progression in emotional awareness of these children linked to their lived experiences.

The professionals stated that when spaces for free artistic expression were offered the children, having reflected on their experiences, were more capable of identifying how they felt, in greater depth, and of amplifying their vocabulary and emotional register.

*“Increasingly they are more capable of recognizing emotions and putting them into words, to describe them in terms that go beyond the happy/sad dichotomy, widening their vocabulary”* (C.A. A professional from the group interview).

Nevertheless, apart from the internal task of self-exploration and knowledge, 51.1% of the participants in the group interviews were of the opinion that artistic methodologies could serve to enhance social development in children in situations of vulnerability. More specifically, when examining in what direction they saw the social potential of the artistic methodologies, the majority (89.4%) concurred that to carry out activities of artistic creation promoted educational values that made living together easier. Relationships with others, respect, empathy, assertiveness, asking for help, self-worth, and acknowledging others are some of the values that the professionals have pointed out as being promoted by this kind of activities. In this regard, they emphasize that artistic activities help these children have confidence in themselves and make them feel more capable of putting into practice these social skills.

*“When they feel confident and sure of themselves they are more able to feel comfortable with others and improve their coexistence”* (C.A. A professional from the group interview).

### **3.2. Conditions for socio-educational interventions based on artistic methodologies**

Our results have allowed us to identify the conditions which the professionals perceive to be necessary in order to carry out socio-educational interventions based on artistic methodologies. These conditions are based on the characterization of the context of the intervention (design, institutional framework, material resources) in which the activities will be developed and the attributes of the professionals who will impart them (training, attitude, and motivation for these methodologies).

In relation to the context, the professionals from the group interview identified a key aspect in the design of the intervention. From their point of view, the planning of the activities included the demarcation of the objectives, strategies, and

educational contents to be addressed. According to their experience, it was crucial to transmit to children living in situations of social vulnerability that the organization of the activities was well-structured. It was of great help for these children to know beforehand the design and planning of the intervention and to be aware of what they were going to do as this reduced the anxiety they felt caused by uncertainty. For them, the possibility of being located in the future helps give significance to the present and becomes a way to function.

*“The profile of the kids that we assist signifies that they must have a clear idea at all times of what they are going to do and be prepared for the steps they must take; it is their way of functioning” (C.A. A professional from the group interview).*

The institutional framework is a second element to take into account when speaking about context. The contextualization in agreement with the norms of the institution and its support are two important aspects according to the responses from the questionnaire. With respect to this theme, it can be seen that 77.7% of the professionals consider it fundamental that they can define their socio-educational work, receiving professional acknowledgement which translates into opportunities for innovation, training and the provision of resources in order to develop these activities. In this regard, interventions based on artistic methodologies should not be isolated proposals but should be part of a wider educational programme of the centre and guide future proposals.

Entering into practicalities and logistics, another aspect that has been detected has been the availability of a suitable space for the development of this kind of activities: 77.7% of the professionals considered that institutional support was positive. When referring to suitable we are talking about an area that permits and encourages individuals to freely move about. 83% of the professionals affirmed that their work centres did not have adequate spaces.

Didactic resources were also evaluated by 65.3% of the professionals as a fundamental element in order to develop these methodologies. Nevertheless, only a little more than half (55.3%) considered that they had sufficient material resources at their disposition and showed their interest in having more available resources.

Nevertheless, it is not only a question of the context of the socio-educational intervention; the professionals, their training and motivation are also crucial. The Social Services Portfolio is where

the characteristics of the service, with respect to professional profiles, are specified at the levels of social science degrees, direct attention, social workers, social integrators, and spare time monitors. If attention is paid to the basic training of the participants it can be observed that those from the field of education (pedagogy, psycho-pedagogy, social education, and teaching studies) show a greater tendency to introduce artistic activities into socio-educational tasks (79.2%; Fisher's exact test  $p=0,026$ ).

What are the professionals' perceptions regarding their level of skills with respect to these methodologies? According to data from the questionnaire, a considerable percentage (67%) believed that they were aware of the benefits of artistic methodologies as socio-educational strategies.

However, irrespective of the perception of their level of preparation with respect to artistic methodologies, 95.7% of the interviewed professionals affirmed that they would like to broaden their knowledge with specific training in order to be able to apply them more systematically in their centres. The professionals from the group interview also pointed out the need for training to improve their professional skills.

*“Sometimes we are not quite sure how to intervene, we have had no training. We don't know everything although we know it works. We lack time, training and capacity” (C.A. A professional from the group interview).*

In addition, the questionnaire has allowed us to confirm that there is a correlation between motivation to be trained and a predisposition to apply the methodologies in a practical manner ( $r_{(94)}=0,502$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ).

#### 4. Conclusions

In our study we have examined the role of artistic expression for children in situations of social vulnerability. From our findings we can state that artistic methodologies are strategies that promote emotional education in individuals, thus endorsing their educational value in the broadest sense possible. Moreover, such interventions promote social inclusion: they provide an opportunity for expression and communication to those who very often have not previously had the possibility to do so. In this way, their existence in the world makes some sense in spite of adversity and difficulties (Cyrulnik, 2009; Barudy & Dantagnan, 2005; Mundet, Beltrán & Moreno, 2015).

The positive perceptions of the educational professionals participating in our research, with

respect to the potential of artistic methodologies at the socio-educational level, have been clearly expressed as favouring emotional education, positive relationships with oneself and others, that is to say, well-being.

Scientific literature reflects the fact that social and educational work employing artistic methodologies is an emerging issue that places us fully in the present century (Mundet, Beltrán & Moreno, 2015; Mundet, 2014). Therefore, within our contemporary social framework, the artistic interventions encompassing the educational tasks of a *Centres Obert* have a proven potentiality that could provide an alternative to more traditional methods based on individual, therapeutic attention focused on shortcomings. From this point of view, socio-educational interventions should encourage the integral development of the individual, their affective and emotional growth, by providing a space to think, participate and behave in society, feel and express emotions, and to promote the capacity to enter into a relationship with near and distant environments (Mundet, 2014). A group-based educational intervention should, therefore, be chosen, with a clear educational intention based on capacity-building, in order to address social inclusion in the individual.

Over the years, a number of studies have referred to artistic activity as a tool that promotes emotional growth (Piaget, 1959; Arnheim, 1993; Moreno, 2010). Data from our research reinforce this idea as they demonstrate how artistic methodologies serve to enter an intimate, symbolic, complex, and personal world that helps identify and manage emotions. This is of particular interest when talking about invisible collectives as it is one way to give them an opportunity to speak and be included as human beings in the community and society.

Artistic methodologies help develop the emotional and intimate spheres of individuals and promote their inclusion in society, fighting against situations of poverty and exclusion. In this regard, artistic interventions carried out with individuals generate experiences of relationships and interchange from the proximity whilst at the same time questioning the specificity of each individual (Ricart, 2014). Working with emotions and their positive management is necessary and opportune for everyone, it becomes a priority, however, when dealing with the environment of social exclusion and child protection as these are contexts where invisibility and stigma are present to a considerable degree. It is, therefore, necessary to learn how to employ artistic methodologies in order to create, communicate, invigorate, and develop emotional well-being (Ricart, 2014).

Moreover, our research data show how the encouragement of an individual's emotional sphere helps enrich and experience social relationships in a more assertive manner, due to the fact that having greater self-knowledge improves sociability. Our findings concur with other studies which propose promoting emotional education as it signifies a potent instrument to develop social skills and education about values (Motos, 2005; Navarro, 2006, 2007; Núñez & Navarro, 2007; Marxen, 2009). The fact of doing this through artistic methodology is both an added value and a challenge that we, as members of society and professionals, should confront. Cruz et al. (2013) describe specific learning issues that artistic activities can encourage. They include self-confidence, awakened self-affectivity and empathy, the discovery of the importance of others in one's own life, experimenting with one's reality and imagining other futures, exploring sentiments and emotions and being able to reflect on them. In this regard, providing spaces for personal and social development is of great importance, particularly with collectives that live in situations of social vulnerability (Murillo & Hernández-Castilla, 2011).

Our results also underline the needs perceived by the professionals in order to put into practice socio-educational interventions based on artistic methodologies in the *Centres Oberts*. In this regard, they specify some conditions related to the context, planning, and design and the role/attitude of the professionals who are carrying out the intervention.

Marxen (2009) and Moreno (2010) confirm our findings, highlighting the importance of planning and structuring the interventions according to stated objectives and designed activities that give sense and content to the intervention. Moreover, they affirm that it is not necessary to plan concrete contents as they are closely linked to what is going on at the present, given that each person can express themselves according to their mood, motivation and willingness.

A key aspect that has been detected in our study is institutional support. Moreno (2012) affirms that social inclusion is possible providing that the educational process is present and integrated within a social and institutional context that encourages the constant learning process of human relationships.

Institutional support is also involved in providing adequate spaces and resources. Kramer (1985) and Marxen (2009) have identified the characteristics of such spaces: without many external distractions, a relaxing area with running water, and place where the children can exhibit the work they have done. All of which will allow them to feel

they are in a safe space where they can develop their creative and expressive processes (Marxen, 2009).

Artistic methodologies encompass an emerging paradigm of educational interventions which encourage social inclusion. This is due to the fact that they are not employed as an objective in themselves, or as a technique to be learnt and perfected, but as a form of expression through which aspects related to communication, relationships, understanding, and personal welfare can be developed (Ricart, 2014). As a consequence, these interventions represent an innovation and an opportunity for both professionals and individuals who are in a growth process. The attitudes of confidence and predisposition of the professional with respect to artistic interventions are, therefore, very important. The professionals should be

sensitive to the intimate contents they are working with, especially because they are based on emotions and with individuals in situations of vulnerability. It is fundamental that the professionals are able to transmit to the children that they are in a safe space where they can not only open up and express their emotions, but also be treated with respect.

Our work has demonstrated the need to create and articulate an educational proposal based on artistic methodologies which encourage child welfare. Going one step further, particular stress should be placed on the need to examine the relationship between art and resilience, because as it has been demonstrated that these methodologies encourage child welfare, it may be supposed they also promote the individual's capacity for resilience.

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