# Enhancing pedagogy for teaching visual arts in the South African Foundation Phase classroom: A collaborative endeavor

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# Abstract

In this article, we report on the pedagogy of a cohort of South African Foundation Phase teachers in the praxis of visual arts. We used participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) as paradigm and methodology and data was generated collaboratively through arts-based strategies such as photovoice, visual journaling, and reflexive group conversations. We analysed the data using an inductive analysis approach. The data indicated a set of extrinsic and intrinsic barriers experienced by the participants in the praxis and pedagogy of visual arts in a South African context. We provide recommendations for Foundation Phase teachers, school management teams, and governmental Departments of Education. This study contributes to the field of arts education by highlighting the plight of generalist teachers having to teach visual arts without sufficient training or support. We create opportunities for arts educators to contribute to the experiences of these teachers.

**Keywords**: visual arts education, pedagogy, Foundation Phase teachers, pedagogical content knowledge, PALAR, reflexive visual journaling, photovoice

# Introduction

Clements and Wachowiak (2010) described a teacher facilitating visual arts as a "planner, an organiser, an expediter, a counselor, a dreamer, a goal setter, and most of all, a lover of children, life, and art" (p. 25). Visual arts education provides authentic meaning-making opportunities that engage young students on a cognitive (mind), emotional (heart), and physical (body) level (Wright, 2010). The implementation and presentation of visual arts do, however, not come without a unique set of challenges, and therefore teaching visual arts requires the determination of a proficient teacher who is invested in a creative pedagogy.

Studies by Alter et al. (2009b), Kerby et al. (2021), and Russell-Bowie (2010) in Australia, Ashworth (2012) in Canada, Eckhoff (2013) in the United States of America, and Irwin (2018) in New Zealand provide valuable insights on a global scale into these challenges and experiences of the generalist class teacher in the praxis of visual arts. In a more recent study, Mannathoko (2020) explored the promotion of entrepreneurship through teaching visual arts in Botswana. The South African literature by Dixon et al. (2018), Jansen van Vuuren and Van Niekerk (2015), Nompula (2012), and Westraadt (2018) pertains to either the life skills subject unit for the Foundation Phase (learners between 6 and 9 years of age)[1] or visual arts praxis in the Intermediate and Senior Phases (learners between 10 and 13). In addition, Mostert (2022) explored the teaching of visual arts in the South African intermediate phase classroom while Quarshie et al (2022) considered the use of technology to support the teaching of visual arts. Visual art education has a rich history in South Africa, with traditional forms of artistic expression playing a significant role in the country's cultural heritage (Pepu, 2022). However, the role of visual arts in the formal education system has been limited, and access to art education has been unequal (Motshekga, 2015). The literature on Foundation Phase visual arts praxis and pedagogy is therefore limited and this led Dixon et al. (2018) to express concern about the lack of research on Foundation Phase life skills education in South Africa. From the available research, it is however clear that most visual arts teachers report experiencing general extrinsic and intrinsic barriers and challenges that prevent the effective teaching of visual arts.

# A pedagogy of discomfort

Through teaching arts, teachers fulfill an important role in the development of students' creativity and artistic confidence (Irwin, 2018, Sheridan et al, 2022) and those teachers who are confident are more inclined to implement effective visual arts pedagogy successfully in their classrooms (Garvis & Pendergast, 2011). Many studies have indicated that most teachers do not have this required level of confidence in their artistic skills (Alter et al., 2009b; Ashworth, 2012; Eckhoff 2013; Irwin, 2018; Kerby et al., 2021; Russell-Bowie, 2012), nor do they have the pedagogical knowledge necessary for teaching visual art as a required component of their curriculum (Alter et al., 2009a, 2009b; Ashworth, 2012; Garvis,

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1      We refer to Foundation Phase as it is used in the South African context, rather than Kindergarten as used elsewhere.

2011; Garvis & Pendergast, 2011; Gatt & Karppinen, 2014; Kerby et al., 2021). Additionally, research studies have reported that many art teachers experience a pedagogy of discomfort (Boler, 1999) in art education, regardless of their years of teaching experience.

The emotions teachers experience is an important factor in the delivery of artistic content since engagement in arts and crafts is classified as a dynamic mental and physical process, involving both cognitive and emotional elements (Gatt & Karppinen, 2014). The prospect of presenting an art lesson evokes negative emotions, such as anxiety, in the teachers participating in studies (Ashworth, 2012; Russell-Bowie, 2012). For example, words such as "overwhelmed" (Alter et al., 2009b, p. 17), "uncomfortable" (p. 12) "nervous" and "intimidated" (Ashworth, 2012, p. 108), along with "ill-prepared" (Irwin, 2018, p. 24) communicated the participants' underlying narrative of self-doubt in their ability to teach visual arts successfully.

Teachers have also reported feeling isolated and alone in their struggle to enhance their pedagogy of teaching visual arts effectively. The literature has reported on significant extrinsic and intrinsic barriers operating against the successful praxis of visual arts teaching. To address both the issue of isolation as well as the reported barriers, we used this research question to guide our study:

> How can the collective experiences of Foundation Phase teachers contribute to enhancing their pedagogy in relation to visual arts?

## Barriers to teaching visual arts effectively

In this article, we classify barriers to successful pedagogy related to arts integration and teaching in the Foundation Phase, as either extrinsic or intrinsic. Extrinsic barriers, on the one hand, refer to factors that act from outside the teacher, while intrinsic factors, on the other, refer to factors operating in the individual. Intrinsic factors are often less tangible and more difficult to measure, but relevant extrinsic factors can also be very complex. Although there are various generalisable extrinsic and intrinsic factors that operate globally, for the purposes of this discussion, we will focus only on South Africa where the study was conducted.

### Extrinsic barriers

Curricular pressure is defined as an overload of content crammed into a curriculum and has been identified as a significant extrinsic barrier to the successful teaching of visual arts (Alter et al., 2009a; Ashworth, 2012; Dixon et al., 2018; Eckhoff, 2013; Irwin, 2018). Curricular pressure is evident in the South African educational context in general and specifically in the Foundation Phase curriculum in which visual arts is framed as part of the life skills component that includes beginning knowledge, personal and social well-being, physical education, and creative arts. The creative arts component, in turn, is divided into performance arts and visual arts. Dixon et al. (2018) highlighted the dense nature of this life skills curriculum and indicated that the practicality of this subject as well as the varied nature of the components may well pose challenges to teachers. Not only are teachers exposed to severe

pressure in relation to the time it takes to cover all content in the curriculum, but they also express significant difficulties in fulfilling the practical requirements of this learning area. De Villiers and Sauls (2017) concluded from their research that Foundation Phase teachers experience a lack of skills in relation to the pragmatism of arts education (specifically music) and thus rely greatly on internet resources and worksheets to supplement the content specified in prescribed workbooks. This is of concern, since, according to Dixon et al. (2018), teachers who lack the differentiated abilities necessary to cope with the diverse nature of the life skills discipline, may find it challenging to facilitate developmental opportunities for students. Some Foundation Phase teachers lack pedagogical content knowledge and the pedagogical skills necessary for teaching compulsory areas like music.

In addition to a full curriculum, time constraints on the teaching of arts pose a challenge and the teachers often feel overwhelmed by the requirement to schedule regular time in the timetable for visual arts (Alter et al., 2009a, 2009b; Ashworth, 2012; Irwin, 2018). Not only do teachers struggle to find time for visual arts during the school day, but this subject also necessitates a considerable amount of preparation time (Alter et al., 2009a; Ashworth, 2012). This results in visual arts being neglected or even totally excluded from classroom activities.

Findings from several studies also report a significantly greater emphasis from national educational platforms and government on the core subjects, such as literacy and numeracy (Alter et al., 2009a; Ashworth, 2012; Dixon et al., 2018; Eckhoff, 2013; Irwin, 2018; Jansen van Vuuren & Van Niekerk, 2015; Nohayi & Caga 2021; Nompula, 2012; Russell-Bowie, 2010, 2012; Westraadt, 2018). This often results in the arts being marginalised, while the presentation of core subjects receives priority. Teachers find it difficult to justify scheduling time for visual arts, even though they acknowledge its value. Irwin (2018) postulated that in some scenarios, visual arts are merely presented as an extension activity to illustrate or enhance a concept presented in another academic discipline. Learners, therefore, do not show any motivation to learn about this area. In other instances, visual arts are presented solely as a reward to learners for good behaviour, or as a treat, so this is how learners come to see visual arts.

Issue related to access and equity pose extrinsic challenges to visual arts teachers. These may include budgetary limitations and unequal access to resources and opportunities that can lead to disparities in visual art education, thus perpetuating existing socio-economic and cultural divides (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Department of Arts and Culture, 2016; Petrella, 2015). Numerous South African schools, especially those situated in rural areas, face severe socio-economic challenges including poverty, unemployment, and poor infrastructure (Runhare et al., 2021; Wilfred, 2014/. In addition, these schools are almost always vastly under-resourced (Naude & Meier, 2019; Wilfred, 2014). Some rural and no-fee schools are required to accommodate up to 70 Foundation Phase students per classroom (Naude & Meier, 2019) and available funds are allocated, not for visual arts, but for school feeding programs and basic supplies such as books and stationery (Runhare et al., 2021; Wilfred, 2014). In these schools, even just the concept, never mind the reality, of a comprehensive visual arts programme or even a dedicated visual arts classroom is unrealistic. In many other more privileged schools

only the basic art supplies, if any at all, are provided and this results in teachers having to use their own money to buy much-needed art supplies (Ashworth, 2012). This lack of resources results in art forms not being taught at all or being taught merely theoretically, thus rendering limited opportunities for exploration and creative development in learners (Nompula, 2012).

As an additional challenge, most functional Foundation Phase classrooms are not equipped with the facilities necessary to facilitate arts education such as basic cleaning materials; visual arts are often perceived to be mainly messy and unstructured and there are no clean-up procedures in place. This results in some teachers adopting a minimalist approach to teaching visual arts and preferring to use what are thought of as clean media like, for example, having learners draw with pencils on paper instead of having them use paint on canvasses, thereby limiting the students' exposure to different art media (Ashworth, 2012). It also takes time to set up a visual arts lesson and clean up afterwards, and this adds to the time management challenges that teachers report.

Regardless of these and other pragmatic or logistical challenges, the Foundation Phase teacher remains the pivot around which visual arts education revolves. These teachers often report not only experiencing external barriers to effective visual arts teaching but also intrinsic challenges.

## Intrinsic barriers

Jansen van Vuuren and Van Niekerk (2015), Steyn et al. (2012), De Villiers and Sauls (2017), and Westraadt (2015, 2018) strongly advocated for adequate pre-service teacher training aimed at addressing intrinsic barriers such as a lack of artistic confidence and the subsequent lack of self-efficacy, and limited pedagogical content knowledge. These local intrinsic barriers are also listed in international studies with in-service teachers (Alter et al., 2009a, 2009b; Ashworth, 2012; Eckhoff, 2013; Irwin, 2018; Kerby et al., 2021; Russell-Bowie, 2012).

It is clear that comprehensive professional development opportunities are needed along with ongoing support for teachers. De Villiers and Sauls (2017) and Jansen van Vuuren and Van Niekerk (2015) have noted that teachers feel underqualified and unskilled to teach creative art. Professional development opportunities should therefore include training from subject advisors, along with workshops on resources, and mentoring in art subjects. This would mean that teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skills to teach all the components of life skills, including visual arts. James et al. (2017) also recommended that the architects of the curriculum need to be mindful of the needs of the generalist teacher and, therefore, provide adequate guidance in the curriculum documents. The absence of such guidance creates a challenge for the generalist teacher who struggles to interpret and teach the stipulated knowledge, skills, and values.

Teacher efficacy, closely linked to self-efficacy, an aspect of Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, is the belief and confidence teachers attain about their teaching ability (see, too, Garvis & Pendergast, 2011; Park & Oliver, 2008; Yancey, 2019). A teacher needs

adequate teacher efficacy to deliver subject content, including visual arts, in a meaningful manner that offers valuable learning opportunities to the learners. The higher the level of confidence regarding their efficacy in their own visual arts pedagogy, the more open teachers will be to innovative and creative strategies in their teaching of visual arts (Garvis, 2011, 2012; Garvis & Pendergast, 2011; Lemon & Garvis, 2013).

Initially, pedagogical content knowledge was conceptualised by Shulman (1987) as the representation and integration of both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge in teaching. In turn, Park and Oliver (2008) defined pedagogical content knowledge as teachers' understanding and enactment of how to help a group of learners understand specific subject matter using many instructional strategies, representations, and assessments while working within the contextual, cultural, and social limitations of the learning environment.

Limited pedagogical content knowledge is therefore a significant intrinsic barrier that prevents the successful and rewarding teaching of visual arts in the Foundation Phase. One way to improve Foundation Phase teachers' self-efficacy and teaching experience would be to explore their perceptions about their pedagogical content knowledge. In this study, we suggest that a collaborative approach to exploring these barriers may offer a feasible platform for future growth and transformation.

## Methodology

In this study, we explored the visual art teaching experiences of five South African Foundation Phase teachers in the classroom through a PALAR approach. We used Park and Oliver's adapted model of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) as a theoretical framework for this study. These scholars constructed their own definition of PCK that correlates with Shulman's (1987) original definition of PCK by stating that it is the consideration and representation of teacher-implemented pedagogy. PCK is directed towards learners to enable them to "understand specific subject matter using multiple instructional strategies, representations, and assessments while working within the contextual, cultural, and social limitations in the learning environment" (Park & Oliver, 2008, p. 264).

We used art-based data collection strategies such as photovoice, reflective group conversations, and reflexive visual journaling as tools for "investigating, asking questions, forming and testing theories, collaborating, and exploring an idea from a range of perspectives" (Pelo, 2016, p. 163). Our findings contribute to the limited body of knowledge on the unique experiences of South African teachers in relation to the pedagogy of visual arts in the Foundation Phase of a learner's schooling career.

Zuber-Skerritt (2011) motivated for the use of PALAR as a research methodology since it is influenced "by our values, worldviews and paradigms of learning, teaching and research and, in turn, influences our behaviour, strategies, methods and therefore the capacity for improving practice" (p. 6). The philosophical foundations that frame PALAR are embedded in participatory and transformative philosophies. As Wood (2020) has noted, it embraces many different perspectives, truths, and experiences as communicated by the specified

communities (in this case Foundation Phase teachers) and supports them to conceptualise problem-solving strategies, thus changing and transforming their own circumstances to empower them to bring about sustainable change and improvement in their social reality. As with all action research, PALAR, in embracing theory and practice, follows a cyclical process of action and reflection (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011).

Five qualified generalist Foundation Phase teachers currently employed at primary schools that are compliant with the national curriculum determined by the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE), were purposefully recruited for this study. Small samples of participants are preferred in PALAR studies to support the in-depth case-oriented nature of this methodology, so the intention of the research is therefore not to generate findings that can be generalised to an entire population.

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the institution and all other relevant stakeholders.

## Data generation

Data was gathered through a combination of participatory and collaborative arts-based strategies interlinked in the different PALAR cycles. The process took place over two months and its cycles are represented in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1**
Research cycles
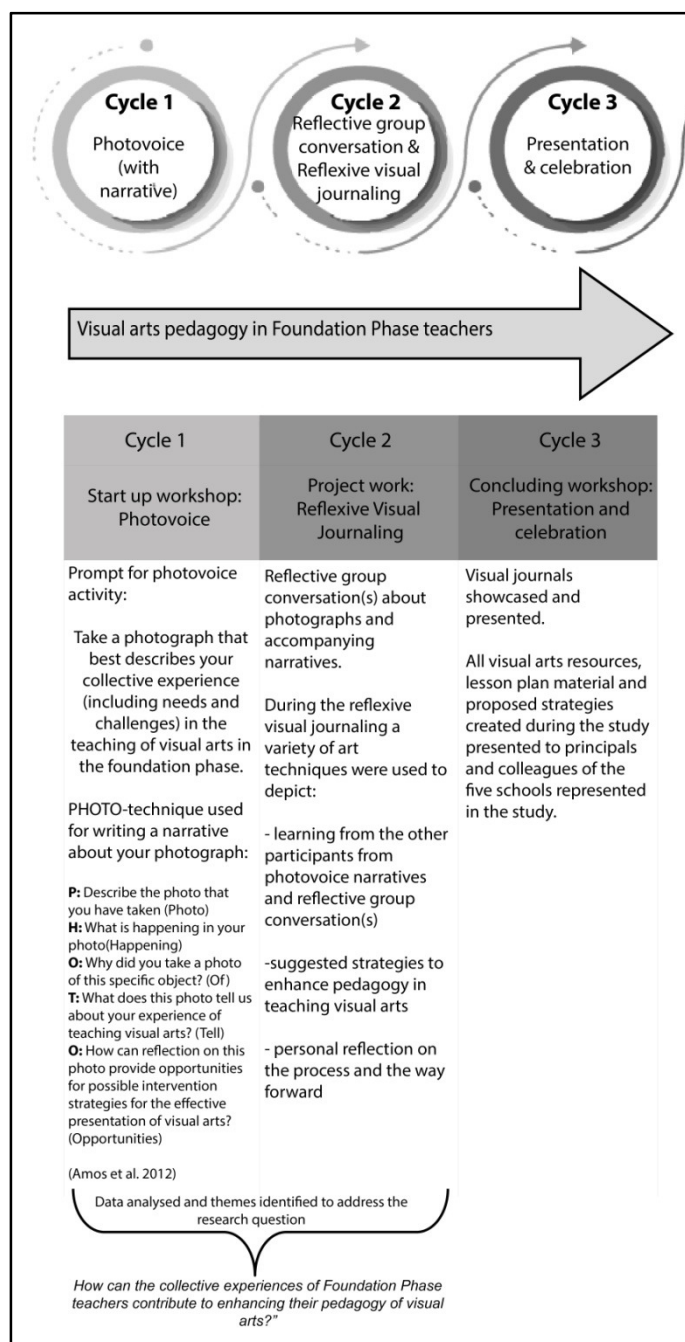


*Cycle 1: Photovoice*

The first participatory data collection method was photovoice (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 1998). Photovoice is a visual research methodology often used in participatory action research during which participants use photography and accompanying narratives to document and reflect on their perceptions and experiences. The value of photovoice resides in the participants' personal narrative and critical reflections that are interconnected with the photographs (Wang, 1999; Wang et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 2007). By sharing and communicating reflections, life experiences, and thoughts about their

photographs, participants become advocates for change (Wang, 1999; Wang et al., 1998). Our participants were invited to take four photographs and then select the one that best depicted their experience of teaching visual arts in the Foundation Phase classroom. Using an adapted form of the *PHOTO* technique (Amos et al. 2012), participants were invited to write a narrative about their chosen photograph. The prompts of the PHOTO technique are elucidated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**
PHOTO self-analysis (adapted from Amos et al., 2012)

| **P** | Describe the **p**hoto selected**,** |
|---|---|
| **H** | What is **h**appening in your photo? |
| **O** | Why did you take a photo of this particular **o**bject? |
| **T** | What does this picture **t**ell us about your visual arts experiences? |
| **O** | How can reflection on this photo provide **o**pportunities for possible intervention strategies in the presentation of visual arts? |

*Cycle 2: Reflective group conversation*

A reflective group conversation, as a second source of data, provided the participants with an opportunity to share their photographs and narratives collaboratively, along with their own thoughts and feelings about all the photographs. This conversation took place a few weeks after the initial photovoice activity. These conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed. The first author, as researcher, also took notes during these meetings. Following Creswell and Guetterman (2019) and Nieuwenhuis (2016b), the reflective group conversation was presented as an introduction to the reflexive visual journaling strategy so it provided introspective opportunities and insight into each other's thoughts and comments and this resulted in a more profound understanding of participants' own perceptions and experiences.

*Cycle 3: Reflexive visual journaling*

Reflective practice creates an opportunity for a person to consider events and what they could learn from them. During reflexive practice, the person will look inward as well as outward and consider how the learning that took place could also influence the context in which they function. Barry and O'Callaghan (2008) summarised this process by explaining that "reflexivity depicts the ability to direct one's thoughts back onto oneself; to examine one's theories, beliefs, knowledge, and actions in relation to clinical practice" (p. 56). Wood (2020) highlighted the importance of reflexive, rather than merely reflective practice and dialogue in a PALAR process. Journaling, as a facilitator of reflexivity, can document experiences meditatively, reconcile the inner conflict between perceptions of theory and praxis, promote learning and transformation, and cultivate insightful problem-solving opportunities (Barry & O'Callaghan, 2008; Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson, 2006; Hayman et al., 2012; Meyer & Willis, 2019; Phelps, 2005).

Carrying out reflexive visual journaling also gave the participants the opportunity not only to be creative but to conceptualise possible strategies to enhance their praxis and pedagogy of visual arts. The goal of creating and keeping such a journal was that through engagement with various visual arts materials, the participants could explore and discover a variety of techniques that were transferable to their visual arts pedagogy and that could be used when they presented visual arts to their learners. Throughout the lifespan of the journal, participants could test these strategies in their classrooms, adapt their practice, expand and evolve their pedagogy for teaching visual arts, and write about all this.

## Data analysis and coding

We adopted an inductive data analysis approach for this study and validity and trustworthiness were achieved through triangulation and respondent verification. Transcriptions were provided to the participants to ensure a fair and valid representation of their words. The first author gathered data presented in the photographs, in the narratives about individual photographs, in the transcriptions of reflective group conversations, and in the content of visual reflexive journals and then used diverse data collection strategies to triangulate and validate the analysis and findings (see Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Nieuwenhuis, 2016a).

## Collaboration as a tool for personal and professional development

In Table 3, the research process is described to highlight the various arts-based data generation methods and PALAR cycles in the personal and professional development of the teachers involved in the study. Column 1 of the table, The process, outlines the steps of the collaborative data generation methods for sustained professional development. These steps point to the fact that these strategies are valuable not only for research studies but can also be used to denote individual steps in the enhancement and professional development of teachers.

**Table 2**
PALAR process

| The process | Description | Data generation method | PALAR application |
|---|---|---|---|
| Creating the context | The teachers were invited to take a photograph and write a narrative depicting their experiences or attitude toward teaching visual arts in the Foundation Phase. | Photovoice: photograph with descriptive narrative | Cycle 1<br>The participants in the study fostered a relationship, negotiated the rules of engagement, and created a communal vision. After the photovoice activity, they shared their photographs and narratives. |
| Exploring the challenges | The photovoice activity and accompanying narrative provided the opportunity to understand the individual context of each participant.<br>The teachers shared their own experiences of teaching visual arts that elucidated the intrinsic and extrinsic barriers they experienced. | Reflective group conversations | Cycles 1 and 2<br>During the first reflective group conversation, local knowledge and lived experience were validated given the collaborative nature of the study. A safe space was created in which the pedagogy of discomfort could be explored. Experiences and beliefs about teaching visual arts were identified and discussed. |
| Taking action | Creating reflexive visual journaling provided the opportunity for art making and thereby challenged the participants' own pedagogy of discomfort. Strategies were identified and personal reflection was encouraged. | Reflexive visual journaling | Cycle 2<br>A collaborative effort was made to identify strategies these teachers and others could use to enhance their pedagogy in teaching visual arts.<br>The reflexive practice provided the opportunity for the participants to explore their own personal and professional development. |
| The transformation | Strategies were tested in the participants' classrooms and feedback was provided to other participants. Evolvement in pedagogy was explored. | Reflective group conversations<br>Teaching | Cycle 2<br>Cycle 3<br>Participants challenged their pedagogy of discomfort by experimenting with some of the strategies identified during the reflexive visual journaling. |
| The celebration | Learning and conceptualised strategies were shared with the principal and colleagues in each school. | Celebration<br>Showcasing | Cycle 3<br>The pedagogy and praxis of participating teachers were enhanced. |

# Findings

During the first two cycles, the five Foundation Phase teachers explored their lived experience. The content of the reflective group conversations, in which the photovoice activity was described and subsequent narratives were offered, elucidated the internal and external challenges these teachers experience. Subsequent reflective conversations as well as the process of visual journaling created the opportunity to suggest, in collaboration with each other, pedagogical strategies for teaching visual arts. This participatory process promoted personal growth and critical thinking on current pedagogy. The data highlights the value of a collaborative approach to exploring pedagogy to enhance and address challenges.

## Intrinsic factors that impact the pedagogy of visual arts

*Attitude*

**Figure 2**
Elsa's photovoice submission



In her photovoice submission, Elsa[3] captured the essence of her attitude towards how Foundation Phase teachers should approach the teaching of visual arts. She photographed a coffee cup and thereby compared her experience of teaching to a refreshing cup of coffee taken early in the morning that, for her, symbolised energy and vitality. She expressed that it was essential for Foundation Phase teachers to remain involved in the planning and execution of visual arts lessons since this would result in sustainable creative opportunities for learning that reflected this level of energy and enthusiasm. During the reflective conversation, Lesley agreed with Elsa that a positive attitude translated not only to the experience of learners but

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3      Pseudonyms were used for all participants.

also affected the attitude and behaviour of teachers. She stated that teaching visual arts is a skill that is acquired and developed through the practice thereof. Therefore, the more a teacher plans and facilitates effective visual arts lessons, the more refined their pedagogy will become.

It was clear, however, from the data that although the other participants vehemently agreed that they all wished to approach teaching visual arts with such a positive and innovative attitude, this was not always the case. The realities they faced sometimes diminished the positivity of their attitudes. In most cases, the presentation of visual arts did evoke positive emotions among the participants that, in turn, reflected their positive attitude.

> I always enjoy presenting the arts. (Amanda)

> I agree, I am just as excited as the students. (Elsa)

Evidence also showed that Carol, for example, did not share this level of enthusiasm for the praxis and pedagogy of visual arts. During the reflective group conversation, she expressed her negative attitude towards teaching visual arts.

## Pedagogical content knowledge

Amanda and Elsa reported that they mostly felt confident and capable of facilitating visual arts lessons because most of the projects fell within their comfort zone and they had sufficient knowledge and skills to teach the required content. However, they further explained that the more complex the visual arts projects became, the less confident they felt in their pedagogy. In addition to the lack of enthusiasm she discussed earlier, Carol described her distress and sense of discouragement on days that such lessons were scheduled. She experienced the presentation of these lessons as very challenging.

> No, for me the whole process of presenting visual arts is not easy.

> I don't create a lot of art because I do not see myself as artistic, I feel it is just not for me."

It was clear that she did not regard herself as being artistic or creative. It is clear that the artistic insecurities expressed and experienced by Carol directly influence her efficacy in the presentation of visual arts. It can also be seen that this is reflected in her self-perceived limited pedagogical competence in teaching this subject. Carol experienced low confidence in teaching arts and therefore experienced lower self-efficacy in this area. In her feedback, Carol substantiates these thoughts through her picture of a house.

**Figure 3**
Carol's photovoice submission



In the accompanying reflective group conversation Carol stated,

> On days that I have to present art lessons, I wish that I could just lock myself in my house and not have to go to school.

Amanda and Elsa expressed a more positive attitude towards teaching visual arts. They often felt very confident and showed high levels of efficacy and joy.

Analysis of the data also indicates that the pedagogy of teaching visual arts is not only impacted by intrinsic factors like attitude and confidence, but also by extrinsic barriers that create challenges in the successful teaching of this subject. In the reflective conversation, the participants shared their frustration with dealing with external factors such as time constraints, curriculum pressures, lack of physical space, and professional development opportunities that negatively impacted the positive attitude with which they approached the teaching of visual arts in the Foundation Phase and that led to the negative impact on their pedagogy.

## Extrinsic factors that impact pedagogy

Although all five teachers agreed on the importance of facilitating regular artmaking opportunities to meet the requirements of the curriculum as well as promote creativity and growth in their learners, there also was consensus among them that they did not have enough

opportunities for artmaking in the Foundation Phase. Time constraints, the pressure to meet all the requirements of the curriculum, the lack of space to create, and having too many students per class were all listed as external impediments to the successful teaching of visual arts.

## Curriculum

Time constraints and curricular pressure are interrelated barriers, and throughout this study, reference to one was seldom made without mention of the other. In this context, curricular pressure refers to the need to adhere to a preset pace to cover specific content in the life skills learning area of which visual arts forms part. Amanda and Carol both stated that they believed that the current South African curriculum did not make adequate provision for visual arts in the higher grades of the Foundation Phase. Carol described the Grade 3 national curriculum as

> . . . very full and dense, especially at Grade 3. Time is limited thus subject areas such as the home languages, first additional languages, and mathematics are more important and receive priority above subject areas such as life skills.

As a result, allocating time to visual arts was not always practically possible.

The curriculum also expects integration of the arts with other academic subjects, and this proved to be challenging since there is not sufficient guidance as to what exactly to do or how to achieve the desired outcomes; this left Carol and Lesley feeling uncertain and insecure.

*Physical space*

In the reflective group conversation, the teachers noted from their photovoice narratives that inadequate space to create art was a significant challenge in the presentation of visual arts. Amanda said that space in her classroom was problematic since she needed to alternate between a play corner and a reading corner to do visual arts. Lesley further elaborated that messiness, combined with time pressure and limited cleaning materials, contributed to challenges in presenting visual arts projects. This was affirmed during the reflective group conversation by Carol, who said that drawing and painting with a class of up to 34 Foundation Phase learners presented a significant challenge. Elsa elaborated on these challenges during the reflective group conversation by stating that "the cleaning after an art lesson is the worst and remains the biggest challenge." It is evident from the data that most Foundation Phase teachers experienced logistical challenges in terms of physical space and classroom layout along with those associated with cleaning up after carrying out visual arts activities.

*Lack of professional development opportunities*

The in-service training for visual arts offered by the DBE in South Africa was referred to as limited by the participants. Apart from Elsa, none of the other participants has attended or been offered professional development programmes with a specific focus on visual arts since

their pre-service teacher training. This is important to note since none of these participants have training in presenting visual arts. Schools do not have the funding to use events in the private sector for training purposes. Professional development opportunities would therefore be the only ways in which they could be empowered in this regard; participation in this study offered the participants some sense of learning and development. The visual journals that they created not only modelled best practice that they could emulate in their own classrooms but exposed them to pedagogies they could also use to teach visual arts.

## Reflexive visual journals: Strategies to enhance pedagogy

The photovoice activity and reflective group conversations allowed the five teachers to share their lived experiences and frustrations. Through elaborating on their personal challenges and the barriers they experienced in teaching visual arts in the Foundation Phase, they realised that they shared similar thoughts and experiences. This offered the opportunity for them to support and learn from each other. The value of collaboration soon became clear. During the last cycle of data generation, the five teachers showcased their own creativity by spending a morning together during which each created her own reflexive visual journal. The figure below depicts the cover pages of four of these.

**Figure 4**
Cover pages of Reflective Journals



These journals were reflexive rather than just reflective since participants not only reflected on their thoughts and actions, but also pragmatically considered the context in which these actions occurred and actively engaged in facilitating change and growth. During this shared time of art-making, they were guided in reflecting on their learning together and on conceptualising strategies for addressing the barriers they all faced.

In her reflection, Amanda expressed her enjoyment in creating a visual journal. She admired the fact that even though they all received the same visual reflexive journal instructions, the execution of each participant's journal was unique and creative. This inspired her to adopt a less structured pedagogy in future when she was presenting visual arts lessons. Elsa was grateful that the collaboration during this study had inspired her to attempt new ideas, techniques, and strategies in her presentation of visual arts. She added that by being offered the opportunity to express and share the needs and challenges she was experiencing in her visual arts pedagogy and praxis, she no longer felt isolated and alone.

Carol admitted that this collaboration initially highlighted her creative insecurities. After challenging the notion that she did not view herself as a creative or an artistic teacher, she realised that teaching visual arts could become something she would enjoy if she just remembered that there is no right or wrong way to create art. She was still concerned that she did not have enough time for visual arts given the curricular pressure, but she was now open to trying out new visual arts techniques in the time that she did have available.

After the conclusion of the study, the strategies that the five teachers conceptualised were shared with their principals and colleagues during a celebration that marked the end of the study. Not only are these strategies of great value to the schools where these teachers are employed, but they can also be used on a larger platform to empower other Foundation Phase teachers and enhance their pedagogy in teaching visual arts.

# Discussion

The value and contribution of this study is three-fold. First, the five participating teachers discovered and proposed strategies to improve the praxis of visual arts pedagogy in their own classrooms that can be used and adapted by other Foundation Phase teachers. Second, this study contributes to the personal and professional development of teachers by highlighting the value of collaboration to address barriers and challenges teachers are facing, that may, in turn, enhance their own pedagogy and praxis. Third, the value of using a participatory research methodology and arts-based data generation methods was validated.

## Strategies to enhance visual arts pedagogy

The participants of this study were a cohort of Foundation Phase teachers employed at different primary schools. It was insightful to explore their diverse experiences within their authentic educational settings. They shared a firm belief that, regardless of the pedagogy of discomfort that some participants reported, they should play a significant role in promoting creativity and visual arts. However, regarding the practical implementation of visual arts education and lessons, they recounted experiencing an array of intrinsic and extrinsic barriers. Time constraints and curricular pressure are interlinked challenges; a reference to one was seldom made without mentioning the other. The data revealed that the national Foundation Phase curriculum was perceived to be overloaded. The participants often found it challenging to allocate the required time to the visual arts component. They felt that academic subjects, such as mathematics and languages, are given a higher priority. Intrinsic factors such as low confidence and the lack of self-efficacy were exacerbated by the extrinsic barriers they experienced. Should the extrinsic challenges be addressed, it is hypothesised that intrinsic anxiety and related insecurities could be minimized, and a positive attitude towards visual arts education could be fostered.

It is essential for Foundation Phase teachers to remain involved energetically in the planning and facilitation of visual arts lessons. Through the data, it was also discovered that the presentation of visual arts is a skill that is acquired and developed through the practice thereof. Participants reported becoming more comfortable with presenting art by making art.

Therefore, by providing regular artmaking opportunities to learners that promote their creative development, the teachers, in turn, are enhancing their visual arts pedagogy.

It is also important to note that the participants agreed that it was important for learners to also enjoy visual arts lessons and projects. Therefore, they collaboratively suggested the following strategies to enhance their praxis and pedagogy in the presentation of visual arts.

*Teachers*

- **Planning:** Teachers should plan visual arts lessons with the focus on, and intention to include, a variety of techniques and different media or resources, rather than just present these lessons on an ad hoc basis. Thus, varied resources and techniques could be employed to keep art lessons interesting and diverse. This strategy may also promote both learners' and teachers' creativity since engaging in the planning and preparation of art projects can lead spontaneously to the development of innovative and creative ideas.
- **Art box:** Data from the reflective group conversation and from the reflexive journaling suggested the value of compiling a visual arts box for each class. Such a box could be filled with interesting things and could be used during art making to spark and encourage creative ideas. The content could be gathered throughout the year without incurring financial costs. Compiling an art box would require collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community. Items such as wool, fabric, buttons, and craft media could be donated to the class by community members. By involving the community, enough visual arts media could be collected.
- **Optimize classroom space**: Consider the restructuring of existing classroom space to accommodate visual arts projects. Where possible, allocate a dedicated art area or classroom where equipment and resources could be stored.
- **Promote parental involvement:** Parents should be well informed of the significance of visual arts in the holistic development of learners. Teachers can create easy-to-follow creative strategies to encourage parental involvement and motivate art-making at home. Innovative ideas for creating visual arts on a limited budget could also be shared.
- **Continual self-improvement:** Adopting an attitude of lifelong learning not only to other subjects in the Foundation Phase but also to active engagement with resources such as visual arts literature and art exhibitions would be invaluable.

*School management*

- Create opportunities for schools in the same district or town to engage collaboratively with a specific focus on visual arts. Working in a participatory manner could promote shared planning and resources.
- Be conscious of allowing time for art projects in the school timetable.
- Highlight the value of life skills and visual arts as a priority similar to mathematics and language development.

- Invest in enhancing the pedagogy of visual arts in Foundation Phase teachers by providing professional development opportunities that are specifically focused on teaching visual arts. This might include inviting experts from the private sector to present such workshops given that the Department of Education does not offer such opportunities.

*Department of Education*

- Provide more opportunities for in-service training on visual arts education with a focus on the enrichment of artistic knowledge and visual arts techniques.
- Refine the criteria of the visual art as specified in the national life skills curriculum.
- Source experts from the private sector to host regular artmaking workshops, much like the reflexive journaling workshop in this study.

Although the participants collaboratively suggested strategies for South African schools, the ideas and strategies could be adopted and implemented in various contexts in other countries with minimal or no change.

## Using the value of collaboration to improve pedagogy

The collective experiences that involved teachers during the process were a key component of this research study. The exploration of their lived experiences in their role as Foundation Phase teachers accentuated the positive aspects of visual arts education as well as the needs and challenges experienced in the presentation of this subject. The action research cycles furthermore created the opportunity for growth and transformation as the teachers collaboratively identified strategies they could employ to address the challenges they have been experiencing.

The collaborative process of making art together (in the form of visual reflexive journals) created opportunities for participants to share perceptions, expectations, local knowledge, and lived experience about teaching visual arts in the Foundation Phase. This communal platform created a safe space in which they could share ideas and contribute to each other's praxis. As a result, their pedagogical content knowledge and general pedagogy of teaching visual arts were improved. In addition, the isolation some teachers experienced was minimized.

As mentioned, the study not only contributed to pedagogical strategies that teachers can employ when teaching visual arts, but the findings also contribute to the developing field of participatory research methodology. The combination of participatory arts-based data collection strategies, namely photovoice, a reflective group conversation, and reflexive visual journaling, validates the value of using PALAR to foster transformation and growth on both personal and professional levels.

# Conclusion

This research on the practice, policy, and context of visual arts education in the Foundation Phase can encourage in-service training initiatives focusing on the visual arts component in this phase. Primary schools in South Africa need to invest in the enhancement of the visual arts pedagogy and praxis of their Foundation Phase teachers. The DBE and primary schools should take into consideration their current policies underpinning in-service training and focus their attention on professional development opportunities for visual arts. Principals of schools, in collaboration with the DBE, should further consider addressing the areas identified as challenging in the teaching of visual arts. It should be a priority to conceptualize empowerment strategies to enhance Foundation Phase teachers' creative and artistic confidence, thereby improving visual arts education in the Foundation Phase.

The findings of this study confirm that, through teaching visual arts, generalist teachers fulfill an important role in the development of Foundation Phase students. Confident teachers are more inclined to implement an effective visual arts pedagogy successfully in their classrooms. This study also contributes to the literature on the discipline of arts education through highlighting the challenges of generalist teachers in South Africa. Designated art teachers could assist their colleagues by sharing their expertise, pedagogical content knowledge, and resources. A greater awareness of the struggles these teachers endure could lead to a greater sense of general support from their art teacher colleagues.

The combination of participatory arts-based data collection strategies, namely photovoice, reflective group conversations, and reflexive visual journaling, not only provided five South African Foundation Phase teachers with the opportunity to reflect on and explore their collective experiences related to the pedagogy of visual arts and, but also to conceptualize practical strategies to enhance their praxis. This study also highlights the value of collaboration as a pedagogical tool as well as a research methodology and paradigm.

Although this study focused on a small sample of teachers in South Africa, their experiences can encourage generalist teachers around the world to reflect critically on their own experiences of teaching visual arts in a Foundation Phase classroom. The strategies these teachers discussed could also add value to their own experience.

## Declaration of interest statement

The authors do not have any interest to declare.

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