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The Visual Representation of Collaborative Learning on the Axis of Aesthetic Experience: An Arts-Based Research on "The Stage"

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how individual aesthetic expressions are negotiated, repositioned, and reconstituted within a collective visual structure through an arts-based research (ABR) framework, focusing on collaborative learning in visual arts education. Conducted in the Spring semester of the 2024–2025 academic year, the study involved seven senior undergraduate students in a visual arts education program at a state university who collaboratively produced a large-scale acrylic painting. Each participant contributed personal imagery shaped by cultural memory and emotional experience to a shared composition conceptualized through the metaphor of a "stage." Rather than framing collaboration as a purely harmonious process, the study conceptualizes the stage as a pedagogical and representational space in which aesthetic experience emerges through negotiation, tension, and shared authorship. Data were collected through systematic observations, process documentation, and semi-structured interviews, and analyzed using inductive thematic content analysis. Findings indicate that participants initially experienced uncertainty and tension regarding creative autonomy, intervention, and compositional balance. However, these tensions functioned productively, fostering empathy, reflective thinking, and collective aesthetic coherence. The study demonstrates that collaborative artistic production operates simultaneously as an aesthetic, pedagogical, and epistemic space in which individual creativity is not diminished but reconfigured through collective engagement. By foregrounding collective aesthetic agency and the performative dimension of collaboration, this research extends arts-based research beyond individual-centered models and offers a nuanced understanding of how aesthetic experience is restructured within shared creative practices. The findings contribute to pedagogical strategies in visual arts education that emphasize negotiation, reflexivity, and collective meaning-making.

Keywords: Arts-based research, visual arts education, aesthetic experience, collaborative learning, reflective practice, creative autonomy.

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Introduction

Art education transcends being merely a field in which psychomotor skills are acquired and artistic abilities are developed; it offers a multidimensional learning environment that supports the individual's holistic development in emotional, cognitive, and aesthetic terms. In this context, aesthetic experience is regarded as a distinctive form of learning encompassing processes through which individuals perceive, reinterpret, and express the world through art (Dewey, 2021; Eisner, 2002). Aesthetic experience possesses a dynamic structure in which the senses are activated, a profound relationship between form and content is established, and the individual actively participates in the process as an aesthetic subject. In this respect, art education functions as a pedagogical tool and a "stage" where cultural, symbolic, and individual modes of existence are represented (Arnheim, 2004; Greene, 2001).

In this study, the "stage" metaphor—used as a central conceptual framework—does not merely signify a physical surface; rather, it denotes a rich semantic space situated at the intersection of aesthetic, pedagogical, and social representations. Although the stage is traditionally defined as the site where a connection is established between the artist and the audience, in this context, it functions as a symbolic plane on which students position their individual productions within a collective narrative. This plane, where the artist expresses the self and engages in an aesthetic dialogue with other subjects, is conceived simultaneously as a space for both individual and collective subjectivation. The "stage" is thus considered a structure in which the representable is transformed into both a personal memory and a shared aesthetic code. This representational space renders the individual's position within the collective visible, while also enabling an aesthetic stance. As emphasized in Irwin's a/r/tographic approach, such

creative surfaces can also be interpreted as visual inquiry spaces where experiences of learning, teaching, and researching are intricately interwoven (Irwin, 2006).

Another key concept foregrounded in this study is collective representation. Collective representation refers to the process through which individual aesthetic expressions are reorganized within a shared structure to form a meaningful whole. Each participant's unique image functions not only as a mode of personal expression but also as a complementary element of a communal narrative. In this context, the visual production process evolves into a space of collective consciousness shaped by intersubjective aesthetic interactions and representational negotiations. Durkheim's concept of "collective representations" emphasizes the constitutive role of shared meaning-making in shaping social structures. These representations extend beyond individual experiences, forming symbolic structures integrated with collective consciousness (Arkonaç, 2011). Within the context of art education, such representational practices enable individuals both to articulate their personal identities and to participate in a shared aesthetic discourse. Therefore, collective representation serves not merely as a visual unity, but also as a pedagogical space of solidarity and an aesthetic domain of negotiation.

Within the scope of this comprehensive structure, Arts-Based Research (ABR) offers a significant theoretical and practical framework for understanding the inquiry process. It conceptualizes the creative process not merely as a domain of aesthetic experience, but also as a research ground where original knowledge production becomes possible. Artistic creation is thus regarded as a vital site of visual production and a meaningful knowledge-generating practice located at the core of the research process (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2009). In this context, ABR renders emotional, intuitive, and experiential knowledge visible. It enables the deliberate analysis of both individual and collective experiences beyond the boundaries of conventional scientific methodologies (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008). Particularly within art education, ABR provides a robust methodological foundation for exploring students' aesthetic decision-making and intuitive knowledge generation during creative processes (Bedir-Erişti, 2015; Rolling, 2010). Utilizing artistic tools as both the object and method of inquiry, this approach builds a transformative bridge between scientific knowledge production and artistic creation.

A qualified art education aims not only to foster individual creativity but also to construct social existence through empathy and interaction (Yılmaz, 2007). In this regard, collaborative artistic production processes make it possible to establish a collective aesthetic unity while preserving each individual's artistic identity. The question of how personal aesthetic expressions are integrated into a collective structure remains relatively underexplored within the field of art education. This study seeks to examine, from both aesthetic and pedagogical perspectives, the creative process in which seven senior students enrolled in a visual arts education program at a public university collaboratively combined their individual images on a single large-scale canvas. The participants designed their unique visual imagery on a shared surface co-created with their peers and, throughout this process, experienced the "stage" metaphor as both a physical space and a symbolic plane of collective meaning-making. In doing so, individual creativity, collective harmony, representational aesthetics, and visual narration became intertwined within an interdisciplinary framework.

This visual creation process enabled the observation of how aesthetic experience is integrated with collaborative learning and how it is subsequently reconstituted through this engagement. The aesthetic experiences of the participating students encompassed not only visual preferences but also psychological dimensions such as motivation, empathy, meaning making, and subjectivation (Cupchik, 2002; Leder et al., 2004). In this context, the concept of the "stage" serves not only as a metaphorical description but also as a tangible aesthetic space in which participants position their artistic presence. As in the fields of theatre or music, each student appears on this stage "as themselves," reconstructing the aesthetic context through their interaction with the audience. These dynamic holds transformative potential in both pedagogical and aesthetic terms. Each participating student emerges not only as a learner but also as a subject who produces, represents, and performs (Erişti & Irwin, 2024; Freedman, 2003).

Despite the growing body of literature on ABR and collaborative learning in art education, existing studies tend to emphasize either individual creative processes or general outcomes of group-based artistic activities. Far less attention has been given to how individual aesthetic subjectivities are negotiated, repositioned, and visually reconstituted within a shared compositional space. In this respect, the present study seeks to move beyond confirming established theoretical assumptions by proposing an interpretive framework that conceptualizes collaborative artistic production as a site of collective aesthetic subjectivation rather than mere cooperation or stylistic coexistence.

By foregrounding the metaphor of the "stage," this research introduces an analytical lens through which collaborative learning is examined as a performative and

relational aesthetic experience. The stage is not treated as a descriptive metaphor alone, but as a pedagogical and representational structure in which individual visual narratives are made visible, contested, and reassembled within a collective aesthetic order. Through this framework, aesthetic experience is understood as a dynamic process shaped by negotiation, tension, and shared authorship, allowing the study to illuminate dimensions of collaborative art-making that remain underexplored in conventional ABR.

Accordingly, the original contribution of this study lies in articulating how collaborative artistic practices function simultaneously as aesthetic, pedagogical, and epistemic spaces. By analyzing the visual production process and participants' reflective narratives together, the research offers a nuanced understanding of how individual creative autonomy is not diminished but reconfigured through collective engagement. In doing so, the study contributes to the literature by reframing collaborative learning in art education as a process of collective aesthetic agency, expanding the theoretical scope of ABR beyond individual-centered models of artistic inquiry.

Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine how individual aesthetic expressions are represented within a collective structure in the context of art education, and to uncover the aesthetic, pedagogical, and psychological dimensions of this representation through an ABR methodology.

In line with this overarching aim, the study focuses on the following specific objectives:

- To examine how individual aesthetic images are represented within a collective artistic composition.
- To analyze the components of aesthetic experiences (sensory, emotional, cultural) that students undergo during collaborative production in the art education process.
- To evaluate the extent to which collaborative creative processes contribute to students' development of aesthetic awareness, empathy, and creative autonomy.
- To explore how participants construct their individual aesthetic narratives within the group context and to reveal the pedagogical implications of this process.
- To discuss the contributions of the ABR methodology to processes of aesthetic representation and artistic learning.
- To identify the effects of artistic practice as a collective creative process on students' self-awareness, expressive capacity, and sense of community.

Method

Research Model

This research was structured in accordance with ABR approach, which is one of the qualitative research designs (Barone & Eisner, 2012). The ABR framework views artistic production not merely as a creative process or an aesthetic product, but as a unique and transformative means of knowledge generation. Within this framework, aesthetic experience gains both pedagogical and investigative depth, allowing for the meaningful visibility of sensory, intuitive, and emotional forms of knowledge in the research context (Leavy, 2009).

Throughout the process, the researcher did not assume a directive or interventionist role, but rather positioned himselves as an observer, facilitator, and reflective actor. This role was intended to encourage creative thinking while enabling participants to develop their own aesthetic decisions independently. During the process, students were encouraged to strengthen a range of complementary skills related to artistic production, including time management, crisis resolution, group interaction, and the ability to reach shared aesthetic decisions.

In this regard, ABR functioned not only as a means of data collection but also as a pedagogical space that supported participants' processes of aesthetic subjectivation. The resulting artwork—combining individual aesthetic narratives with collective visual representations—served as a rich and multidimensional source of data that contributed meaningfully to the research process and the emergence of its findings.

Participants

This research was conducted in the Spring semester of the 2024–2025 Academic Year within the Department of Fine Arts Education at a public university. The participants of the study consisted of seven senior students enrolled in the Art Teaching Program. The participant group included six female and one male student, aged between 21 and 24. The students participated in the study on a voluntary basis. Drawing on the personal aesthetic approaches and visual expression styles they had developed throughout their undergraduate education, the participants engaged in a collective process aimed at reconstructing their individual visual languages on a shared compositional surface. Particular attention was given in the selection of the participants, to their prior experience with individual artistic production and their willingness to take part in a

undergraduate education, the participants engaged in a collective process aimed at reconstructing their individual visual languages on a shared compositional surface. Particular attention was given, in the selection of the participants, to their prior experience with individual artistic production and their willingness to take part in a collaborative creative process. Each student sought to express original imagery shaped by their cultural memory, emotional experiences, and artistic style on a communal surface created with their peers. In this process, the participants assumed active responsibility in various interconnected social and artistic processes, including forming aesthetic consensus, negotiating representational dynamics, and establishing empathetic relationships within the group. In this regard, the participants were positioned not only as subjects of the research but also as creative collaborators. Through this aesthetic experience–based collective production process, they engaged in a profound interaction that encompassed both the individual and social dimensions of learning.

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected using two primary instruments:

Observation of the Artistic Creation Process

One of the primary data sources in this study was the large-scale collaborative canvas created by the participants, measuring 2 meters in height and 4.5 meters in width. This artwork was not only considered the final artistic product but also evaluated as a tangible reflection of the participants' creative thinking processes, aesthetic preferences, and collective interactions. The visual analysis process was conducted on multiple levels, including individual originality, aesthetic coherence, representational strategies, and modes of collective expression. Particular attention was paid to how each participant's unique imagery was positioned within the dynamics of the group. Throughout the production phase, the researcher employed process-based observation techniques to collect data systematically. This included careful monitoring of how students engaged in the creative process, the aesthetic and technical challenges they encountered, the solutions they developed, task distribution within the group, their flexibility during moments of crisis, and their mechanisms for making artistic decisions. Observations were documented using a structured observation form. In addition, detailed field notes were kept recording ongoing aesthetic discussions, symbolic choices, attempts to achieve visual harmony, and representational negotiations, defined as the process by which individuals arrived at a shared visual narrative. In this context, the observation data not only described the creative process but also offered in-depth insights into the students' modes of aesthetic thinking, experiences of collaborative learning, and practices of artistic subjectivation. The observation phase was carried out in accordance with the principle of "witnessing the process" a key characteristic of the ABR approach and was guided by a reflexive and interpretive perspective.

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

Following the completion of the artistic creation process, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. The development, validity, and reliability of the interview form were ensured through the following procedures: These interviews aimed to explore the participants' experiences during the artistic process, their aesthetic perceptions, and the dynamics of group collaboration. The open-ended questions in the interview form were designed to elicit participants' perceptions of the creation process, their emotional reflections, and their aesthetic evaluations. The semi-structured interview form used in this study was developed in alignment with the research objectives and refined based on expert consultation. Content validity was established through evaluations provided by three academic experts specializing in art education, aesthetic experience, and ABR. Based on the feedback received, the questions were simplified and restructured to directly contribute to the research problem. In terms of reliability, the questions were prepared in an open-ended and comprehensible manner, allowing participants to freely articulate their experiences. The form was piloted with two students to assess the clarity and non-directive nature of the questions. Minor revisions were made following the pilot study, resulting in the finalized version of the interview form. These adjustments ensured that the data collection tool was both valid and reliable. Additionally, in accordance with the qualitative nature of the research, reliability was addressed through the principles of transferability, confirmability, and consistency.

The ethical process in the study was as follows:

This study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University where the implementation was conducted, in accordance with academic ethical principles. Based on this ethical approval, fundamental principles such as the protection of participant rights, confidentiality, voluntariness, transparency, and informed consent were carefully observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed in advance—both verbally and in writing—about the purpose, scope, and duration of the study, and written informed consent forms were obtained from each participant. All data collected during the research process—including visual documents, interview recordings, and observational notes—were anonymized to prevent the disclosure of participants' identities and were used solely for scientific purposes.

Participants' personal privacy and freedom of expression were fully respected, and no coercion or direction was applied during interviews or creative production sessions. Additionally, all necessary ethical precautions were taken to ensure the secure storage of data, to prevent sharing with third parties, and to avoid any interpretation of the study results that could harm the participants. In this regard, the research process adhered strictly not only to academic ethical guidelines but also to the psychological, pedagogical, and aesthetic rights of the participants, with a high degree of sensitivity.

- Ethics committee approval was obtained from Gazi University Ethics Committee (Date: 18.06.2025, Number: E-E-77082166-604.01-1265190)
- Informed consent has been obtained from the participants.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data in this study were collected through systematic observation records, detailed field notes, and semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants during the artistic creation process. This diversified and integrative dataset, derived from multiple sources, enabled a multidimensional understanding of the research problem. The data were subjected to thematic content analysis, which followed a multilevel, in-depth, and contextual approach that considered patterns and relationships among the data. The analysis was structured to explore how both individual expressions and collective interactions were reflected in the content, encompassing aesthetic, pedagogical, and psychosocial dimensions.

The analytic process was guided by inductive, iterative, and holistic strategies widely recommended in the qualitative research literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the first stage, all interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and combined with observation forms and field notes to form a comprehensive dataset. These documents were read repeatedly by the researcher to identify significant statements, recurring discourses, emotionally charged expressions, and aesthetic choices. Meaningful statements were transformed into codes; each participant's data were then grouped according to thematic similarities and semantic units.

The coding process was conducted by both the researcher and a second expert evaluator in the field of art education, ensuring inter-coder reliability (with a target agreement rate above 80%). The themes and sub-themes generated from the codes were systematically developed through the identification of patterns, contrasts, and convergences in the data. These themes were supported by direct quotations from participants and were also linked to creative behaviors observed throughout the artistic process.

The analysis process extended beyond the identification of content themes, evolving into a comprehensive interpretive practice aimed at revealing interconnected layers of meaning, such as aesthetic experience, representational strategies, and pedagogical interactions. In this sense, the analysis reflected the interpretive and interpretable nature of ABR by evaluating the data within its contextual and cultural meanings.

Analysis of Data Obtained from the Observation of the Artistic Creation Process

The observational data were collected by the researcher through participant observation, which involved active engagement in the artistic process. Throughout the observation period, the researcher was physically present in the participants' creative environment, occasionally asking guiding questions, but maintained a non-intrusive, reflective-observer position, refraining from direct intervention in the creation process. Observations were systematically documented through detailed field notes and process-related visual materials (e.g., photographs, sketches, and sequential images of the artwork's development). The observational data obtained through this process were analyzed using thematic content analysis and underwent the following stages:

Transcription of Field Notes: Handwritten notes recorded throughout the process were digitized and organized chronologically by observation day.

Coding of Meaning Units: Within the observation notes, recurring behavioral patterns, notable interactions, visual decision-making processes, and attitudes toward collaboration were identified and transformed into open codes.

Theme Generation: Based on the codes, thematic categories such as aesthetic negotiation, creative conflict and resolution, transformation of intra-group roles, reflective production, and silent communication and visual language were developed.

Support with Visual Documents: Themes that emerged from process observations were supported by photographic and visual documentation captured during the studio process. This triangulation allowed interpretations to be substantiated through concrete visual evidence.

***Interpretation*:** The observation themes were interpreted within the aesthetic and pedagogical principles of ABR. The individual and collective production dynamics of the

students were analyzed in this context.

This analytic process aimed to move beyond mere descriptive accounts of behavior, seeking instead to understand how aesthetic experience was transformed into a pedagogical process. The observational data, when evaluated alongside participants' verbal narratives, provided a rich interpretive ground encompassing multiple dimensions, thereby deepening the holistic structure of the research.

Analysis of the Semi-Structured Interviews

Transcription of Data: All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. This stage was carried out meticulously to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the textual data to be analyzed.

***Exploratory Reading*:** All transcripts were read multiple times by the researcher to identify overarching meaning structures, recurring expressions, and noteworthy emphases. This process served as a preparatory step for coding and contributed to the development of a holistic understanding of the data.

Coding Process: Meaningful units within the interview transcripts were transformed into conceptual codes. Participants' responses were categorized under relevant codes based on content similarity. The coding was independently conducted by both the researcher and an expert in the field. Inter-coder agreement exceeded 80%, thereby affirming the reliability of the analysis.

Theme Identification. Main themes and sub-themes were developed based on the coded data. These themes were structured according to patterns and commonalities observed across participant responses.

Matching Themes with Data: Each theme was supported with relevant participant quotations, enhancing the validity of the qualitative data through direct evidence.

Interpretation and Synthesis: The identified themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework. The resulting findings were synthesized into a comprehensive structure that reflects the depth and complexity of participants' experiences.

Results

Results Derived from the Observation of the Artistic Creation Process

The collective artwork (Figure 1) was executed on a large-scale canvas measuring 2 meters in height and 4.5 meters in width, using acrylic paint. This medium was selected due to its fast-drying properties, which facilitated the collaborative process. The work was completed over a period of 42 days. The composition functions as a collective visual narrative constructed from the personal imagery developed by the participating students throughout their undergraduate education. The composition is structured around three central figures: a figure with closed eyes on the left, a reclining female figure in the center, and a figure in striped pajamas on the right, gazing directly at the viewer. This tripartite structure creates a visual balance while guiding the viewer's gaze across the stage-like surface. The warm color palette used in the background enhances the dramatic atmosphere and allows the diverse images contributed by different students to merge into a coherent whole.

Figure 1.

The Stage, Collective Work, Acrylic on Canvas, 200 x 450 cm, 2025



Source: The Stage [Collective artwork, acrylic on canvas, 200 × 450 cm], authors' personal archive.

Participant 1 frequently incorporates animal imagery in her previous artistic works. In the examined piece, recurring visual elements such as the snake figure positioned in the lower part of the composition, the spider in the upper left corner, as well as the spider web, snail, and dragonfly in the background, reflect visual motifs that consistently appear throughout her artistic practice.

Participant 2 is another student who regularly employs animal figures in her prior artworks. Her compositions often feature a crow figure placed against a spontaneously constructed background. To reinforce the dark mass formed by the crowd, she uses electric cables as linear elements. In this collective work, the crow figure—located in the left central area—creates a dynamic area of contrast. The blue cables emerging from beneath the car and extending toward the left side of the composition were also contributed by this participant, enhancing the chromatic tension against the orange background.

Participant 3 frequently features elderly male figures in his artistic work. In the current composition, the figure depicted on the left side holding a teacup has become a distinctive character emblematic of the participant's visual language. Due to its orientation and posture, this figure plays a crucial role in establishing compositional balance.

The rendering of the character's clothing also contributes to the overall visual dynamic by creating an open tonal area within the composition. Moreover, the participant was significantly involved in shaping the painterly infrastructure of the entire artwork.

Participant 4 regularly employs images of classic cars and automotive parts in her individual works. In this painting, the car image located in the upper right corner is her contribution. This visual element holds compositional significance, particularly in terms of directional contrast. It also provides visual continuity with the green background area located in the upper left corner of the canvas.

Participant 5 typically explores themes such as traditional carpet motifs, female figures, and scenes from everyday life in her artistic practice. The central portion of the composition, which features a reclining woman overlaid with a carpet motif, is her contribution. This figure plays a key role in the compositional balance. The light tones used in the woman's hair contrast sharply with the darker tones of the carpet motif, creating a strong value contrast. Additionally, the visual continuity in tone and color between this central figure and the adjacent figures to the left and right enhances compositional cohesion. Positioned in direct opposition to the car figure, this contribution also introduces the most prominent directional contrast within the canvas.

Participant 6 has developed an original character based on the motif of masks in her artistic work. This figure is often situated in social environments—such as the metro, cafes, or beaches—and has been transformed into a metaphorically rich character that evokes meanings beyond its literal form. In the current painting, the character appears on the right side of the composition, dressed in traditional striped pajamas and holding a teacup. This figure contributes significantly to the piece by providing both tonal and directional contrast.

Participant 7 initially focused on traditional wooden doors in her early works but has more recently developed compositions based on observations within studio settings. She frequently incorporates the image of an easel in varying formats across her work. The easel figures seen in the upper left and upper right corners of the current composition are her contributions. These elements enhance the visual richness of the painting while also counterbalancing the overall horizontal orientation of the composition.

At the request of the seven participants who created the collective work, the researcher—who served as the project coordinator—was also invited to contribute a personal visual element to the composition. In response, the researcher incorporated a wooden chair image, a motif frequently employed in his own artistic practice. While each image in the composition serves as an individual mode of personal expression, the work as a whole presents a multidimensional and symbolically layered visual unity that contributes to collective memory and is embedded within a shared consciousness. When interpreted through Barthes's (1977) semiotic approach, these images function both within their individual contexts and as integral components of the overall narrative.

Within the framework of Dewey's (2021) definition of aesthetic experience, this work can be regarded as an aesthetic process transformed into lived experience. The participants' aesthetic concerns, perceptions, preferences, and behaviors in bringing together their personal narratives on the canvas extend far beyond formal compositional arrangement. They reflect a process of emotional and cognitive construction, giving rise to a new and collective aesthetic experience. According to Eisner's (2002) theory of learning through art, artistic production serves not only as a learning outcome but also as the sum of decision-making, interpretation, and critical engagement processes. In this study, the students not only produced a visual composition but also developed a shared narrative by respecting one another's creative spaces, demonstrating both individual agency and collaborative authorship.

Figure 2.

Participants' Collaborative Working Processes



Source: The Stage [Collective artwork, acrylic on canvas, 200 × 450 cm], authors' personal archive.

In the photograph taken by the researcher during the creation process of the artwork, The Stage (Figure 2), students are seen working collaboratively in front of the canvas—a concrete manifestation of cooperative learning. Each student freely contributed their own image while simultaneously supporting the overall composition of the group. This aligns closely with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of learning through social interaction. The videos recorded

during the process reveal simultaneous artistic engagement, with each participant creating without interfering with the others, demonstrating that cooperation was maintained not only on a cognitive level but also through affective and behavioral equilibrium.

One of the most striking aspects of the work is that the entire visual narrative is constructed around the metaphor of a "stage." Each participant assumed a role on this stage and placed their image as if performing a part in a visual play. Yet, this placement does not generate a set of isolated performances but rather contributes to a collective script. This structure can be interpreted as the visual art equivalent of a harmonious ensemble in theater or polyphony in music. Additionally, the fact that the figures do not directly gaze at the viewer invites the audience "backstage." In doing so, the viewer is encouraged to become an intellectual participant in the act of creation itself.

Figure 3.

Critical Reflection and Reasoning on the Artwork



Source: The Stage [Collective artwork, acrylic on canvas, 200 × 450 cm], authors' personal archive.

The collective evaluation session conducted with other student groups after the completion of the artwork (Figure 3) represents reflective learning, which is another core dimension of ABR. Through dialogue about the artwork, students were able to reinterpret both their individual contributions and the collaborative process (Schön, 1983). These sessions served to foster self-awareness through art-making and critical engagement. Finally, a group exhibition titled The Stage was organized at an art gallery located on the university campus. The exhibition featured not only the collaborative piece that lent its name to the event but also the participants' individual artistic works. The centerpiece of the exhibition was the large-scale artwork, The Stage. This exhibition provided an opportunity for students to share their artistic and academic journey with their peers, families, and faculty members, thereby making their arts-based experiences publicly visible and intellectually accessible.

Figure 4.

Exhibiting The Stage



Source: The Stage [Collective artwork, acrylic on canvas, 200 × 450 cm], authors' personal archive.

This artistic practice represents a compelling example of ABR, in which individual images are transformed into a shared narrative, and the collective aesthetic experience holds significant pedagogical value (Figure 4). Each visual element of the artwork carries not only aesthetic meaning but also psychological, sociological, and intellectual connotations. The documentation generated throughout the process—photographs, videos, and interviews—demonstrates that the study is grounded in multiple data sources, supporting the methodological richness of the research.

Results Derived from the Interviews

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the thematic content analysis of the semi-structured interview data, along with supporting participant quotations and explanatory notes, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Findings Related to the Semi-Structured Interviews

Theme	Sub-Themes	Supporting Participant Quotations	Explanation
1. Reflection on the Individual Creative Process	Connections to personal history and cultural memory, childhood memories and nostalgia, expression of personality through imagery	"I materialized my childhood memories in my imagery." (Participant 1) "Wooden materials evoke a sense of lived experience." (Participant 7)	Participants described their individual creative processes through images rooted in personal and cultural histories.
2.	Initial anxiety	"I was afraid at	They learned

Collective Creative Experience and Collaboration	followed by harmony, achieving balance through communication and respect, creating a shared aesthetic unity	first, but then we found harmony with patience and respect." (Participant 1) "Different styles merged into a single structure." (Participant 5)	to establish a balance between individual expression and group harmony during collaborative work.
3. Meaning, Aesthetics, and the Stage Metaphor	Individual positioning on The Stage: family, solidarity, and memories; expectation of empathy and admiration from the viewer	"I'm part of the story in a corner of the stage." (Participant 6) "I want the viewer to be left alone with the stage." (Participant 4)	Participants developed both individual and collective storytelling strategies through the stage metaphor.
4. Learning Through Art and Personal Growth	Gains in empathy, collaboration, originality, flexibility, and courage in modes of expression	"Art is not only individual but also a collective form of expression." (Participant 2) "I learned to stretch and challenge boundaries." (Participant 3)	Art-based learning helped participants enhance their forms of expression, aesthetic awareness, and empathetic capacity.
5. Researcher-Reflective Thinking and Critique	Challenges: fear of falling behind, pressure to conform; transformations: surpassing one's limits; the potential of art for knowledge production	"I learned to balance between control and letting go." (Participant 3) "Art can also be a way of producing knowledge." (Participant 7)	By overcoming challenges in the creative process, participants developed reflective thinking and discovered the research potential of art.

Based on the first theme, findings from the semi-structured interviews indicate that participants strongly referenced their personal histories and cultural memories during their individual creative processes. Their engagement with childhood memories, nostalgic elements, and imagery reflecting personal identity formed the foundation of their aesthetic preferences and artistic expressions.

According to the second theme, participants initially expressed concern about protecting their individual space for self-expression. However, over time, they reported having established an aesthetic balance through communication, patience, and mutual respect. This finding suggests that collaborative artistic production does not simply require cooperation but involves a continuous negotiation of aesthetic authority and creative control. Rather than functioning as a harmonious process from the outset, collaboration emerged as a dynamic field in which participants confronted tensions related to ownership, visibility, and intervention. These tensions, however, did not weaken the creative process; instead, they operated as productive forces that enabled participants to redefine their individual positions within the collective aesthetic structure.

In line with the third theme, participants effectively utilized the stage metaphor to construct both individual and collective narrative strategies.

The fourth theme revealed that the arts-based collective production process contributed significantly to the development of individual skills such as empathy, expressive flexibility, and originality.

According to the fifth theme, the challenges encountered during the creative process fostered participants' reflective thinking skills and enabled them to grasp the scientific validity of knowledge production through artistic processes. From an ABR perspective, these reflections point to the epistemic dimension of artistic practice. Participants' expressions reveal that moments of uncertainty, fear of falling behind, and pressure to conform were integral to the learning process. Such experiences challenge idealized narratives of collaboration and instead highlight how reflective thinking emerges through disruption, hesitation, and aesthetic risk-taking. In this sense, the creative process functioned not only as an expressive activity but also as a site of knowledge production grounded in lived experience.

Reflective thinking, as defined by Dewey (2022), is a high-level cognitive activity that involves the deep evaluation of one's own thoughts, experiences, and learning processes. The content analysis of this study demonstrates that aesthetic experience is constructed through a dynamic balance between individual originality and collective harmony. Participants learned to situate themselves within

the collective stage while preserving their individual artistic perspectives. This process provided a transformative learning space through which participants simultaneously enhanced their aesthetic sensitivity, pedagogical interaction skills, and psychological awareness.

Discussion

Rather than merely illustrating the outcomes of collaborative art-making, the findings of this study reveal how aesthetic experience is restructured through negotiation, tension, and collective authorship within a shared visual space. The findings of this study demonstrate that the dynamic relationship between individual aesthetic expression and collective artistic production fosters creative autonomy, empathy, and aesthetic awareness within the context of art education. While aesthetic experience is shaped by personal memory and cultural identity, these individual narratives were observed to merge into a collective unity through the shared metaphor of a stage. This finding aligns with Dewey's (2021) conception of aesthetic experience as an integrated expression of lived experience.

Although the students initially entered the process with concerns about preserving their individual artistic space, they eventually came to experience how collaboration can transform aesthetic production. This observation supports Eisner's (2002) assertion that learning through art enhances decision-making and the capacity for empathetic engagement. The participants' ability to strike a balance between individual originality and collective harmony in their aesthetic decision-making highlights the dual role of art education: it supports individual creativity while also cultivating shared spaces of production and aesthetic exchange.

The stage metaphor in this study represented not merely a physical surface but also a space in which individual identities and narratives were restructured within a shared context. In line with Barthes' (1977) semiotic approach, each student's image produced not only its own individual meaning but also generated a new layer of meaning through its relationship with the overall composition. As a result, the artwork evolved into a polyphonic structure, enriched by both individual and collective narratives.

Despite the overall coherence achieved in the collective artwork, the collaborative process was not free from tension or uncertainty. Participants reported moments of hesitation related to intervening in others' visual spaces, concerns about disrupting compositional balance, and anxiety over losing individual artistic control. These experiences reveal that collaboration in art education is not inherently harmonious but is shaped by ongoing negotiation, vulnerability, and aesthetic risk. Rather than being treated as limitations of the process, such tensions played a constitutive role in deepening participants' aesthetic awareness and reflective engagement. In this sense, moments of conflict and discomfort functioned as pedagogical catalysts that enabled the emergence of collective aesthetic agency.

The research process clearly revealed the experiential knowledge-generating potential of arts-based inquiry. Participants' reflective expressions demonstrated that art functions not only as a mode of aesthetic production but also as an alternative scientific method that conveys emotional, cultural, and experiential knowledge. This finding supports Leavy's (2009) conceptualization of ABR as an interdisciplinary domain of knowledge production.

Another important contribution of this study is its demonstration of how the aesthetic connection established between individual identity and collective narrative within the process of art education enhances students' abilities to develop empathy, cultivate creative flexibility, and engage in aesthetic critique. The richness of learning through art positions aesthetic experience not only as a source of individual pleasure but also as a platform for social and cultural exchange.

The primary limitation of the study lies in the participants' restricted ability to share space and time simultaneously, due to their responsibilities outside the studio course. However, these limitations did not prevent the collection of in-depth qualitative data. Future research involving participants from diverse cultural contexts may offer valuable insights into how aesthetic experience manifests across cultural differences.

In addition, the collaborative nature of the artistic process introduced certain constraints related to shared decision-making and spatial negotiation. Some participants experienced difficulty balancing respect for collective harmony with the desire to preserve individual autonomy, which at times led to hesitation or delayed intervention. While these moments may be interpreted as limitations, they also reflect the inherent complexity of collaborative aesthetic practices. From an ABR perspective, such constraints are not treated as methodological weaknesses but as integral components of the aesthetic learning process that contribute to reflexivity and critical awareness.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored how individual aesthetic expressions can be represented within a collective artistic unity, demonstrating how the ABR approach can be applied in educational settings. The large-scale canvas collaboratively created by seven pre-service art teachers around the

metaphor of "the stage" revealed the aesthetic, pedagogical, and psychological dimensions of the creative process simultaneously. The findings indicate that artistic production provides a powerful space for both individual and group-level learning and representation.

Thematic analyses revealed that students' personal images were closely tied to their identities, cultural backgrounds, and aesthetic sensitivities. As the process progressed, these individual narratives gradually merged—through empathy, aesthetic interaction, and a shared sense of purpose—into a collective visual story. The students' creativity intersected with group dynamics, and this intersection was directly reflected in the processes of aesthetic decision-making and visual representation.

The metaphor of "the stage" evolved into a conceptual space in which participants expressed their experiences of subjectivation, where the individual and the collective were deeply intertwined. This structure enabled students to develop not only artistic skills but also a sense of cultural belonging, emotional expression, and collaborative production. The resulting composition offers a concrete example of how aesthetic diversity can be interpreted within a unified framework. By the end of the process, participants evaluated the ABR methodology as a practical approach for fostering creative thinking, aesthetic awareness, and scientific inquiry. This experience reaffirmed that learning is not merely a cognitive activity, but rather a multilayered process shaped by emotional, aesthetic, and social dimensions.

In conclusion, this study illustrates how the relationship between individual aesthetic expression and collective production can be established in art education settings, and what kinds of transformations this relationship can generate in students. In this context, aesthetic experience emerges both as a foundation for personal awareness and as a structure that supports creative solidarity within a community. ABR methods, therefore, hold significant potential as practical tools for future educational practices and interdisciplinary studies.

Considering the findings of this study, it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on collaborative aesthetic production processes within undergraduate-level academic art education. Encouraging students to engage in collective composition while maintaining their individual creativity enhances both their artistic expression skills and their capacity for social interaction. Such practices are particularly valuable in teacher education programs, where structured experiences that promote aesthetic sensitivity and intra-group empathy are of critical importance.

Moreover, ABR should be promoted not only as a teaching tool but also as a legitimate and effective alternative research methodology, both theoretically and practically. Integrating examples of ABR into the content of qualitative research courses within faculties of education can offer students the opportunity to experience how creative thinking can be aligned with scientific inquiry.

Future studies can further expand the scope of this methodology by exploring its applications with different age groups, in interdisciplinary contexts, or across diverse cultural environments. In addition, longitudinal studies that examine the long-term effects of collective aesthetic production may provide deeper insights into the pedagogical transformative power of art education.

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