Canadian Review of Art Education
Research and Issues
Revue canadienne d'éducation artistique
Recherche et questions d'actualité artistique

Fighting Gender-Based Violence With Feminist Art Pedagogy
A Co-Choreography Between Teacher, Students, and Anonymous Activists
Lutter contre la violence fondée sur le genre par le biais de la pédagogie artistique féministe
Une co-chorégraphie entre enseignant, étudiants et activistes anonymes

Annik Bilodeau et Ariane M Wilson

Volume 51, numéro 1, 2025

The Multifaceted Nature of Art Education Research

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1118533ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.26443/crae.v51i1.1372

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Society for Education through Art

ISSN

2290-3747 (imprimé)
2563-6383 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Bilodeau, A. & Wilson, A. (2025). Fighting Gender-Based Violence With Feminist Art Pedagogy: A Co-Choreography Between Teacher, Students, and Anonymous Activists. *Canadian Review of Art Education / Revue canadienne d'éducation artistique*, *51*(1), 23–41. https://doi.org/10.26443/crae.v51i1.1372

Résumé de l'article

Des groupes d'activistes comme No Estamos Todas (NET) exploitent les médias sociaux pour partager des œuvres d'art qui rendent hommage aux victimes de féminicides. En analysant les publications de NET sur les médias sociaux pour y déceler l'évolution des représentations des victimes, nous avons observé des contributions d'élèves intermédiaires de l'Illinois qui remontent à 2017. La façon dont ces œuvres rapportaient la vie des victimes est à l'origine d'une collaboration inédite entre NET, les étudiants et leur enseignant. L'analyse pédagogique de ce projet sous une optique féministe nous permet d'affirmer que les étudiants recherchent une justice genrée, fondée sur la reconnaissance. Nous proposons des orientations en termes d'approches pédagogiques et de mise en œuvre, dans le but avoué d'inspirer le corps enseignant à voir les étudiants comme agents du changement.

Fighting Gender-Based Violence With Feminist Art Pedagogy: A Co-Choreography Between Teacher, Students, and Anonymous Activists

Annik Bilodeau, University of Waterloo
annik.bilodeau@uwaterloo.ca

Ariane M Wilson, University of Waterloo
am9wilso@uwaterloo.ca

Abstract: Activist groups like *No Estamos Todas* (NET) leverage social media to share art memorializing feminicide victims. While analyzing NET's social media posts for patterns in representations of victims, we noticed contributions starting in 2017 from middle schoolers in Illinois. The way these artworks focus on victims' lives led us to explore a collaboration between NET, these students, and their teacher. Through a feminist pedagogical analysis of the project, we argue that the students engage in recognition-based gender justice. We provide guidelines for implementation and pedagogical approaches, hoping to inspire teachers to recognize students as agents of change.

Keywords: Art Teaching; Gender-Based Violence; Feminist Pedagogy

Every day, an average of ten women are killed in Mexico (Kloppe-Santamaría & Zulver, 2023). The authorities' documented lack of interest in combatting this epidemic (Acevedo, 2023) has led to the rise of several grassroots activist groups (Buscemi, 2023; Fregoso, 2023). While some rely on traditional forms of protests—staging sit-ins in front of government offices or police stations, or lobbying politicians—others, like *No Estamos Todas* (NET), abandon the streets altogether in favour of social media platforms. This group, whose name means "we are not all here," protests by posting artworks on Instagram and Facebook. Each publication memorializes feminicide victims primarily from Mexico. This digital arena allows them to call global attention to gender-based violence.

Our choice to spotlight these Mexican activists arises from our disciplinary background and the breadth of strategies they deploy to effect change. To examine how art manifests as a form of protest in digital spaces, we analyzed NET's social media posts for patterns in representations of victims of feminicide. As we qualitatively coded over 1,400 artworks, tracking symbols and styles, we discovered that victims were predominantly depicted eyes shut, and often with flowers, emulating posthumous portraiture.[i] Few artists portrayed victims as active; many that did were students in a middle school classroom in Illinois.

This was an unusual development: students and activists using social media to transcend borders and generations in the name of justice for feminicide victims. We emailed Marc Nelson,[ii] an artist and grade four through eight art teacher since 2008 at the Central Elementary School in Kewanee, Illinois, and conducted a two-hour virtual interview with him on August 8, 2022 (University of Waterloo Research Ethics Board clearance number 40241). This semi-structured interview—organized around three thematic axes: activism, teaching practice, and NET—and a

series of emails, became our primary source of information, since NET's founders are anonymous.[iii]

Nelson uses art to teach his students about social injustices and to show them that, working alongside marginalized populations, their voices help effect social change. His teaching aligns with Hochtritt et al. (2012) who propose further application of "an arts education for social justice that moves away from doing things for people and toward doing things in solidarity with them" (p. 7). After hearing about NET on National Public Radio, Nelson contacted the group, and with their support, designed an art project to memorialize victims of feminicide with his eighth-grade students.

We draw from Nordlund et al.'s (2010) fifteen principles for teaching art to qualitatively analyze how Nelson's teaching practice is grounded in a feminist pedagogy that centres his students and creates connections between their experiences, their education, and contemporary challenges, in and beyond their communities. Beyond the classroom, we discuss how this pedagogical approach reveals a network of activism that resembles Anttila's (2013) concept of *co-choreography*, which was originally identified in dance studies but reconceptualized within pedagogy. Underpinned by feminist pedagogy, we argue that the impact of this co-choreographed project is twofold: the students experience recognition-based justice—the recognition that all people deserve dignity and respect—and participate in a global movement calling for the recognition of feminicide victims.

While this project, and by extension its network of collaborators, concentrate on gender-based violence in Mexico, the issue of silencing and sidelining marginalized populations is not unique. In Canada, to foster students' sense of social justice, similar activities could be designed around projects by Indigenous voices—collaborating with Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women activists, or spreading awareness of residential schools, for instance.

Although relevant, we do not explicitly explore questions related to allyship in this article. How these collaborators are or are not engaging in 'allyship', and the ethical dilemmas that may arise, would be an important focus for future research. Nevertheless, we must situate ourselves as white cis-gender women, both born and raised in Canada, tackling the issue of feminicide in Latin America from privileged positions. We come to this investigation seeking to draw attention to the work of activists who have lived experience this violence, while remaining aware that our experiences and backgrounds inextricably shape our work. Although we strive to challenge our biases, this article should not be read without the understanding of our subjective positions as outsiders.

This article is divided into the four following sections: Defining Co-Choreography as Postmodern Pedagogy for Social Justice Art Education lays out its theoretical foundations; Gender-Based Violence and the Need for Bottom-Up Activism in Mexico provides brief context and introduces the co-choreographers; Bringing *No Estamos Todas* into the Classroom analyzes the activity's implementation using principles theorized by Nordlund et al. (2010); and finally, Co-Choreographing Social Change examines how the activity and Nelson's teaching praxis promote recognition in the classroom and beyond.

Defining Co-Choreography as Postmodern Pedagogy for Social Justice Art Education

Early in this investigation, we agreed that despite our different titles—Bilodeau as principal investigator and Wilson as research assistant—we would be co-authors. We modelled the very framework with which we analyze the NET activity: Anttila's (2013) co-choreography, a postmodern collaboration—or a collaboration grounded in the partiality of knowledge (Lather,

1991). Elaborated in Choreographed Childhoods: Patterns of Embodiment in the Lives of Contemporary Children (Anttila, 2013), co-choreography underlies both our theoretical analysis and our collaborative investigation.

While traditionally, choreography is understood as a dance imagined by a choreographer, Anttila (2013) expands it to explain interactions between people. In a world built through interactions, "choreography is seen as the aesthetic practice of setting those relations or setting the conditions for those relations to emerge" (Anttila, 2013, p. 107). Anttila is concerned that, too often, adults place restrictions on these choreographies—particularly when engaging with children in modern pedagogical contexts. Instead, she draws from William Doll (1989), who favoured the adoption of a "radically new relationship" (p. 248) with students, in which everyone has agency; the teacher becomes more of a peer, and learning starts to occur through questioning and creativity (Doll, 1989).

This re-defines the relationship between educators and students as reciprocal, enabling "an open or collaborative approach [in which] the roles become blurred" (Anttila, 2013, p. 116–117). When applied to educational systems, co-choreography requires teachers and learners to shed their traditional roles (givers versus receivers of information) and co-create meaning. Teachers reframe in-class interactions with newfound vulnerability, and students, with newfound agency. For art teaching, this requires an understanding that "children, youth, and adults learn about art across venues and construct conceptions of art based upon myriad sources of information" (Blandy, 1999, p. 374). As such, "a postmodern art education should acknowledge and reinforce such multiple and simultaneous learning" (Blandy, 1999, p. 374). For this reason, Nelson's relationship with the founders of NET is essential to the success of the activity, as it grounds it in lived experience.

Gender-Based Violence and the Need for Bottom-Up Activism in Mexico

Understanding what led activists to deploy artistic strategies on social media to protest the feminicide crisis in Mexico is imperative. This brief context-setting illuminates why Nelson was drawn to an art-based group like NET, both as an artist and as a pedagogue.

The World Health Organization (n.d.) defines gender-based violence as a global public health pandemic. This violence exists on a continuum that culminates in *feminicide*, a term used in Mexico to describe the murder of a woman solely for being a woman.[iv] Feminicides have been a major focus of political and artistic activism in Mexico since the 1990s, but social change remains slow, generating persistent bottom-up activism.

No Estamos Todas: The Platform

In mass media, victims of gendered violence are often lumped together and presented as statistics rather than as women with their own stories. This is partly what inspired the launch of NET's Instagram (n.d.) and Facebook (n.d.),[v] where they share artworks memorializing victims and provide any available information about their lives and deaths. Thus, they participate in a "collectivization of mourning" (Morbiato, 2017, p. 141) that allows society to grieve victims as individuals, not statistics. Naming each victim and remembering each life by focusing on localized stories—a staple of postmodernism (Sisson, 1999, p. 21)—works to restore the dignity of victims.

The art they post is acquired through an ongoing, open call for images; anyone can contribute. Since their first post on November 24, 2017, NET's audience has grown to over 34,000 followers across both platforms, a sizeable number for online activists who focus on a

single issue. They remain consistent, often posting daily and tagging each post with movement-specific hashtags to facilitate searching for particular feminicides. As of March 20, 2025, they have 1,733 Instagram posts, most of which also appear on Facebook (*No estamos todas*, n.d.).

María Salguero: The Data Activist

The continuing waves of feminicides—documented since 1993—have spurred hundreds of social justice projects across Mexico (Lozano, 2019). Although many appear not to have official ties with others, this does not impede collaboration; often one group builds on another's work, either picking up where the previous one left off or relying on their data. Such is the case with NET and María Salguero.

Salguero (n.d.) designed *Yo te nombro* (I Name You), a publicly available interactive map of feminicides. Combing through physical and online newspapers, she compiles the murders of girls, cisgender women, and trans women, that are officially classified as feminicides, as well as those that carry its markers—an extreme violence perpetrated on the body, or an isolated retrieval site. She then geo-tags the names on the map and writes a detailed description for every entry.

Using Salguero's map (see Figure 1), NET memorializes these victims, many of whom remain unidentified, meaning this kind of artistic obituary is often the only public acknowledgment of their murder.

Figure 1

Map of feminicides in Mexico reported since 2016 (Salguero, n.d.)

Nelson's Students: The Artists

Nelson's students who participate in the NET collaboration are in grade eight and 13-14 years old; about 60-70% of the school's students are white, 20% are Hispanic, and 10-15% are African American, with an even distribution of girls and boys. Approximately 80% of the school's students receive a free or reduced lunch given economic hardships faced by the district's surrounding community.

While the media used vary between artists—from crayon and watercolour to digitally-created artwork—the images *not* created by Nelson's students are often similar: a woman centred on a plain or textured background, framed by flowers, her eyes closed or gazing off into the distance (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Illustration by Ninna Falla, memorializing Sofía (No estamos todas, 2019b)

Most images created by Nelson's students diverge from this theme, having victims doing rather than posing (see Figure 3). This depiction of victims as active agents drew us to these works and made us consider recognition.

Figure 3

Illustration by one of Nelsons students, memorializing Juanita (No estamos todas, 2019a)

The Need for Recognition

When ten Mexican women are murdered daily and authorities fail to recognize feminicide as an epidemic, the system perpetuates *recognition-based social injustice*, which includes "disrespect, cultural imperialism, and status hierarchy" (Fraser, 2007, p. 27).[vi] In Feminist Politics in the Age of Recognition: A Two-Dimensional Approach to Gender Justice, Nancy Fraser (2007) maintains that "a major feature of gender injustice is androcentrism: an institutionalized pattern of cultural value that privileges traits associated with masculinity, while devaluing everything coded as 'feminine'" (p. 26). In Mexico, this is often referred to as *machismo* (Oliver & Valls, 2003, p. 16), an ideology that assigns specific gender roles to both men and women, and where women who deviate from them are often misrecognized as insignificant and expendable.

Bringing *No Estamos Todas* Into the Classroom

We hope to guide educators towards integrating co-choreographed activities into classrooms through art. Even if an activity is not framed as a social justice project, modelling advocacy behaviours normalizes speaking up in response to injustice. In Promising Democracy, Blandy (2021) urges art educators to pursue "strategies for partnering with their students to advance democracy. … [through] curricula that address questions associated with the relationship among culture, art, citizenship, and democracy" (p. 288). Similarly, we encourage teachers and activists to collaborate on artistic projects. In doing so, they expand their communities, and their awareness of social justice causes. According to art educator Kristin Congdon (1993), using art in the classroom builds connection with oneself and across communities, which in turn, equips students with "the ability to seek, more effectively, that ever present goal of justice in our difficult world" (p. 18).

While Canadian educators are our primary audience, we acknowledge that instructors elsewhere may not be free to embed feminist pedagogy in their curricula. Issues related to race, gender identity, and class are highly politicized, and as such, can be sensitive topics to incorporate into curricula. Despite these challenges, "these are all real issues … from which students should not be barred in our classes" (Congdon, 1993, p. 27).

To assuage administrators' or parental concerns, these activities could be incorporated into an after-school program tackling social injustices occurring in one's immediate community or a larger, global issue like the climate crisis, or perhaps a historical one, like the lack of women visual artists in the Western canon. Nelson has developed many projects which may inspire educators to find creative ways of integrating social justice into their teaching, including drawing underrepresented veterans and Surrealist artists, exploring refugee journeys through portraiture, or designing translated posters to help Ukrainian and Afghan refugees navigate a new school.

While NET's activity is the focus of our article, we need to further introduce its instigator, Marc Nelson. Nelson holds a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts with a minor in English from Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. After spending a year in the AmeriCorp program teaching public school students, he obtained an Art Education Teaching certificate from Western Illinois University, followed by a Master of Arts from Eastern Illinois University, where he focused on drawing and printmaking in education.

He chooses to weave a variety of topics and social issues into the curriculum so that all students can relate to his teaching, even those who are not interested in art. He teaches them that "art is always kind of taking and responding" to lived experiences (M. Nelson, personal communication, August 10, 2022). Nelson was drawn to the NET project by the variation in media and artistic styles, but also because it would resonate with many of his students with ties to Latin America. Like Congdon (1993), Nelson is convinced that students need to be aware of issues like feminicide as they reach the precipice of adulthood to better equip them to understand their own experiences and the importance of treating others with respect. This is a major aspect of Nelson's overall praxis: while the NET activity tackles gender issues, Nelson emphasizes that every aspect of one's identity—whether it is race, class, or creed—affects one's lived experiences. Aligned with feminist pedagogy, he leads by example with a teaching practice that promotes an intersectional understanding of the other.

The founders of NET responded when Nelson made contact, agreeing that collaborating with his class would be a valuable opportunity for everyone involved. For this project, Nelson's goals transcend curricular outcomes on portraiture. His objective is to teach that art can exist and communicate in the world we live in, and play a role in healing and responding to challenges; to

make his students aware of these issues in their own and others' lives; to carry what they learn forward through mutual respect; and, finally, to shine a spotlight on marginalized artists, demonstrating that "art is for everyone" (M. Nelson, personal communication, August 10, 2022).

The Design

The activity itself unfolds over the span of four weeks and has been recurring since 2017. Nelson introduces his students to the term *feminicide* by presenting a nine-page slideshow designed by the founders of NET. Slide one defines feminicide as "the act of killing a woman based solely on the fact that she belongs to the feminine sex" (Nelson, 2017). The following slides share statistics, citing Salguero: victims' ages and relationship to the murderer, percentage of murderers who escape justice, specific data around female infanticide, and locations where feminicides occur. The last slide thanks students for participating and elevating the voices of women for those who cannot do so. Nelson then provides each student with the following instructions: "Think of an idea for your portrait of an imaginary girl aged 0-14. You can imagine what a girl that age would like doing, what would be important to her. You can also make a portrait that is more based on beautiful designs" (M. Nelson, personal communication, August 10, 2022). He offers examples of design-based and interest-based works from NET's page and asks his students to copy/paste at least ten images from a Google search to use as inspiration. The medium is up to the student; ink, watercolour, acrylic, charcoal, oil pastels, and digital drawing software are available.

Before they begin, Nelson shares some of his artworks, artworks by amateur and professional artists on the NET page, and artworks by Frida Kahlo because his students often know of her, and they practice painting one of her self-portraits. Together, they discuss how different styles and techniques can be used to celebrate a stolen life, and Nelson encourages them to imagine the values, interests, and dynamism of their subjects' lives. Students end up creating artworks that are diverse in style and in the activities they depict. Examples include playing guitar, rock climbing, dancing, amongst others.

Nelson recognizes that art teachers often struggle with determining what is appropriate for the classroom, and he is grateful that his administration has been supportive of this activity from the beginning. He recalls when he introduced the activity to his classroom with anticipation because he knew his students wanted to learn how art can respond to real-world issues: "I was super excited to tell my students and my students were [too] … they love doing stuff like this" (M. Nelson, personal communication, August 10, 2022). While there are always some disinterested students, for the most part, when he tells them they will be working on something that helps raise awareness about gender-based violence and that their art will be shared online, "that is really powerful for them" (M. Nelson, personal communication, August 10, 2022).

Once a year, a boy may express concern that the project only focusses on women and girls. This question inadvertently prompts an important—and highly relevant—teaching moment: Nelson explains that most survivors and victims of gender-based violence are women and girls and that their experiences are largely underrepresented or ignored. He further illustrates this disparity by contextualizing it in art, asking his students to name famous visual artists. They will mostly name men (if not only), so Nelson will ask them to name women, and they might know one, or often none because they have not heard about them. When he elaborates on the historical underrepresentation of women in the arts due to sexist constructs, the importance of counteracting that gap becomes evident.

Nelson rarely receives pushback from parents. He only recalls one incident where a parent was concerned because NET also posts art that memorializes trans women,[vii] arguing that their child's participation could hinder their future career. To ensure anonymity, the social media posts no longer include the student's name nor the name of the school.

The Analysis

There is a lot of reflection behind the planning and design of the activity and its purposes. We argue that it is through this kind of reflection—both about himself and the role of art—that Nelson creates space for students' experiences and engages social justice. To structure and guide our analysis of both this activity and Nelson's teaching praxis, we use one of the best-known templates for including social justice topics and feminist pedagogy. In An Invitation to Social Change: Fifteen Principles for Teaching Art, Nordlund et al. (2010) outline a series of principles to guide the inclusion of Judy Chicago's (1974–79) *The Dinner Party* in K-12 programs, for educators to integrate social justice into art pedagogy.[viii] *The Dinner Party* is an installation that symbolically depicts women's histories and criticizes the omission—often erasure—of their achievements. Although Chicago's (1974–79) artwork does not deal directly with feminicide, it is about making women's lives more visible, not unlike NET's refusal to let feminicide victims go unseen. The following principles (see Figure 4) are described as applicable for addressing any type of artwork in the classroom (Nordlund et al., 2010, p. 36).[ix]

Figure 4

Nordlund et al.'s (2010) principles

15 principles for teaching art

1. Start with students.
2. Create community.
3. Find IDEAS.
4. Look for metaphors.
5. Extend the community.
6. Encourage dialogue.
7. Establish a safe place.
8. Make room for multiple voices.
9. Make comparisons.
10. Explore contexts.
11. Encourage inquiry.
12. Guide practice.
13. Be flexible.
14. Reflect.
15. Find support.

The first principle is to ***start with students***, by asking yourself: "Who are our students? What do they know? What are their personal experiences?" (Nordlund et al., 2010, p. 36). Starting in his first teaching positions, Nelson sought to relate to his students and empathize with their experiences. For instance, while he studied Spanish in high school and college, passion for

the language and its cultures sparked when he started teaching in classrooms, where most of the students spoke Spanish. Understanding students and what they care about facilitates a teacher's ability to educate meaningfully (Nordlund et al., 2010).

Because of NET's focus on feminicide in Mexico, Nelson particularly seeks to relate to students of Latin American origins during the activity. He notices that students incorporate a range of perspectives and values in their artworks when prompted to think about their own experiences and what they like doing. Sometimes boys in his class have difficulty relating to the activity and struggle to conceptualize their artwork. When this happens, Nelson suggests that they put themselves in the shoes of women and girls in their lives. This leads some to ask girls in their class about their interests, which they then incorporate into their artwork. These interactions between students, where they show an interest in each other's lives, ***encourages dialogue*** and builds community in the classroom.

Nelson also ***explores contexts*** with his students, a principle Nordlund et al. (2010) spotlight because "as we come to know an artwork through investigation of its social, political, historical, and ideological contexts, we develop deeper understanding and appreciation of its meaning and significance" (p. 40). Although they are referring to the exploration of contexts around a specific artwork, we contend that by exploring socio-political issues through various artworks and projects, Nelson's students are better equipped to make connections within and across artworks, as well as with lived experiences distinct from their own.

When leading these activities, Nelson ***encourages inquiry*** by playing "a crucial role in establishing situations in which questions and subsequent investigation likely would arise" (Nordlund et al., 2010, p. 40). Nelson believes that engaging with his personal artistic practice enhances his teaching, and he is transparent with his students about this: "It's important as a teacher to be like 'listen this is my life, you know, I'm not teaching you this to make a buck, this is my reason, my passion in life is art and I want to share that with you'" (M. Nelson, personal communication, August 10, 2022). For Nelson, this means sharing his own artworks dealing with social inequities along with works by historically marginalized artists, carefully selected of course to ensure that they are age appropriate. He emphasizes that students are eager to be treated like adults: "They want to know, they want to see how art can respond" to inequalities (M. Nelson, personal communication, August 10, 2022). By treating them as they want to be treated, Nelson encourages his students to become curious about injustice and to question the things around them.

This inquiry transforms the classroom into a space where students can connect with experiences beyond their own, laying the groundwork to ***create community*** founded on the recognition that everyone deserves to feel safe. Getting involved in community-based initiatives is not unusual for these students. In 2021, they created posters that translated English signs throughout their school into Pashto, to welcome refugee students from Afghanistan. These visual cues are more than practical—they are 'for the people', demonstrating a desire to connect and foster wellbeing in all students. Nelson uses these activities to teach his students that "art is a very democratic way of communicating" (M. Nelson, personal communication, August 10, 2022)—"educating for democracy" as Blandy (2021) would put it (p. 288).

His students learn that these communities exist beyond the classroom when Nelson ***extends the community*** to NET. By "reach[ing] out beyond the classroom community to include local experts, [Nelson] then provide[s] opportunities for increased connections with works of art" (Nordlund et al., 2010, p. 38). The founders of NET, whom some students may connect with more readily, then serve as additional role models for them.

Nordlund et al. (2010) argue that their principles require teachers to encourage student ***reflection*** by asking questions related to the process of the activity. Here, the local experts Nelson involves, NET, pose these questions. Once their artworks are finished, the students fill out an exit survey administered by NET[x] while Nelson takes pictures of the students' artworks and sends them to NET to be posted on their social media pages (see Figure 5). Whenever possible, Nelson shares the post with the student, showing them that their contribution has "artistic merit … [and] this is what art can do. … Art doesn't just have to sit on a wall somewhere … it can go out into the digital realm and maybe reach someone" (M. Nelson, personal communication, August 10, 2022).

Figure 5

Illustration by one of Nelsons students, memorializing María (No estamos todas, 2020)

Although feminicide is a deeply distressing subject, Nelson has yet to witness students display outright discomfort when learning about it. Nevertheless, he is aware that many of his students who identify as girls already have experience with trauma and violence. To ***establish a safe place*** for them, he has been learning about trauma-based education. Nordlund et al. (2010) observe that during discussions in safe places, students make "links between the subject matter and their own lives or experiences" (p. 38).

Similar connections happen in Nelson's classroom. He describes several instances where students made links between their own lives and the subject matter. For example, in 2020, shortly after the murder of George Floyd, some Black students revealed that they could relate to the injustice of a system that chooses to ignore and perpetuate feminicide. Nelson estimates that annually, around 15 students do additional research on feminicide and NET on their own time. Often, these students are the ones who have also spoken to him about having traumas of their own.

Nordlund et al. (2010) highlight the impact this connection-making can have on students, and they take it further, claiming that ***making comparisons*** between artwork by ***looking for metaphors***, themes, history and subject matter, helps students make sense of the work and the context in which it was created. By the time Nelson's students embark on the creative process, they are beginning to understand how art affects them and others. When Nelson tells them to "think about how [they're] doing this to celebrate the life of someone who is not here anymore, and this is for them and their family" (M. Nelson, personal communication, August 10, 2022), they become motivated and empowered. They know that a broader community outside their classroom will be impacted by their artwork.

Some students carry this experience with them into the future—a kind of "social transformation" (Nordlund et al., 2015, p. 42) where they start to self-identify as agents of change. Some pursue careers as art teachers and try to lead similar projects in their own classrooms. Others speak out about injustices at school or in their community. Every year, Nelson's colleagues notice that bullying is less rampant at their school when his students participate in social justice-related projects like NET. Nelson also often hears that upper-year teachers are impressed when students take the initiative to bring up social issues like domestic violence and share what they learned from his classes. Although anecdotal, these stories attest that "feminist art and feminist pedagogy both serve the ideals of social justice by giving attention to the issues and oppressions surrounding women and under-represented groups and prompting us to take action" (Nordlund et al., 2010, p. 42).

Nelson applies principles for teaching art that invite social change into the classroom, making his methodology highly influential. Nevertheless, we argue that Nelson's approach would not be as effective if it did not integrate visual art. Art acts as a powerful medium for learning and change in this activity. In Art History and Human Suffering: Pasts, Pedagogies, and Possibilities, Adrian Duran (2021) explains that throughout history, art has been used to express grief and make viewers contemplate their own mortality, motivating them to feel sympathetic sadness for the sitter. Beyond the emotional and psychological effects, art can move people to action that drives social change (Hochtritt et al., 2012). Before Nelson's students become artists of change, they are viewers, reflecting on what art makes them feel. Some have told Nelson: "This reminds me of my sister, and I can't imagine what it would be like to lose my own sister" (M. Nelson, personal communication, August 10, 2022). Art acts as a means through which Nelson's students become aware of feminicide and start caring about it. We argue that this emotional shift spurred by visual media is what moves them to act, to create their own art and help drive social change with NET.

Co-Choreographing Social Change

Anttila (2013) uses co-choreography to draw different analogies "between dance choreography and a wider application—the choreography of life, or social choreography" (p. 106–107). Co-choreography is a collaborative process wherein the teacher-student relationship becomes a creative partnership, unrestricted by traditional dynamics of power and authority. Teachers can facilitate learning through co-choreography, Anttila (2013) writes, by recognizing students as active agents whose internal lives should be supported, not restricted. We claim that during the NET activity, Nelson and his students are engaging in a co-choreography that enables recognition for the students and the marginalized populations they uplift. Moreover, applying the concept of co-choreography allows us to underline that their collaboration fits into a larger network of groups that do not necessarily have formal relationships. Nelson and his students co-

choreograph with NET to recognize feminicide victims, co-choreographing with Salguero to do so. In other words, there is a multi-dimensional network of co-choreographies at play, all of which are motivated by issues of misrecognition.

Recognizing Students

Nelson's students contribute to promoting recognition for feminicide victims, but the co-choreographed nature of this activity also makes them receivers of recognition. Recognizing students as participants in society, to see them as "active subjects, multitalented and resourceful, and as competent experts about issues related to their own lives" (Anttila, 2013, p. 112), acknowledges their unique ways of being and relating. Anttila (2013) attributes the term *solo dance* to what she calls the "internal choreographies" (p. 108) that we use as a basis to relate to one another. Through their solo dance, individuals harmonize what they feel in response to stimuli with what they express through language or action. An example of a solo dance would be when boys in Nelson's class struggle to imagine the victims' lives before death, so they ask girls in their class about their lives to try to relate to their lived experiences. Another example is when students express empathy for victims and their families, some even sharing personal experiences with violence and loss.

The solo dance is essential to co-choreography because "becoming a collaborative choreographer entails, first, understanding the significance of internal patterning that lays the groundwork for all embodied actions" (Anttila, 2013, p. 108). This resonates deeply with Congdon's (1993) premise that "art promotes the clarification of who one is in a communal sense" (p. 19), encouraging community engagement for peace and justice. As a postmodern framework, co-choreography therefore requires teachers to "give students time to organize their own thoughts" (Doll, 1989, p. 250). By creating a safe space for his students to engage in their solo dance through art, Nelson validates their internal patterning, thus helping them better understand their positionality. Students start to see the value of their contributions in the world, which influences how they choose to behave in it. This is noticed when there is less bullying at the school while these activities are running, and when students carry what they learn into their communities and future careers. These behaviours exhibit how the NET activity helps develop students' commitment to respecting others and speaking out about injustices. These students gain more than emotional, historical, and socio-political knowledge. Nelson's support of their solo dances appears to reinforce students' belief in their own abilities, and exemplifies how Nelson acts as a facilitator rather than a "depositor" (Anttila, 2013, p. 119) of information.

Nelson continues this facilitation throughout the activity by providing students with an array of materials, and few limitations. Their instruction sheet only has two options, but neither are artistically nor conceptually limiting. Nelson offers minor guidance to help prompt ideation and gives examples that may encourage students to seek out their own inspiration. This hands-off approach allows for what Anttila (2013) describes as real *play* (p. 112)—creation occurring while being performed, an improvised choreography requiring "limited adult control" (p. 113). Nelson describes students as excited to dive into working on their artworks for NET. During class, he circulates, assisting students when necessary; the students are directing his facilitation, and he is releasing the reins of control. This gives students space to engage in real play, to experiment with art in a kind of improvisation moved by their emotions in response to feminicide.

While refusing to categorize students as passive agents, and relocating the teacher as a facilitator rather than an expert is not a new approach for all teachers, we want to emphasize that

co-choreography goes one step further by situating the educator as a student as well. This feature is what makes co-choreography an ideal framework to teach complex affective issues. Nelson disrupts art teaching norms by seeing his students as capable of joining with him in inquiring about feminicide. By selecting a social justice topic that he is still learning about, he no longer acts as a subject matter expert, but as a peer, recognizing students' ability to engage with complex issues, showing them that he sees them as active members of society. Together, they learn to be curious, and see that they can produce relevant and important artworks and ideas. This recognition travels beyond the classroom when students see their contributions on NET's social media pages; evidence that they play an active role in a larger movement. This encourages their sense of belonging and safety, which is essential to being able to recognize others as equally deserving of belonging and safety.

Recognizing Feminicide Victims

In a co-choreography, "there is no single author" (Anttila, 2013, p. 117)—all participants find themselves on equal footing. As discussed, Nelson and his students each play a collaborative role in determining the outcomes of the NET activity. In this section, we explore how NET co-choreographs with Nelson and his students, which further positions Nelson as a learner.

Like his students, Nelson has a solo dance of his own. Art has always been the vehicle through which he comes to understand the world. Every piece he makes is part of his internal means of choreographing his relationship with the outside world. He claims that "doing [his] own personal art really does enhance [his] teaching" (M. Nelson, personal communication, August 10, 2022). Although Nelson creates art for social justice causes on his own time, he does not act as the authority on *what* art should be created by his students. When introducing the NET activity, he relinquishes his power as the "teacher-of-the-students … [becoming a] teacher-student" (Anttila, 2013, p. 120) in the process. Likewise, NET refrains from acting as the sole authority on the memorialization of victims. They simply provide Nelson with the context he needs to speak to his students about feminicide. NET may select the artworks that are posted, but they do not control the art—this is determined by the students and every other contributing artist.

NET offers the platform and the context, Nelson shares this with the students, and the students create the art. The nine-slide NET presentation does not offer any indication about what the art should look like, it simply contextualizes feminicide in data. While NET explains the intention of the page, they leave artistic choices entirely open. In fact, the last note in the presentation says, "this network is being constructed openly by all of us, so if you have suggestions or ideas to help us grow, we would love to hear them" (Nelson, 2017). This indicates that, like Nelson, NET does not see the students as mere objects to be molded, rather that they "are always present and active participants in society" (Anttila, 2013, p. 112).

This collaboration does not end when NET receives the students' finished artworks, they seek their feedback with an exit survey. By asking questions such as: "Why is it important to remember these girls?" (Nelson, 2017), NET delves into the students' internal thought processes, further positioning NET as a facilitator in this co-choreography. This prompts students to search for paths to relate to different lived experiences. Together, they are co-choreographing with diverse artists and activists to affect social change. It is "in these spaces, [that] different kinds of knowledge become constructed and transmitted through various perceptual channels and levels of reflection" (Anttila, 2013, p. 122). These students learn about gender-based violence, and by reflecting on a range of experiences—including their own—they learn about recognition-based justice.

This knowledge advances the agenda of what one typically teaches in middle school art classrooms. By being taught in an unconventional manner through a co-choreographed art project, further opportunities for knowledge acquisition are created. This co-choreography goes beyond teaching about gender-based violence; it also teaches students the *importance* of recognition *within* the context of gender-based violence. Although the students may not be able to articulate the complexities of the theory to explain why this approach to social justice is instrumental for social change, they experience what it is like to take part in such an approach.

Being prompted by NET to reflect on the importance of "remembering these girls" (Nelson, 2017) at the end of the activity, reinforces what they have learned about feminicide *and* that they have become part of a larger network dedicated to recognizing victims. Every time they work on their artwork for NET, they are dedicating time to recognizing victims; they are creating art that says that it is worth investing the time and effort to honour victims' lives. They are attributing value to aspects of reality that are "coded as 'feminine'" (Fraser, 2007, p. 26). We believe the students are motivated to participate in this recognition-based project in large part because, during the activity, they, themselves, experience what it is like to be recognized.

Conclusion

Many academics claim that "a pedagogy that would collapse the distinctions separating teaching, research, and art might also have the power to guide transformation of the lived, social world" (Ulmer, 1985, as cited in Lather, 1991). Using art to foster social change is not a new strategy (Hochtritt et al., 2012; Congdon, 1993). In fact, "artists have been in the vanguard … of every major crisis and every social change, their work an important part of social transformation that contributes to the healing of those wounded or traumatized by history and its contexts" (Duran, 2021, p. 79). Still, these artists do not choreograph change on their own. Co-choreography has a cascading effect. Analyzing one partnership leads to the discovery of another, and so on and so forth. Every partner is a choreographer, and "at the center of [their] art, deals with patterns and structures within the context of an existing, larger, ongoing choreography of physical, mental and social structures, whereby he/she acts as a strategist negotiating intended change with his/her environment" (Anttila, 2013, p. 116).

Given the fruitful learning space we have described, we maintain that Nelson demonstrates that co-choreography can be applied in a classroom and that, when implemented judiciously, it can also constitute a form of recognition for students. Nelson's application of Nordlund et al.'s (2010) principles for teaching art, and the partnership he builds with NET, can serve as a guideline for teachers who wish to promote social change through the making, or simply the use of art. Our analysis has demonstrated that NET uses art to motivate their viewers to recognize the lives of victims and take part in their call to action by contributing artworks to their page. In this article, we chose to examine the strategies they deploy to engage Nelson and his students and highlighted that this is only one among many possible co-choreographies in which NET plays a role. The cycle of viewership and participation present in these co-choreographies, where each partner is affected as a viewer of another partner's work(s), motivates each of them—each of us—to join with NET in challenging the status quo and bring about a paradigm shift that recognizes girls, trans women, and cisgender women as having lives worthy of living and grieving.

We aim for this article to inspire you to consider the role of co-choreographies in pursuit of social justice in your own teaching. Social justice movements created to deconstruct oppressive traditional institutions should include dismantling social pedagogical structures that

misrecognize students. The more we teach students what it means to be recognized by society by actively acknowledging them as contributing members, the more equipped they become to recognize others throughout their lives, helping establish recognition as the 'norm.'

This article draws on research supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

References

Acevedo, E. (2023). Gender-based violence and femicide in Mexico: Why is the law failing to protect Mexico's women? In D. S. Peterson & D. Zhang (Eds.), *International responses to gendered-based domestic violence: Gender-specific and socio-cultural approaches* (pp. 39–50). Routledge.

Anttila, E. (2013). Choreographed childhoods: Patterns of embodiment in the lives of contemporary children. In G. Boldt & F. McArdle (Eds.), *Young children, pedagogy and the arts: Ways of seeing* (pp. 106–125). Routledge.

Blandy, D. (1999). Review of the books *Art education: Issues in postmodernist pedagogy*, by R. Clark & *Postmodern art education: An approach to curriculum*, by A. Efland, K. Freedman, & P. Stuhr. *Studies in Art Education, 40*(4), 373–376. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1320555

Blandy, D. (2021). Promising democracy. *Studies in Art Education, 62*(3), 286–290. https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2021.1936429

Buscemi, E. (2023). Deploying private memory in the virtual sphere: Feminist activism against gender-based violence in Mexico. *International Journal of Communication (Online), 17*, 2180–2199. https://go-gale-com.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/ps/i.do?p=LitRC&u=uniwater&id=GALE%7CA745268302&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon&aty=ip

Chicago, J. (1974–1979). *The Dinner Party* [Exhibition]. Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY, United States. https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party

Congdon, K. G. (1993). Art and teaching for peace and justice. *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education, 13*, 13–36. https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/jstae/vol13/iss1/4/

Doll, W. E., Jr. (1989). Foundations for a post-modern curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 21*(3), 243–253. https://doi.org/10.1080/0022027890210304

Duran, A. R. (2021). Art history and human suffering: Pasts, pedagogies, and possibilities. In C. Hutt & M. Celinscak (Eds.), *Artistic representations of suffering: Rights, resistance, and remembrance* (pp. 59–78). Rowman & Littlefield.

Fraser, N. (2007). Feminist politics in the age of recognition: A two-dimensional approach to gender justice. *Studies in Social Justice, 1*(1), 23–35. https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v1i1.979

Fregoso, R. -L. (2023). *The force of witness: Contra feminicide*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478024385

Hochtritt, L., Ploof, J., & Quinn, T. (Eds.). (2012). *Art and social justice education: Culture as commons*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203852477

Kloppe-Santamaría, G., & Zulver, J. (2023). *Beyond collateral damage: Femicides, disappearances, and new trends in gender-based violence in Mexico*. Wilson Center. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/beyond-collateral-damage-femicides-disappearances-and-new-trends-gender-based-violence

Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. Routledge.

Lozano, N. M. (2019). *Not one more! Feminicidio on the border*. Ohio State University Press.

Morbiato, C. (2017). Prácticas resistentes en el México de la desaparición forzada. *REVISTA TRACE, 71*, 138–165. https://doi.org/10.22134/trace.71.2017.100

Nelson, M. (2017). *No Estamos Todas: feminicide presentation* [PowerPoint slides].

No estamos todas. (n.d.). *Posts* [Facebook page]. Facebook. Retrieved March 20, 2025, from https://www.facebook.com/noestamostodas

No estamos todas [@noestamostodas]. (n.d.). *Posts* [Instagram profile]. Instagram. Retrieved March 20, 2025, from https://www.instagram.com/noestamostodas/

No estamos todas [@noestamostodas]. (2019, July 19). *No estamos todas, nos falta Juanita 23/04/19 - Oaxaca - Tenía 14 años Ilustración por: Aylah. Estudia el séptimo grado en la* [Photo]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/BztmyHaDuu1/

No estamos todas [@noestamostodas]. (2019, October 21). *No estamos todas, nos falta Sofía 10/06/19 - Veracruz - Tenía 50 años Ilustración por: Ninna Falla IG: @ninna_falla / @queenv.brand* [Photo]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/B35kpkcDHVA/

No estamos todas [@noestamostodas]. (2020, December 11). *No estamos todas, nos falta María Tenía 7 años cuando fue asesinada el 10 de abril de 2020 en Veracruz* [Photo]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CIrRsnLCywn/

Nordlund, C., Speirs, P., & Stewart, M. (2010). An invitation to social change: Fifteen principles for teaching art. *Art Education, 63*(5), 36–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2010.11519086

Oliver, E., & Valls, R. (2004). *Violencia de género: Investigaciones sobre quiénes, por qué y cómo superarla.* El Roure.

Retford, K. (2010). A death in the family: Posthumous portraiture in eighteenth-century England. *Association of Art Historians, 33*(1), 74–97. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8365.2009.00717.x

Salguero, M. (n.d.). *Yo te nombro: El mapa de los feminicidios en México*. Blogger. https://mapafeminicidios.blogspot.com/p/inicio.html

Sisson, E. (1999). Practising theory? Visual arts education and postmodern pedagogy. *Circa, 89*, 20–21. https://doi.org/10.2307/25563492

Téllez, G.C. (2020). No estamos todas: Ilustrando memorias. *Iberoamérica social: Revista-red de estudios sociales, 8*(14), 173–201. https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7500052

Trans Murder Monitoring. (2024). *Will the cycle of violence ever end? TGEU's Trans Murder Monitoring project crosses 5,000 cases*. https://transrespect.org/en/trans-murder-monitoring-2024/

World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Violence against women, Impact.* Retrieved April 7, 2025, from https://www.who.int/health-topics/violence-against-women#tab=tab_2

[i] Posthumous portraiture—commissioning the portrait of a family member who had died—was a common practice in 18th-century England (Retford, 2010).
[ii] Not to be confused with retired Chicago teaching artist, Mark Nelson.
[iii] Nelson consented to have his teaching and background included in this article, and he reviewed the article before publication.
[iv] "Feminicide" and "femicide" coexist in academic literature; the latter is more common in English. When posting in Spanish, NET solely uses "feminicide," but in their slideshow to Nelson's students they use "femicide," as it is likely the more familiar term.
[v] Except for Gabriela Coronado Téllez's (2020) *Ilustrando memorias*, there is little academic literature dealing with No Estamos Todas.
[vi] While Nancy Fraser (2007) argues that recognition without redistribution is an insufficient conception of social justice, we leave questions of economic maldistribution and their intersection with the misrecognition of feminicide victims to future research.
[vii] 94% of trans and gender-diverse murders in 2024 were trans women (Trans Murder Monitoring). How NET helps expose the disproportionate violence trans women face is an important question for future research in trans necropolitics.

[viii] Nordlund et al. (2010) created these principles from a "planning process [that] drew upon [their] deeply embedded orientations to feminism and social justice, as well as [their] beliefs regarding the importance of understanding artworks as situated within multiple and overlapping contexts" (p. 35-36).
[ix] We do not explore the other six principles here only for the sake of scope. In fact, we believe all the principles overlap in various ways in Nelson's classroom and further research could explore these intersections.
[x] The survey thanks them for being part of NET and says: "We loved receiving your beautiful drawing[s] and we would love to know more about you and your collaboration, please answer the following questions" (M. Nelson, personal communication, September 19, 2022). The 10-question survey prompts them to reflect on the work NET is doing; why this collaboration is important; how they experienced working on this project; and the role art plays in speaking out about injustices.