

Review

Visual Arts-Based Interventions to Prevent Violence Against Children and Within Schools: A Critical Narrative Review and Perspectives

Christine Sanchez * and Nathalie Blanc *

Epsilon—LAPECS (Laboratory of Psychology, Environment, Culture & Society), University of Montpellier
Paul-Valéry, 34000 Montpellier, France

* Correspondence: sanchezchristine.dr@gmail.com (C.S.); nathalie.blanc@umpv.fr (N.B.)

Abstract

Violence against children constitutes a global public health emergency, necessitating innovative prevention strategies within the school environment. While the benefits of visual arts on socio-emotional development are well-documented, their specific impact on preventing interpersonal violence remains under-synthesized. This critical narrative review analyzes existing literature (2000–2025) through a corpus of 14 empirical studies (exclusive visual arts interventions and multimodal programs) conducted with children aged 5 to 12. The results reveal a dichotomy: while art-centered interventions demonstrate robust effects on emotional regulation and anger reduction (protective factors), evidence for a direct reduction in violent behaviors primarily stems from large-scale multimodal programs. Although promising as a lever for universal prevention and the facilitation of disclosure, the visual arts require further randomized controlled trials to validate their direct behavioral efficacy. This review proposes an Integrative Mechanisms Model (IMM) to structure future research on visual arts-based violence prevention and advances a renewed evaluative agenda centered on children's possible selves and future-oriented identity development in the context of violence prevention.

Keywords: art education; visual arts; socio-emotional development; violence prevention; bullying; childhood; well-being; school climate; creativity

1. Introduction

1.1. The Global Burden of Violence Against Children

Globally, violence against children reaches levels of prevalence and severity that exceed what is admissible under the fundamental principles of child protection and human rights [1–3]. Aggregating major international surveys, it is estimated that at least one billion children aged 2 to 17 (i.e., approximately one in two children) experienced some form of violence in a single reference year, whether physical, sexual, emotional, or neglect [4]. Violence is primarily concentrated within the family and community environment: nearly three-quarters of children aged 2 to 4 are exposed to violent disciplinary practices, and approximately 610 million live with a mother who is a victim of intimate partner violence [1]. A recent meta-analysis shows that 17.3% of children are direct victims of domestic physical violence and 16.5% are witnesses to it, with rates exceeding 40% in certain regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and West Asia [5].

In France, in 2023, the CIIVISE (Independent Commission on Incest and Sexual Violence Against Children) revealed that 160,000 children are victims of sexual violence each



Academic Editor: Huijing Shi

Received: 30 December 2025

Revised: 24 June 2026

Accepted: 30 June 2026

Published: 10 July 2026

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year, mostly within their own families—equating to one child every three minutes [6]. The 2023–2027 Plan to Combat Violence Against Children confirms the scale of systemic violence that still massively permeates family privacy [7]. Schools are not spared: according to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), one in three students reports having been a victim of bullying in the previous month, and a similar proportion reports having suffered physical attacks [8]. Results from PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2018–2022 confirm that, in OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, approximately 20% of adolescents still experience regular bullying [9].

The consequences of this interpersonal violence are profound and lasting. Meta-analyses [10,11] show that repeated exposure to maltreatment or multiple ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) increases the risk of major mental and somatic disorders—depression, anxiety, cardiovascular diseases—by two to three times, and the risk of severe disorders, addictive behaviors, or violent behaviors in adulthood by more than three times. Victims of bullying present a robust increased risk of socioeconomic difficulties, psychiatric disorders, and increased use of health services into middle age [12]. The economic cost is equally alarming: between 2% and 8% of global GDP (Gross Domestic Product), and at least 124 billion dollars per year for the annual cohort of confirmed cases in the United States alone [13,14].

Taken together, these figures outline a global public health crisis whose magnitude is only just beginning to be politically recognized. They testify to a collective ethical failure: being a child remains, for hundreds of millions of them, a high-threat experience. Faced with this situation, the responsibility of psychological and educational sciences is immense. These two dimensions—violence experienced outside the school context (intrafamilial, sexual) and violence occurring within school settings (bullying, peer aggression, micro-violence)—are not equivalent in nature; however, both define the scope of this review. They correspond to two distinct preventive functions of visual arts: first, as a non-verbal medium for symbolization and disclosure for children who are not yet able to verbalize their experiences; and second, as a universal primary prevention tool acting on classroom norms, peer relationships, and the socio-emotional skills that protect against school-based interpersonal violence.

1.2. School as a Central Space for Universal Prevention

In response to this global emergency, major international organizations converge on a common imperative: to invest massively in early prevention within educational environments. The WHO (World Health Organization), UNESCO, UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund), and the global End Violence initiative identify schools as one of the few spaces capable of reaching all children, including those exposed to intrafamilial violence, and of structuring protective socio-emotional skills early on [2,3,15,16]. In this macrosocial perspective, the school is no longer solely a place of instruction; it becomes a strategic lever for systemic prevention, enabling the development of emotional security, empathy, cooperation, emotional regulation, and respect for consent.

In France, these orientations are directly translated into the 2023–2027 Plan to Combat Violence Against Children [7], which places “education on consent, respect, and equality from an early age” at the center of its priorities, as well as in the directives relating to Education on Affective, Relational, and Sexual Life [17]. These policies insist on the necessity of offering students safe spaces for expression and tools to identify situations of violence, express their feelings, and seek help.

However, they also highlight a fundamental limitation: exclusively language-based approaches struggle to reach the most exposed children. Work in trauma psychology shows that children who are victims of violence present profound difficulties in verbalizing their lived experience due to mechanisms of freezing, shame, or disruptions in emotional processing [18,19]. In other words, those who most need to disclose their experiences are often the least able to verbalize them.

1.3. Visual Arts as a Non-Verbal Medium for Prevention and Symbolic Expression

In this context, the visual arts offer an essential medium for articulating primary prevention and early detection. They allow for a form of prevention through symbolization: representing what cannot yet be said, symbolically transforming what exceeds the child's verbal capacities, and establishing a safe emotional distance. Visual artistic practice mobilizes processes of symbolization, emotional distancing, and agency recognized for supporting emotional regulation, cooperation, shared attention, and emotional expression—skills at the heart of evidence-based prevention programs [20–23].

The importance of visual arts as a non-verbal medium for emotional regulation aligns with a broader movement documented internationally. The editorial by Karkou et al. (2022) highlights that visual arts are among the most represented domains in research on the psychological and physiological benefits of artistic practices [24]. Nevertheless, this visibility mainly concerns work centered on well-being, quality of life, or emotional regulation, and not on the prevention of interpersonal violence, a field where empirical data remains surprisingly rare.

Models of esthetic psychology conceptualize the artistic experience as a sequence of perception, information processing, meaning attribution, and affective transformation [20,25]. Representing a difficult situation, then transforming it within a secure framework, constitutes a mechanism of distancing and reconfiguration of lived experience. Experimental work shows that drawing decreases the intensity of negative affects and improves children's mood [21,23], while neurocognitive studies indicate that artistic creation activates prefrontal networks involved in emotional regulation [26].

International reports on arts and health further emphasize that universal artistic activities improve school climate, cohesion, and well-being [3,27]. They also strengthen the relationship with supportive adults within the school, a major protective factor in breaking the cycle of violence [12,28]. Finally, promoting visual arts helps address a longstanding structural deficit: in many countries, particularly in France, school artistic practices are insufficient despite their demonstrated benefits [29–31]. Therefore, developing visual arts in schools amounts to filling two gaps: a gap in art and a gap in effective prevention.

1.4. Literature Gaps and Objectives of the Review

Although the theoretical foundations are robust and public policies now recognize the value of artistic approaches, the literature specifically dedicated to visual arts as tools for violence preventive interventions remains surprisingly sparse. Most studies document positive effects on emotional regulation, school engagement, or cooperation [22,29,31,32], but very few directly measure effects on violence both inside and outside of school, as well as on bullying. Existing interventions are often scattered, limited to pilot projects or case studies, and rarely rely on robust methodological designs. Therefore, this review addresses two distinct yet interconnected preventive functions of visual arts: (a) as a non-verbal medium for symbolization and disclosure, particularly relevant for children exposed to violence outside the school context; and (b) as a universal primary prevention tool acting on school climate, peer relationships, and the socio-emotional skills that serve as protective

factors against school-based interpersonal violence. This dual focus structures the analysis throughout the present contribution.

This review aims to fill this gap by proposing a critical analysis of visual arts-based interventions in the prevention of interpersonal violence among children aged 5 to 12. Its objectives are as follows: (i) to map studies published since 2000 dealing with visual arts interventions or multimodal programs containing a substantial visual component and explicitly or implicitly aiming at violence prevention; (ii) to introduce the newly developed 5-Level Integrative Mechanisms Model (IMM) as a conceptual framework synthesizing the psychological processes that explain the observed effects (from initial esthetic encounters to the construction of prosocial possible selves); and (iii) to apply this IMM to critically analyze existing interventions and to outline a targeted research agenda that articulates this emerging field with child protection and school health policies.

2. Conceptual Foundations: Why and How Visual Arts Can Contribute to Violence Prevention

To clarify the diverse theoretical foundations of visual arts-based prevention and reduce conceptual fragmentation, we propose using our newly developed 5-Level Integrative Mechanisms Model (IMM, see Figure 1) as the organizing framework for this section. The existing literature draws on various, sometimes disconnected, theoretical fields: esthetic psychology, socio-cognitive theories, and health prevention models. Rather than presenting these models in isolation, the IMM synthesizes them into a cohesive, sequential pathway. The following subsections are therefore structured around the levels of the IMM, demonstrating how each theoretical framework contributes to a specific stage of the prevention process—from the initial cultural mediation (Level 1) to the ultimate transformation of the child's possible selves (Level 5).

This model synthesizes the psychological and behavioral mechanisms through which visual arts and narratives contribute to preventing interpersonal violence. It outlines five interconnected levels of intervention effects: Level 1 introduces the cultural mediation stimulus (visual arts and children's literature). Level 2 conceptualizes the cognitive and emotional processing of the esthetic encounter, where active dissonance resolution generates a "Transformative Esthetic Response" characterized by self-transcendent emotions such as awe, empathy, and pride. Level 3 illustrates the flourishing mechanism, where these emotions broaden and build the child's enduring socio-emotional resources. Level 4 translates these resources into concrete school child violence prevention outcomes, including emotion regulation, normative change toward prosocial norms, and cooperative school climate. Finally, Level 5 integrates an evaluative dimension grounded in possible selves theory, demonstrating how children project themselves into prosocial possible selves (e.g., agency, speaking up, and disclosure) rather than antisocial or victimized roles, thereby bridging the gap between school-based interventions and out-of-school violence. This model is proposed as a generative framework for future transcultural research design and not as a definitive causal account. (Note on figure creation: The conceptual structure of this model was entirely developed by the authors. The graphic design and visual layout of this figure were generated with the assistance of AI tools, specifically ChatGPT (GPT-5.5) and DALL·E, before final review and editing by the authors).

INTEGRATIVE MODEL: FROM CULTURAL MEDIATION TO VIOLENCE PREVENTION

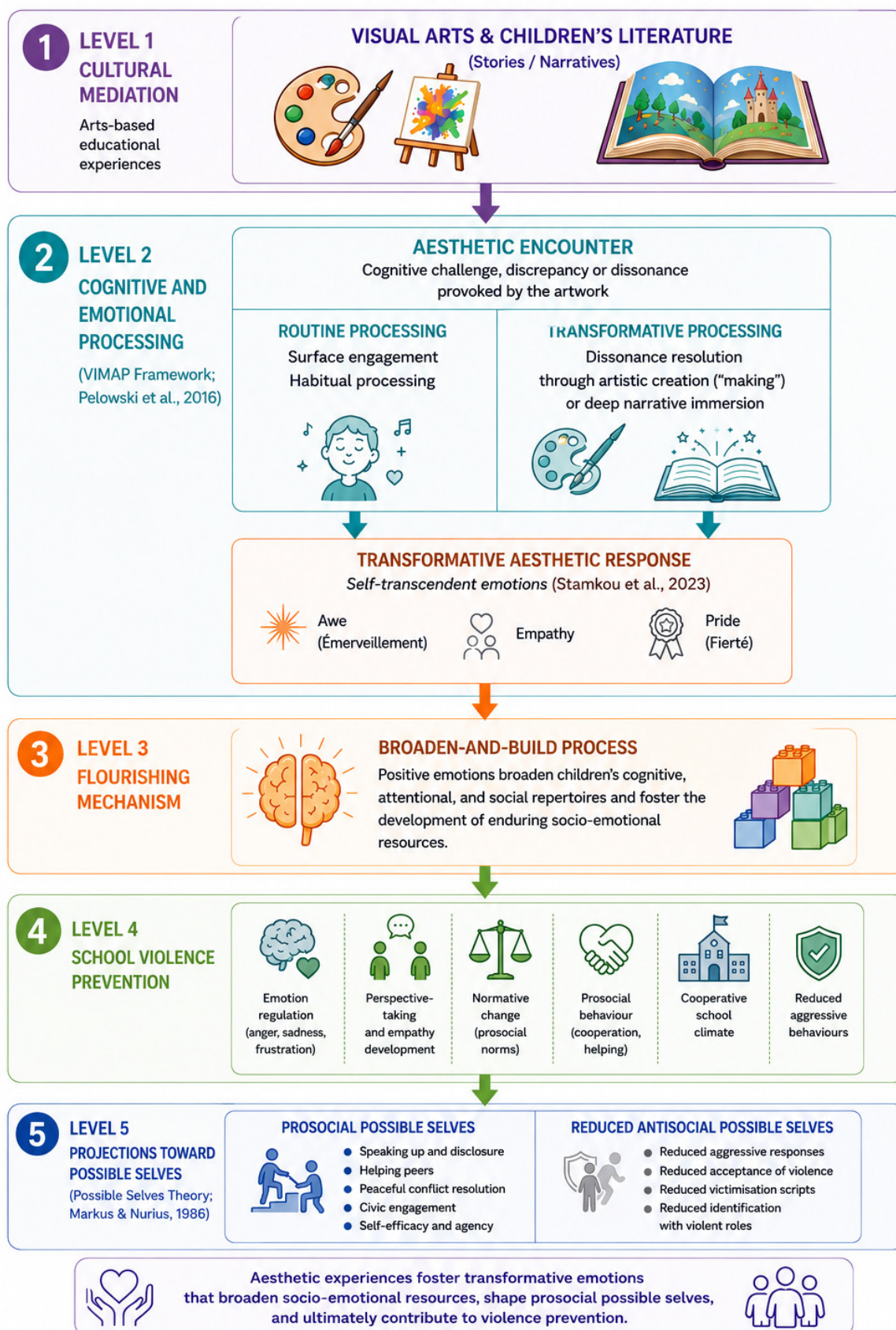


Figure 1. The Integrative Mechanisms Model (IMM) of visual arts-based violence prevention [25,33,34].

2.1. Levels 1 and 2: Cultural Mediation and Cognitive/Emotional Processing

The idea that visual arts can constitute a relevant lever for preventing interpersonal violence rests primarily on models of esthetic psychology and emotional development. According to the models of Leder et al. [20] and Pelowski et al. [25], the artistic experience involves a sequence of perception, interpretation, and affective elaboration, allowing for the construction of meaning and emotional transformation. The possibility of representing a difficult situation, then transforming it symbolically, fosters secure emotional distancing. Experimental work by Drake and Winner [21] and Drake [23] shows that drawing reduces the intensity of negative emotions in children, particularly when the activity favors distraction or the re-elaboration of experience. Combined with results obtained in a school context [31], which highlight the positive effect of visual arts practice on emotional experience in the classroom, this work indicates that visual creation constitutes a non-verbal pathway for emotional regulation, particularly relevant when language skills are limited or hindered by traumatic experiences or simply by the gravity of the subject matter when dealing with prevention.

Building on these frameworks, Level 2 of our Integrative Mechanisms Model (IMM) conceptualizes the Transformative Esthetic Response that emerges from the evaluative dimension of the artistic encounter. When children actively resolve the cognitive dissonance or challenge provoked by an artwork—either through the act of creating (‘making’) or through deep narrative immersion—they generate specific self-transcendent emotions. Chief among these is awe (“*émerveillement*” in French). As recently demonstrated [34], experiencing awe directly sparks prosociality and diminishes egocentrism in children. Furthermore, in the context of school-based visual arts programs, Sanchez and Blanc [31] observed a significant increase in these transformative emotions over the sessions, specifically wonder (awe) and pride. Consequently, awe, empathy, and pride constitute the specific, measurable psychological outcomes of Level 2. They act as the crucial bridging variables between the esthetic encounter and the subsequent development of prosocial behaviors.

2.2. Level 3: The Flourishing Mechanism and Socio-Cognitive Models

Building upon the transformative emotions generated in Level 2, Level 3 of our Integrative Model details the flourishing mechanism triggered by these artistic experiences, heavily drawing on the ‘Broaden-and-Build’ theory of positive emotions [35]. The self-transcendent emotions elicited by the esthetic encounter—such as awe, pride, and joy—act as catalysts that broaden children’s cognitive, attentional, and social repertoires. Over time, this broadening process builds enduring socio-emotional resources, effectively shifting the child from a state of vulnerability to one of psychological flourishing. This mechanism aligns seamlessly with motivational frameworks. For instance, Self-Determination Theory [36] provides a second essential framework. Artistic activities simultaneously nourish the fundamental psychological needs for autonomy (esthetic choices), competence (progressive mastery and validating feedback), and relatedness (collective realization), all linked to well-being, school engagement, and agency. Work by Sanchez and Blanc [30] shows that the sense of competence in visual arts is associated with a better emotional experience in the classroom. Furthermore, recent socio-cognitive models emphasize that perceived agency and the capacity to ask for help are major determinants of pro-social and protective behaviors [34,37,38].

Parallel to this, work on collaborative creativity [39] shows that collective artistic projects (murals, collages, installations) mobilize skills of negotiation, listening, perspective-taking, and co-construction. These skills stand in direct opposition to relational dynamics of domination, exclusion, or bullying, and contribute to transforming classroom norms into a cooperative micro-culture.

2.3. Level 4: School Violence Prevention and Socio-Ecological Anchoring

The enduring socio-emotional resources accumulated at Level 3 directly feed into Level 4, which specifies the concrete, measurable outcomes of the intervention regarding school violence prevention efforts. At this stage, the individual psychological benefits translate into behavioral and relational shifts within the educational environment. The targeted outcomes of Level 4 explicitly include improved emotion regulation (particularly a reduction in reactive anger and sadness), enhanced perspective-taking, a normative shift toward prosocial norms, and the establishment of a cooperative school climate. Ultimately, these combined factors lead to a tangible reduction in aggressive behaviors among peers. Beyond developmental psychology, the contribution of visual arts to preventing violence can be illuminated by frameworks from health psychology and prevention [3,40]. Socio-ecological models of violence [3] underscore the interlocking of individual, relational, school, and societal levels, and highlight the importance of interventions acting on life contexts. Visual arts programs in schools can thus be interpreted as universal prevention interventions aimed at modifying the classroom climate, implicit norms of cooperation, and opportunities for pro-social interactions, while reinforcing socio-emotional skills identified as protective factors [41].

Major theories of health behavior change also offer useful conceptual levers. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior [42], behaviors result from attitudes, perceived norms, and perceived control. Artistic programs that mobilize students around collective productions focusing on respect, consent, or solidarity potentially contribute to modifying these three dimensions: transformation of attitudes towards violence, reinforcement of pro-social norms, and development of a sense of relational self-efficacy. Concurrently, school health promotion models [40] highlight the central role of social skills, emotional regulation, and school climate in preventing aggressive behaviors.

Finally, frameworks for evidence-based prevention—notably the distinction between universal, selective, and indicated prevention [43]—allow for positioning artistic interventions in schools as universal actions capable of serving, for certain children exposed to violence, a function of selective or indicated prevention via the facilitation of identification and relationships with supportive adults. Ultimately, lessons drawn from these approaches can inform the design of visual arts programs integrated into structured intervention development processes (e.g., Intervention Mapping).

2.4. Level 5: Projections Toward Possible Selves

While Levels 1 to 4 detail the immediate and school-based impacts of visual arts interventions, Level 5 extends the preventive scope to the child's broader social environment. Grounded in the Theory of Possible Selves [33], Level 5 conceptualizes how children project their identity in the face of violence. Through the socio-emotional resources accumulated at Level 3, children are empowered to imagine themselves not as passive victims but as agents capable of disclosure, seeking help, or defending a peer (prosocial possible selves). As will be discussed more comprehensively in the Discussion (Section 5.2), this projective dimension is crucial for understanding how in-school arts interventions can foster the psychological readiness necessary to break the silence and stop abuse experienced outside of the school context.

2.5. Integrating Developmental, Normative, and Social-Cognitive Perspectives: Toward a Unified Theoretical Framework

The frameworks presented in Sections 2.1–2.3 are further enriched by four additional theoretical perspectives that provide mechanism-level specificity to the general claim that visual arts can contribute to preventing interpersonal violence.

The first is Social Information Processing Theory [44], which conceptualizes aggressive behavior as the outcome of biased or deficient processing at six sequential cognitive steps: encoding social cues, interpreting their meaning, clarifying goals, generating response options, evaluating their consequences, and enacting behavior. Visual arts activities that engage children in representing and reflecting on social conflict situations can be understood as structured opportunities to rehearse alternative interpretive frameworks at each of these steps—reducing hostile attribution bias, expanding the repertoire of prosocial response, and strengthening outcome evaluation for cooperative behaviors. This model provides a developmentally grounded account of how indirect, arts-based approaches may operate as upstream prevention tools, acting on cognitive processes that precede and shape observable behavior.

The second is Social Cognitive Theory [45,46], which explains behavioral change through observational learning, mastery experiences, verbal encouragement, and the development of self-efficacy beliefs. Collaborative visual arts projects can be understood as instantiating each of these mechanisms: children observe peers managing emotional expression through creative production (vicarious learning); receive validating feedback on their own artistic work (mastery and competence experiences); and progressively develop a sense of relational self-efficacy—the belief that they can act prosocially, resist group pressure, and support peers in situations of conflict. These mechanisms are consistent with the empirical pattern documented in the largest studies of the corpus, including Bowen and Kisida [47] ($N > 10,000$; significant reduction in disciplinary infractions) and Kliewer et al. [48] ($N = 258$; aggression reduction $d = -0.48$, mediated by improved emotion regulation).

The third framework draws on Normative Belief Theory [49,50], which distinguishes between moral rules (perceived as universally binding) and social conventions (context-contingent normative agreements). Applied to violence prevention, this framework suggests that aggressive behaviors in peer contexts are partly sustained by implicit normative beliefs that tolerate, minimize, or condone such behaviors within specific social configurations. Visual arts programs that engage children in the collective production and public display of representations of respect, consent, or solidarity can function as normative reframing interventions: by rendering prosocial values symbolically visible and publicly shared, they act on the implicit conventions that regulate peer interactions—a pathway that is complementary to, and potentially more durable than, explicit rule-based instruction alone. This mechanism has been operationalized in validated measurement instruments for adolescents (Esposito et al. [51]); however, no equivalent tools currently exist for early childhood—a critical gap that future research should address (see Section 5.4, Priority 1).

A fourth and converging line of evidence derives from recent bibliotherapy research examining children's literature as a structurally analogous form of symbolic artistic mediation. Shared reading of children's books addressing bullying is associated with documented improvements in bullying-related knowledge from age 5 and in social norm acquisition from age 8, with shared reading—which involves adult-mediated dialog around character emotions, perspective-taking, and moral deliberation—consistently outperforming passive exposure [52]. The psychological mechanisms proposed to account for these effects—narrative identification, distancing from personal experience through fictional characters, collective deliberation around represented social conflict, and the modification of normative beliefs—are structurally homologous to those activated by engagement with visual arts. This cross-domain convergence provides independent empirical support for the symbolic mediation pathway central to the IMM.

3. Method

3.1. General Approach

This review adopts a structured critical narrative approach, particularly adapted to an emerging field that is still sparsely explored empirically [53,54]. The objective is not exhaustiveness, but a reasoned analysis of the most pertinent contributions [55] regarding the following question: What are the effects of using visual arts for violence prevention in the school environment?

3.2. Selection Strategy

The selected works meet four cumulative criteria: (1) they concern interventions conducted in a school setting (primary or middle schools); (2) they mobilize a substantial visual arts component (drawing, painting, collage, collaborative murals, or photo-voice methods) as a central modality of action; (3) they explicitly aim to prevent interpersonal violence, school bullying, or to strengthen recognized socio-emotional protective factors, such as empathy, emotional regulation, affect expression, or peer cooperation; and (4) they include an empirical evaluation, even preliminary, of the observed effects, based on a pre-post, quasi-experimental, or RCT (Randomized Controlled Trial) design.

The literature search was conducted across five major scientific databases (i.e., ERIC, PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar), selected for their disciplinary complementarity: ERIC and PsycINFO cover educational and developmental psychology; Scopus and Web of Science provide multidisciplinary coverage, including public health and education sciences; and Google Scholar captures gray literature and recent preprints. The search covered the period from 2000 to 2025, reflecting the emergence of rigorous empirical research on school-based visual arts programs and their psychosocial effects following foundational theoretical contributions (e.g., [20]). Studies published prior to 2000 predominantly focus on individual clinical art therapy, which falls outside the scope of this review, which targets group-based, classroom-transferable interventions. The focus was on peer-reviewed studies published in English, which is the most widely used language for sharing scientific knowledge. Studies published in French were also considered, in order to assess France's position in this field of study and to highlight the importance of investing even more in it.

The documentary search mobilized the following Boolean search strings, adapted to each database: ("visual art" OR "visual arts education" OR "drawing" OR "painting" OR "mural*" OR "art therapy") AND ("school" OR "classroom" OR "primary school" OR "elementary school") AND ("violence" OR "bullying" OR "aggression" OR "emotional regulation" OR "socio-emotional" OR "prevention"). Searches were conducted between October and November 2025. Following a process of title and abstract screening and full-text review against the four inclusion criteria detailed above, 14 studies were retained for analysis.

3.3. Justification of the Critical Approach

The scarcity of experimental studies directly measuring the effect of visual arts on school violence justifies a critical synthesis allowing for (1) the identification of the most informative interventions despite the heterogeneity of designs; (2) the contextualization of observed effects within the presented theoretical models; (3) the identification of explored prevention themes (school climate, bullying, expression of violence, etc.); and (4) the highlighting of structural gaps in the literature to guide research priorities. Results are presented in synthetic tables comparing modalities, objectives, results, and levels of evidence of interventions, with a view to informing their potential transferability to educational policies.

4. Critical Synthesis of Existing Interventions (2000–2025)

At the end of the selection process, 14 empirical studies strictly meeting the inclusion criteria (school or extracurricular intervention, population aged 5–15, direct or indirect measurement of violence/school climate) were retained. This restricted but robust corpus is divided into two categories. The corpus includes interventions focused exclusively on visual arts ($n = 8$) and multimodal programs integrating a substantial visual component ($n = 6$). Tables 1 and 2 present all 14 retained studies in full. Two of the visual arts-only studies [48,56] employ both expressive visual and written modalities (i.e., drawing, narrative posters, and written storytelling) as their primary creative intervention; they are retained in the corpus because their expressive symbolic processes meet the inclusion criterion of a substantial visual arts component as a central modality of action. The conceptual paper by Holochwost et al. [57] is included as a framework study explicitly grounded in empirical case data from a school-based arts program, consistent with the critical narrative approach adopted in this review.

Table 1. Studies based exclusively on visual arts interventions (selected corpus).

Reference (Country)	Design/Sample	Visual Arts Intervention	Targeted Measure	Key Results
Alavinezhad et al., [58] (Iran)	Experimental (RCT) $N = 30$ (7–11 years, aggressive children)	Group Art Therapy (10 sessions): Painting and drawing.	Anger and Self-esteem (Aggression Questionnaire)	↓ Anger ($p < 0.001$) ↑ Self-esteem ($p < 0.0001$). Significant direct effect on aggressive behaviors.
Freilich & Shechtman, [59] (Israel)	Quasi-experimental $N = 76$ (Children with Learning Disabilities)	Visual Arts Therapy vs. Verbal Therapy.	Aggression and Social Adjustment	↓ Aggression (teacher and peer reports). Art therapy was as effective as verbal therapy in reducing aggression.
Sanchez & Blanc [31] (France)	Within-subject design (Pre-post) $N = 135$ (Grades 3–5)	“Experiencing Art at School” program (Matisse sequence, 3 sessions).	Achievement Emotions (8 discrete emotions)	↑ Positive emotions (Wonder, Love, Pride; $p < 0.001$) ↓ Negative emotions (Anger, Sadness; $p < 0.05$).
Coholic et al., [60] (Canada)	Quasi-experimental $N = 36$ (8–14 years, needs-based)	Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP): Mindful drawing, sculpting.	Emotional Resilience and Regulation	↓ Emotional reactivity ($d \approx 0.41$). Improvement in regulation skills.
Sholahuddin et al., [61] (Indonesia)	Pre-Post Design $N = 24$ (Adolescents)	Creative Psychoeducation: Posters, “Ideal Self” drawing.	Bullying Behaviors	↓ Bullying ($p < 0.001$). Significant reduction in self-reported bullying behaviors.
Moula, Powell & Karkou [56] (UK)	Pilot cross-over RCT $N = 62$ (7–10 years, mild emotional and behavioral difficulties), 4 primary schools	Art therapy (8 sessions, 45 min/week): drawing, painting, sculpture, clay. Delivered by accredited art therapists.	Health-related quality of life (HRQOL), well-being (CORS), emotional/behavioral difficulties (SDQ), sleep duration (Fitbit)	↑ Life functioning and overall well-being; ↑ sleep quality (significant). Qualitative data: ↑ self-expression, emotional regulation, sense of safety, hope, and optimism. Cohen’s $d \approx 0.33$ for quality of life.
Kliewer et al. [48] (USA)	RCT/ $N = 258$ (7th grade, 91% African American, high-violence urban neighborhoods), 17 classrooms	Expressive writing (8 sessions): stories, skits, poems, and narratives about violence experienced or witnessed.	Teacher-rated aggression and emotional lability; child self-report of physical aggression	↓ Teacher-rated aggression and lability at 2 months post-intervention ($d = -0.48$). Effects are stronger for students with the highest exposure to community violence. The moderating effect of violence exposure was confirmed.

Table 1. Cont.

Reference (Country)	Design/Sample	Visual Arts Intervention	Targeted Measure	Key Results
Holochwost et al. [57] (USA)	Conceptual framework paper with illustrative case data/ <i>N</i> ≈ 60+ (Grade 3, urban elementary school)	Theater-based residency program (SPARK): 15 weekly 40 min sessions + 3 live performances across one academic year.	Social awareness, relationship skills, empathy (SSIS empathy subscale); perspective-taking (narrative coding, ecogram)	Framework for differentiating arts education effects by domain, context, and developmental stage. Illustrative data: improvements hypothesized and partially supported in social awareness and peer relationships. Underscores the need for context-specific, mechanism-sensitive hypotheses.

The retained studies were analyzed according to several dimensions: (1) prevention themes addressed, (2) implementation modalities, (3) evaluation methods used, and (4) observed results. The comparative tables below structure the synthesis according to intervention type, highlighting measured effects, targeted preventive themes, implemented designs, and strength of evidence.

4.1. Benefits of Visual Arts on Socio-Emotional Development

Several recent works converge to show that visual arts activities in schools can strengthen essential socio-emotional skills in children, such as emotional regulation and expression, empathy, cooperation, and a sense of belonging [24,31]. These dimensions, whose significant reinforcement by artistic practice has been highlighted [31], are identified by the literature as major protective factors against bullying dynamics. The reference meta-analysis by Durlak et al. [41] establishes that the development of these socio-emotional skills is predictive of a reduction in aggressive behaviors at school.

In other words, by improving both children’s emotional well-being and the quality of peer relationships, artistic practices could indirectly contribute to the prevention of school violence. Although rare, some rigorous studies directly measure the impact of the visual arts on violent behaviors. Alavinezhad et al. [58] demonstrated, via a randomized controlled trial with 30 children, that ten painting and drawing sessions significantly reduced anger scores (*p* < 0.001) while increasing self-esteem (*p* < 0.0001). Similarly, Freilich and Shechtman [59], in a special education context, report that visual arts therapy is as effective as verbal approaches in reducing aggression observed by teachers.

More recently, Sanchez and Blanc [31] highlighted, with 135 primary school students, the immediate emotional modulation power of a visual arts sequence in the classroom. Their results show a significant decrease in negative emotions (anger, sadness) and an increase in positive emotions (wonder, pride) over the sessions, suggesting that artistic practice acts as a regulator of the classroom’s emotional climate, a key preventive factor for micro-violence. In the UK, Moula et al. [56] conducted a pilot randomized controlled trial across four primary schools in which 62 children aged 7–10 with mild emotional and behavioral difficulties received art therapy (drawing, painting, sculpture) over 8 weekly sessions. Results showed improvements in quality of life and well-being alongside significant gains in sleep quality, with qualitative data further confirming children’s enhanced self-expression, sense of safety, and emotional regulation. Complementing these findings, Kliwer et al. [48] demonstrated in a school-based RCT (*N* = 258; 17 classrooms in high-violence urban neighborhoods) that expressive writing about violence—incorporating poems, skits, and personal narratives—significantly reduced teacher-rated aggression and

emotional lability at 2 months post-intervention ($d = -0.48$), with effects strongest for the most violence-exposed students.

4.2. Efficacy of Interventions Centered on Visual Arts

The studies selected in this category ($n = 5$) rely exclusively on the practice of visual arts (drawing, painting, sculpture; see Table 1). Unlike individual therapeutic approaches, they were selected for their potential transposability to a class group. Although fewer in number than multimodal programs, they offer valuable data on the specific mechanisms of art.

The analysis of these five interventions reveals targeted effects on regulatory mechanisms. The experimental study by Alavinezhad et al. [58] is particularly compelling: it shows a significant reduction in anger ($p < 0.001$) and an increase in self-esteem among children with behavioral disorders, validating the efficacy of group art therapy on direct aggression. Similarly, Freilich and Shechtman [59] observe that artistic intervention is as effective as verbal approaches in reducing aggression in a specialized school environment.

On the emotional level, Sanchez and Blanc [31] highlight an immediate modulation of the emotional climate in a regular classroom, characterized by a decrease in negative affects (sadness, anger) and an activation of positive emotions (wonder, pride). These results align with those of Coholic et al. [60] on the improvement of emotional resilience ($d \approx 0.41$).

Nevertheless, the majority of these studies focus on protective factors (regulation, self-esteem) or specific contexts (special education). With the exception of Sholahuddin et al. [61], who observe a decrease in reported bullying, few works in this category isolate the effect on interpersonal violence in the general population, which limits the generalization of results to the entire school system.

4.3. Multimodal Programs and Systemic Approaches

The studies listed below integrate visual arts (drawing, painting, murals) within broader frameworks (social-emotional learning, mediation, school climate). This holistic approach aligns with international recommendations [3,62], which value creativity as a lever for safer school environments. Unlike isolated interventions, this corpus offers the advantage of providing large-scale direct behavioral efficacy evidence (Table 2).

Table 2. Multimodal programs including a substantial visual arts component.

Reference (Country)	Design/Sample	Program Components	Role of Visual Arts	Key Results
Bowen & Kisida [47] (USA)	RCT (Randomized Controlled Trial) $N = 10,548$ (Grades 3–8)	Arts Access Initiative: Cultural partnerships.	Exposure and practice (Visual Arts + Theater + Dance).	↓ Disciplinary Infractions (−3.6%) ↑ Compassion. Robust causal evidence of behavioral improvement.
Bone et al., [63] (USA)	Longitudinal Cohorts $N > 25,000$	Global Arts and Cultural Engagement.	In-school and out-of-school artistic practice.	↓ Antisocial Behaviors Mediated by improved Self-control.
Lyshak-Stelzer et al., [64] (USA)	Pilot RCT $N = 29$ (Adolescents, trauma history)	Trauma-Focused Art Therapy vs. Crafts.	Narrative drawing of trauma.	↓ PTSD Symptoms ($p < 0.05$) ↓ Anxiety. Reduction in risk factors for reactive violence.
Mendelson et al., [65] (USA)	Pilot RCT $N = 228$ (Urban youth)	Mindfulness + Arts components.	Mindful drawing (Mandalas).	↓ Involuntary stress responses Indirect effect on classroom climate.

Table 2. *Cont.*

Reference (Country)	Design/Sample	Program Components	Role of Visual Arts	Key Results
Paat et al. [66] (USA)	Descriptive qualitative/ <i>N</i> = 15 community partners (schools, shelters, juvenile rehabilitation); >3000 participants reached through ~80 arts-based events	REACH project: painting, drawing, graphic design, coloring contests, and community art exhibitions.	Visual arts are a primary vehicle for violence prevention, kindness promotion, and civic engagement.	4 themes: inherent benefits of arts; promoting kindness and preventing violence; teaching civic responsibility; collaborative strategies. Reported effects: ↑ community bonds and emotional expression; ↓ social isolation; ↑ pride, motivation, and civic engagement. Noted limitations: qualitative design, no longitudinal tracking.
Moula et al. [67] (UK)	Pilot RCT—qualitative sub-study/ <i>N</i> = 62 (7–10 years, mild emotional and behavioral difficulties)	Multimodal arts therapies: art therapy, music therapy, dramatherapy, dance movement therapy. School-based.	Art therapy (drawing, painting, sculpture, sand trays) is one of 4 parallel intervention groups.	Children reported: ↑ self-expression, sense of safety, empowerment, hope and optimism; ↑ emotional regulation and mastery; ↑ self-confidence. Qualitative and arts-based evidence complements quantitative pilot RCT outcomes (Moula et al., [56]).

Detailed analysis of this corpus highlights action at two levels. On the one hand, regarding the general school climate, the most probative study to date remains the randomized controlled trial by Bowen and Kisida [47]. Covering more than 10,000 students, it establishes a robust causal relationship: increased exposure to the arts leads to a 3.6% decrease in disciplinary infractions and a significant increase in compassion. This result is corroborated by longitudinal data from Bone et al. [63], which identify self-control as the mediating mechanism through which artistic practice reduces antisocial behaviors. This finding is consistent with the broader SEL (social–emotional learning) literature establishing self-regulation as a key predictor of reduced aggression in school contexts [38].

On the other hand, in more clinical or targeted contexts, the integration of art into care protocols (Trauma-Focused Art Therapy) allows for the reduction in post-traumatic stress symptoms and anxiety [64], thus diminishing the risks of reactive violence in vulnerable adolescents.

However, it is worth noting a limitation inherent in these multimodal designs: it remains difficult to isolate the specific variance attributable solely to the visual arts component. Nevertheless, the convergence of results suggests that artistic activity plays not an accessory but a central role, acting as a non-verbal catalyst indispensable for the internalization of pro-social norms.

Beyond these large-scale programs, two additional multimodal studies extend the corpus. Moula et al. [67] presented qualitative and arts-based evidence from the same pilot RCT population [56], documenting children’s subjective experience of positive change across safety, empowerment, and emotional regulation. Paat et al. [66] reported on the REACH community project, which mobilized painting, drawing, graphic design, and art exhibitions across schools and shelters along the U.S.–Mexico border to promote kindness and prevent targeted violence. Although qualitative in design, their study constitutes an ecolog-

ically valid illustration of the preventive mechanisms theorized in the IMM—particularly at the relational and ecological levels.

5. Discussion

5.1. Critical Summary of Observed Effects

The results from the selected corpus report a significant gain in emotional regulation and social adjustment. Contrary to previous reviews limited by methodological heterogeneity, the analysis of the 14 retained studies allows for the objectification of tangible benefits on two levels.

First, regarding protective factors, targeted interventions (Table 1) demonstrate a robust reinforcement of socio-emotional skills. As highlighted by Sanchez and Blanc [31] or Coholic et al. [60], participation in visual arts sequences operates a functional emotional modulation: reduction in negative valences (sadness, anger) and activation of achievement emotions.

Second, regarding violence reduction, a methodological dichotomy appears. While small pilot studies sometimes struggle to reach statistical significance, large-scale trials (Table 2) provide causal evidence of a decrease in disciplinary infractions [47]. This contrast suggests that the effect of visual arts on violence is not “weak,” but that it requires sufficient statistical power to be detected. By acting on the precursors of aggression (anger, lack of self-control), the visual arts prove effective when the design is rigorous.

However, the scope of these successes must be nuanced: while demonstrating a reduction in offenses constitutes a major breakthrough, it primarily concerns violence enacted by students. The challenge for future research is now to prove that these mechanisms also better protect children against the violence they suffer (suffered violence).

5.2. Perspective Within Theoretical Models

These empirical results must be placed within the framework of the presented theoretical models, stemming from esthetic psychology [20], the “Broaden-and-Build” theory of positive emotions [35], and SDT (Self-Determination Theory) [36]. According to esthetic psychology models, the artistic experience triggers a process in several stages (perception, interpretation, meaning attribution, affective reaction) that allows for symbolic elaboration of emotional experience [20,25]. The act of drawing or giving body to a visual representation offers the child the possibility to represent a difficult situation and then transform it in a secure setting, which favors distancing from negative emotions and their regulation [21].

Similarly, positive emotion theories (Broaden-and-Build) postulate that pleasant artistic experiences broaden children’s cognitive and social repertoire and consolidate their adaptive resources [35]. By eliciting joy, creative pride, or a sense of accomplishment, a visual arts activity could thus increase resilience, openness to others, and empathy [35], indirectly contributing to reducing aggressive behaviors [38]. Finally, Self-Determination Theory [36] suggests that pedagogical contexts satisfying fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness favor pro-social motivations. Visual arts workshops can nourish the sense of autonomy, strengthen the sense of competence, and intensify peer bonds, all elements conducive to less violent attitudes.

However, our critical review reveals a significant discrepancy between these solid theoretical promises and the weakness of empirical data regarding the effective reduction in violence. Several explanations are possible. On the one hand, observed effects on socio-emotional skills might require a long integration time to translate into visible behavioral transformations, which the brevity of follow-ups often prevents from detecting. On the other hand, current evaluation relies almost exclusively on quantitative behavioral

indicators, leaving aside essential dimensions of violence prevention, particularly psychic and social reactions to suffered violence.

The Theory of Possible Selves [33] constitutes a fruitful avenue. It proposes analyzing how children represent themselves in future situations: do they imagine themselves capable of reacting, protecting themselves, or helping a peer in case of violence? Integrating indicators related to “possible selves” and how the child projects themselves in the face of violence could profoundly evolve evaluation standards in prevention.

As illustrated in the final level (Level 5) of our newly proposed Integrative Model (IMM, see Section 2), this projective dimension operates upstream of observable behavior and bridges the critical gap between in-school arts interventions and out-of-school violence prevention. Visual arts programs do not directly modify the external environment or the perpetrators. Instead, by accumulating socio-emotional resources, children are empowered to project themselves into prosocial possible selves—imagining themselves as agents capable of seeking help, defending a peer, or speaking up. Crucially, fostering this sense of agency and readiness for disclosure (breaking the silence) constitutes the primary behavioral mechanism through which children can seek support from trusted adults, thereby helping to stop abuse experienced outside of the school context.

Future research should therefore develop scenario-based protocols—using illustrated vignettes, graphic narratives, or structured role-play—to assess shifts in children’s prosocial possible selves as a measure of preventive impact beyond behavioral and emotional aggregate indices.

5.3. Methodological Limitations

Despite the interest of the findings reviewed, five categories of methodological limitations invite caution in interpreting conclusions.

First, the heterogeneity of study designs limits comparability across the corpus. Three-quarters of the retained studies rely on pre-post designs without equivalent control groups, preventing attribution of observed changes to the artistic intervention per se rather than to maturational effects, classroom dynamics, or teacher expectations. Sample sizes are frequently modest (median $N \approx 87$ across the full initial corpus), introducing risks of selection bias and insufficient statistical power to detect moderate behavioral effects. Only two studies in the retained corpus meet the standards of randomized controlled trials [47,58], which remain the methodological benchmark for causal inference. Beyond design type, the studies vary substantially in their temporal architecture: intervention durations range from a single three-session sequence [31] to a full academic year [47], follow-up periods from immediate post-test to several months, and session intensity varies widely across studies. This dosage variability makes effect-size comparison unreliable and prevents identification of the minimum exposure thresholds necessary to produce behavioral—as opposed to emotional or climate-level—effects. Furthermore, in 17 out of 28 studies in the initial corpus, the visual arts component was embedded within broader multimodal programs, making it structurally impossible to isolate the specific variance attributable to visual arts engagement as distinct from social-emotional skills instruction or school-wide climate initiatives.

Second, inconsistencies in intervention content, delivery, and outcome measures constitute a persistent obstacle to cumulative knowledge. The retained studies vary substantially on dimensions that are theoretically significant but rarely reported: the specific visual arts modality engaged (drawing, painting, sculpture, collaborative murals, expressive writing); the professional profile of the facilitator (classroom teacher, arts specialist, registered art therapist, external researcher); the degree of program standardization; and whether the intervention targets students, teachers, or the broader school community. As Holochwost

et al. [57] demonstrate, these dimensions are not interchangeable—each activates distinct psychological mechanisms—and the current corpus does not yet permit systematic comparison along these lines, because implementation parameters are inconsistently reported across studies. On the measurement side, several studies in this corpus [59–61,65] relied on ad hoc instruments or non-standardized self-assessment questionnaires to evaluate children's socio-emotional skills. More worryingly, the near-absence of direct measures of violence perpetrated or suffered by students limits the preventive scope of evaluations. It therefore remains uncertain whether improvements observed on indirect indicators truly accompany a reduction in actual violent behaviors, a central objective of any preventive approach.

Third, the cultural generalizability of findings is uncertain. The retained corpus is geographically concentrated, with studies primarily conducted in the USA [47,48,63–65], France [31], Israel [59], Canada [60], Iran [58], and Indonesia [61]. Cultural factors—including educational traditions, the social meaning attributed to artistic practice, norms governing emotional expression in school contexts, and teacher-student relational climates—may significantly moderate both the mechanisms and the magnitude of arts-based prevention effects. The assumption that visual arts engagement triggers symbolization, perspective-taking, and prosocial norm-building in comparable ways across cultural contexts has not been empirically tested. This limitation is compounded by the language restriction of the present search strategy (English and French only), which structurally excludes contributions from Latin American, Eastern European, East Asian, and Sub-Saharan African research traditions. Cross-cultural replication of both programs and measurement instruments is therefore not merely a desirable extension but a scientific and ethical priority, formalized as Priority 3 in Section 5.4.

Fourth, the underrepresentation of vulnerable populations in the studied samples constitutes a double gap. Most artistic programs have been tested, in general, school populations without specific targeting. Data is lacking on the efficacy of such interventions with children having histories of intrafamilial violence, forced migration, disability, or other forms of vulnerability. The absence of research dedicated to these subgroups is both a scientific gap (understanding efficacy conditions) and an ethical one (ensuring that prevention benefits those who need it most), and is formalized as Priority 4 in Section 5.4.

Fifth, the quantitative evaluation of visual arts interventions poses inherent epistemological challenges. Existing instruments (aggression scores, disciplinary infractions, teacher-rated conduct, standardized SEL questionnaires) are structurally adapted to measuring downstream behavioral outcomes but not to capturing the upstream mechanisms through which visual arts operate: changes in symbolic elaboration, normative belief formation, narrative perspective-taking, and identity-based projection. Validated instruments for assessing normative beliefs about violence now exist for adolescents (Esposito et al. [51]), but no developmentally adapted equivalents have been constructed for early childhood, preventing mechanism-sensitive evaluation of precisely the age group most targeted by universal school-based prevention. Future research must develop multimodal, mechanism-sensitive assessment tools, including illustrated vignette protocols and graphic narrative scenarios—capable of capturing how children position themselves as witness, victim, or perpetrator in situations of violence before and after intervention [33]. This is the evaluative paradigm shift proposed as Priority 1 in Section 5.4.

Finally, these limitations should be read against a broader disciplinary context. A large-scale meta-research assessment across 600 social and behavioral science papers found that only 54% of published results were precisely reproducible, replication attempts confirmed original findings in approximately half of cases, and median effect sizes declined from $r = 0.25$ to $r = 0.10$ —with reproducibility particularly limited in education and psy-

chology [68]. This reinforces the urgency of the open-science standards and preregistration practices advocated in Section 5.4.

5.4. Future Perspectives

Five research priorities emerge from this review, organized around the levels of the proposed Integrative Mechanisms Model (see Figure 1):

Priority 1. Mechanism-sensitive assessment. Future studies should develop and validate instruments capable of independently measuring each level of the proposed IMM. At Level 2, this entails the development of validated tools to assess the ‘Transformative Esthetic Response’ (e.g., awe, pride) and emotional distancing in young children. At Level 4, observational measures of empathy, perspective-taking, and prosocial behavior during collective art-making activities are needed. More broadly, to evaluate Level 5, the field should move beyond behavioral and aggregate emotional indicators toward scenario-based protocols—such as illustrated vignettes or graphic narratives—capable of capturing how children project themselves into possible selves (as agents capable of disclosure, witnesses, or victims) in situations of violence before and after intervention [33]. The stronger effect detection observed in studies using validated instruments, such as the Aggression Questionnaire [58] or standardized resilience scales [60], already demonstrates the gains in rigor afforded by standardized measurement.

Priority 2. Methodologically robust designs. The field would benefit from an increased number of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) with adequate statistical power, matched control groups, and multi-source outcome measures (e.g., student self-reports, teacher observations, administrative records). Longer follow-up periods (minimum 6–12 months) are needed to detect behavioral effects that may only emerge after sustained exposure. Future research should also formally test the mediation pathways proposed in the IMM and compare different forms of visual arts practice to identify those that are most effective depending on the targeted outcomes and populations.

Priority 3. Cross-cultural validation. The current evidence base is geographically concentrated (France, the United States, Israel, Canada, Iran, and Indonesia). To provide specific methodological guidance, future research must move beyond broad cross-cultural recommendations and implement targeted, multi-centric protocols. An illustrative example of this next step is the PREVIOS project (PREventing VIOlenceS at school), a research initiative currently being developed by the authors. The ambition of such a prospective initiative is to evaluate the combined impact of cultural mediations (visual arts and children’s literature) across specifically contrasting socio-educational contexts (e.g., France, Italy, and Peru). By aiming to implement large-scale RCTs across these diverse contexts to specifically test the pathways identified in the IMM, researchers will be able to identify boundary conditions, culturally specific moderators, and assess whether the mechanisms of the IMM generalize beyond Western educational traditions.

Priority 4. Vulnerable and underrepresented populations. Most studies have been conducted with general school populations. Research specifically targeting children exposed to intrafamilial violence, forced migration, disability, or other risk factors is critically needed—both to identify the conditions under which interventions are effective and to address the ethical imperative that prevention efforts benefit those who need them most. Mixed-methods approaches combining quantitative and qualitative data would provide more fine-grained insights into participants’ lived experiences and the subtle processes involved in artistic creation.

Priority 5. Gender-based and sexual violence prevention. The current literature is virtually silent on the use of visual arts to prevent gender-based violence, sexual abuse, or intimate partner violence during childhood. Given the epidemiological urgency doc-

umented in Section 1.1 (160,000 children victims of sexual violence per year in France alone [6]), this constitutes a major research blind spot to address urgently.

5.5. Implications for Educational Policies and Research in Arts Education

Despite remaining uncertainties, our conclusions carry several important implications for educational policies. On the one hand, the favorable results of the visual arts on school climate, emotional well-being, and social skills constitute a plea for a thoughtful (re)integration of artistic practices in schools. Even if the direct effect on violence is not yet conclusively demonstrated, the reinforcement of protective factors (empathy, emotional regulation, belonging to the school community) is demonstrated, which is a valuable step for the educational mission.

Educational decision-makers could therefore legitimately support the expansion of visual arts programs with a preventive or socio-emotional aim, complementing more specific violence-control actions. This presupposes investing in the development of turnkey tools allowing teachers and interveners to have evidence-based resources in curricula, and encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration to properly frame potential repercussions in terms of disclosure or expression through the arts.

However, our critical review reveals a significant discrepancy between institutional orientations and available empirical evidence. Indeed, the integration of artistic practices is now explicitly recommended by international bodies as a strategic lever for securing the school climate. UNESCO identifies creativity and arts as essential tools for building safe and inclusive learning environments [69], while the WHO includes creative approaches in its practical handbook for school-based violence prevention [3]. Similarly, UNICEF values drawing as a critical and emotional expression modality within its pedagogical kits for child protection [62,70]. In France, these recommendations resonate with national directives on the development of psychosocial skills and education on affective life. Yet, while the normative prescription is strong, scientific validation of the specific efficacy of the visual arts on violence reduction remains fragmentary. This contrast underscores the urgency of conducting rigorous research to empirically test postulated mechanisms.

6. Conclusions

This critical review highlights the untapped potential of the visual arts as a lever for preventing violence in the school environment. While psychological mechanisms (i.e., emotional regulation [21,31], symbolization [20,25], and empathy development [60]) are now supported by promising empirical results, the demonstration of a direct reduction in acts of violence still rests on too few rigorous studies. While validated tools exist for assessing adolescents' normative beliefs about antisocial behavior [51], no comparable instruments have been developed for young children, a critical gap that future research should address.

However, the challenge of evaluation cannot be limited to merely lowering student aggression. It is also about measuring the capacity of interventions to protect children, too many of whom still suffer violence perpetrated by adults. In this respect, future research would benefit from renewing its methodologies, for example, by exploring students' projection into fictitious situations (as witness, victim, or aggressor) to better grasp the integration of protection strategies.

A fundamental paradox remains today: while international institutions recommend integrating arts to create safe schools, research struggles to provide decision-makers with "turnkey" causal evidence. Yet, the indirect effects observed on class climate and socio-emotional skills already justify a thoughtful integration of artistic practices into educational policies.

The school, as a space of protection and refuge for socio-cognitive development, must seize this universal medium [2,3]. To transform these theoretical promises into validated practices, the scientific community will have to rise to the challenge of complexity: conducting ambitious longitudinal studies, targeting vulnerable populations, and daring to measure what is silent—notably invisible violence. Ultimately, the challenge is not simply to demonstrate that visual arts reduce violence, but to determine whether they enable children to become capable of recognizing violence, imagining alternatives, and acting upon them. This shift—from measuring violence itself to measuring children’s developmental readiness to resist, disclose, and seek help—may represent one of the most important future directions for research in child violence prevention.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, C.S. and N.B.; methodology, C.S.; software, C.S.; writing—original draft preparation, C.S. and N.B.; writing—review and editing, C.S. and N.B.; supervision, N.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. This article is based exclusively on previously published literature.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Abbreviations

ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
CIIVISE	Independent Commission on Incest and Sexual Violence Against Children
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HAP	Holistic Arts-Based Program
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
RCT	Randomized Controlled Trial
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SEL	Social–Emotional Learning
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

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