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📅 Published online: 29 Jan 2025.

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Reconfiguring education in times of pandemic: a visual analysis of pedagogical practices and school spaces

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a comprehensive examination of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education, focusing on pedagogical practices and school spaces in primary schools in the community of Castilla y León, Spain. Through a visual analysis of student drawings and the reconfiguration of educational spaces, the study explores the profound changes that have occurred in educational settings during the pandemic. The research highlights the shift from traditional classroom methodologies to virtual and remote learning environments, emphasising the role of technology and digital tools in facilitating education during times of crisis. Additionally, the study investigates the evolving perceptions of students towards school, considering how the reconfiguration of physical spaces has influenced their learning experiences and social interactions. By examining the 'new normal' of education, the study sheds light on the challenges and opportunities faced by educators in adapting their pedagogical practices to meet the changing needs of students in a post-pandemic world. Overall, the analysis provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between pedagogy, space, and technology in reimagining education in times of crisis.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has represented times of profound change in our sociocultural practices. It is a period of trial-and-error experimentation filled with uncertainty, social change, and bewilderment in the face of the unknown. The educational system is not exempt from this new situation: educational policies are being modified, although education experts and the individuals they target (e.g., teachers and students) believe that their opinions have not been adequately considered in the policy-making process (e.g. González-Calvo et al. 2020; González-Calvo, Varea, and García-Monge 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to widespread adaptations and unprecedented realities in the way teaching and learning take place in classrooms worldwide. Many schools transitioned from in-person to online instruction in a matter of hours, while others returned to in-person teaching amidst social distancing restrictions, waves of increased infections within classrooms, and home confinement for infected or at-risk students. Spain, like other European countries, falls into the latter situation, opting to reopen schools at the beginning of the new school year in September 2020 – after being closed for 13 weeks during the lockdown from March to June. This decision

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aimed to ensure the right to in-person education, considering the educational spaces to be safe. All of this has brought about a new way of understanding and interacting with school spaces, aiming to make them places that promote the health and well-being of students.

The reopening of schools during a health crisis has necessitated an adaptation of the spaces used for pedagogical practices. The conceptual space (Meyer and Land 2005) that schools currently constitute describes the different uses and adaptabilities of a space during a period of change. These are places that exist 'between' two different spaces, involving the construction of new and deeper conceptions of students' identity and how it relates to their life experiences.

Depending on how teachers embrace the pedagogical possibilities of the practice space, their role will differ in the classroom, affecting the session structure, student involvement in tasks, their level of autonomy, and their relationship with peers in class (Lund 2013). Spaces and materials, along with the teacher-student relationship, determine the image and typology of the educational institution. Additionally, spaces have a clear influence on how teachers make choices, and the way educators 'perceive' these elements will be influenced by their training, knowledge, experiences, and past lived experiences (Ryan 2011; Todd 2014).

In this study, conducted with primary school students (between 7 to 9 years old) in the community of Castilla y León (Spain), we aim to investigate how the Covid-19 crisis is affecting students and pedagogical practices as the spaces they typically occupy (the physical school building) have been reconfigured in recent months. Specifically, we seek to answer the following questions: (1) What possibilities and limitations does the reconfiguration of school spaces due to the pandemic offer?; (2) How has the perception of minors towards school changed?; and (3) How do the 'new spaces' influence pedagogical practice and life in school?

'New normal', change, and uncertainty

The so-called 'new normal' implies instability, uncertainty, lack of cohesion, and constant change (e.g. González-Calvo 2025; Weaver and Swank 2021; WHO 2020). With all this, school spaces and new educational policies must continually adapt, making it unlikely that they will solidify and survive for long (ref. Bauman 2013). The reconfiguration of spaces, the lack of personal contact, strict health measures, among others, can potentially neutralise pedagogical practices as they were traditionally carried out. Rapid changes are capable of inducing new behaviours, perceptions, and sensibilities in teachers and students, which, while necessary, may have negative implications for pedagogical practice (e.g., lack of proximity, distancing from others, mistrust).

In the new way of conceptualising school, spaces play a crucial role. In the development of this new normality, there is a dialogue between legal regulations, the possibilities and limitations of infrastructure, pedagogical intentions, and the needs of students. Teachers try to mitigate the effects these changes may have on students (Varea, González-Calvo, and García-Monge 2022) attempting to provide them with a world that is familiar and friendly. This known world is useful because it provides a framework for understanding significant events and everyday experiences (Becker 1999), while offering confidence to students by allowing them to experience a balance between the changing and the constant.

The notions of what constitutes a disruption of space usage, experiences, and everyday activities are socially and culturally constructed. They depend on factors such as imposed health standards, sociocultural customs, and personal circumstances regarding these standards. They also depend on narratives of what is considered 'normal' and what is expected to return to 'normal' once the health situation improves. As Becker (1999) states, when life circumstances do not align with cultural ideas of what is 'normal', there is a tendency to question dominant narratives in an attempt to normalise or make recognisable what is, in fact, experienced as a disturbing experience. Education professionals and students are trying to exert some control over an uncertain and abnormal situation, attempting to meet sociocultural expectations of order (Varea, González-Calvo, and García-Monge 2022). In this way, an effort is being made to create a new space in line with the characteristics of

the new situation, drawing on what we already know to create a sense of 'order.' However, the situation has disoriented teachers and students from a pedagogical perspective. For educators, it is challenging to impose a level of certainty in an uncertain reality; for students, finding accommodation and confidence in shared spaces that are perceived as a threat of possible contagion is not easy.

Health situation and changes in schools

The health emergency caused by COVID-19 brought about significant changes in the schooling of children in Spanish classrooms. While classroom classes were initially suspended, from the following school year onwards, some measures were established, at the proposal of the Ministry of Health, for the prevention of contagion situations, seeking specific organisation and management while the pandemic situation remained active.

By way of contextualisation, and citing the regulatory documentation, we set out the measures that were carried out during the 2020/2021 academic year, and which completely transformed the way of life in schools as they had been developed up to that point.

During the first months of the pandemic, since the state of alert was declared on 14 March 2020 and with it the closure of schools, the situation in schools was managed in the best possible way by the teaching teams who, knowing that it was impossible to open their classrooms to receive students, tried not to lose the connection with families through technological devices, both those in the centres and the teachers' own. In this way, they tried to maintain communication and initiated an attempt at non-face-to-face training by proposing online work to the students, through the existing portals of public education in each community. This meant an abysmal difference between centres and families, highlighting the differences between those with and without training and technological resources. The labour and economic situation, in addition to the health drama, produced a huge gap where it had always been felt, and the most vulnerable families and students once again suffered the cruellest side of this situation.

Once the first few weeks were over, and the situation was more normalised in terms of attendance at work, on-site classes were resumed, but with significant changes that were modified as the situation progressed.

An action protocol had been established for confirmed or suspected cases of contagion, both for students and teachers, including non-attendance for several days (which varied during the different phases of the pandemic) until the risk of contagion was considered to be minimal or non-existent.

When the following academic year 2021–2021 began, it was decided to return to face-to-face attendance in schools and, as mentioned above, certain measures[1] were established that completely changed the dynamics in schools.

It should be noted that the regulation of attendance and stay in schools was not published and known by the educational community well in advance, which influenced the feeling of lack of protection and chaos on the part of teachers and families during the return to the classroom in this academic year.

Teachers, families and, above all, pupils had to adapt to this situation of 'new normality', which produced profound changes in the links and interrelationships of the educational community, and which marked a before and after in the school experience of the youngest pupils.

Space, fluidity, and liminality

Life within the liquid context of the pandemic is characterised by conditions, values, and codes of conduct changing before they solidify (Bauman 2013). We can speak, then, of the confusion of spaces associated with the pandemic.

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[1]Interterritorial Council of the National Health System Agreement, adopted in coordination with the Sectoral Conference on Education, regarding the declaration of coordinated public health actions against COVID-19 for educational centers during the 2020–2021 academic year.

According to Beck (1999), modernity is in a phase where it has turned back on itself, distinguishing between 'zombie categories' and 'zombie institutions', i.e., those that are dead but still alive. An example of the latter may be schools during the pandemic: what is a school nowadays? What is its purpose? In these spaces, there is a redistribution and reassignment of the powers of modernity's dissolution. They are spaces located in a lost/stolen/abandoned past that resist dying, not in a future yet to be born (and therefore non-existent) (Bauman 2017). In this uncertain context, individuals retract themselves and no longer touch each other (Bauman 2007). In times of uncertainty, spaces and institutions make it impossible to master the unpredictable forces of the social and natural worlds (Bauman 2007, 2017); uncertainty characterises the liquid modern era, the inability to confront the concrete threat looming over the system, and the ignorance to determine what needs to be done to counteract it.

One way to conceptualise uncertainty in the current era could be by turning to the term liminal. That is, these are spaces that are not what they were conceived for, but neither are they what they are currently used for. They are unlimited, undefined, uncertain spaces where all our roles intertwine. This spatial liminality, defined as the transitional phase of a person between one process and another, occupies a space away from something but without reaching another state (e.g., an illness, adolescence, and/or states of transient madness are liminal spaces) (Simmons et al. 2013). Liminal spaces in different contexts are characterised as simultaneously problematic but also as opportunities for transformative change in concepts that were previously unattainable (Meyer and Land 2005).

Liminality is considered to be transitory (a state that is not considered permanent, as it is limited by space or time) or perpetual (involving a more complex understanding, as it cannot be considered either one thing or the other or, indeed, both things simultaneously) (Johnsen and Sørensen 2015). Perpetual liminality is related to the space in which today's school practices and students' daily lives take place. Places like school, home, playgrounds, natural environments constantly renegotiate the identity of their roles as the demands arising from the pandemic define and redefine how and for what purpose each space will be used. The norms, forms, and limits of spaces, intrinsically connected with the roles that individuals must perform, must be continually negotiated. It is a moment, then, in which the sense of 'order' and 'normality' is disrupted. There is the possibility that undefined and uncertain spaces suggest new forms of relationship and connection between different professional and personal contexts we inhabit. Following Clouder's proposal (2005), liminal spaces could generate new knowledge and leave the door open to creativity. Ways of thinking and being that were previously inaccessible may now be more accessible, thanks to the opportunities arising from the new way of understanding and acting in space.

If fluidity, uncertainty, and liminality of spaces allow new thoughts and opportunities to emerge around school spaces, this could have an evident impact on how educational practices are understood and carried out. One consequence of this new way of understanding school spaces aims to establish a panopticon (Bauman 2017), a place where 'certain people are kept away.' School spaces, clearly differentiated to create small groups of students who must stay away from others, are an example of this. Being a student in the times of the Covid-19 school involves being separated, maintaining distance from others. The crucial aspect, in the new schools, is to be separated; it is a new school marked by the dilapidation of social bonds. The alteration of the boundaries of the school space, the limitation of urban spaces and interpersonal meetings, the impossibility of engaging in extracurricular activities in enclosed environments, among other factors, leads to mistrust in the physical and behavioural manifestations that shape students' personalities (González-Calvo and Arias-Carballal 2022; González-Calvo 2025).

Methods

Participants in this study were a group of 73 students aged between 7 and 9 years old (37 girls and 36 boys). They were undertaking their second year of primary school in a public school in Spain, located

in the community of Castilla y León. The town is close to the city of Valladolid and has a growing population that is approaching 25,000 inhabitants. The community is characterised by being a municipality in constant growth, with a development of its infrastructure that is in line with its growing number of inhabitants. The town has a wide range of inexpensive attractions (e.g., museums, theaters, factories, leisure and cultural theme parks, political institutions). From here, it is also easy to go to rural areas, where several wineries and dairy farms are located. The sociocultural and economic status of the families of participants was considered middle class, and the occupations of the parents ranged from being employees in the building sector to being employed in different services. Most of the families lived in a small house with a small garden, which might be better during lockdown than living in a small apartment with no outdoor space (as many people in Spain live). Following the Spanish government's decision to impose lockdown measures in March 2020, including the closure of all schools, these participants continued their classes online from their homes. In this way, students had to follow the classes from home using computer resources (availability of a computer and internet access), following the normal school timetable – from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Those students who did not have access to computer resources could request them from the school.

To ensure a representative and relevant sample, a purposive sampling strategy (Suri 2011) was employed. This strategy allowed us to select students who were directly impacted by the pandemic's reconfiguration of educational spaces. In particular, we focused on students from middle socioeconomic backgrounds who experienced diverse levels of access to technology during lockdown. this approach ensured that the sample reflected the wide range of realities and challenges faced by the school community during this period (see also González-Calvo 2025).

In terms of assessment, Castilla y León established a 'non-written' special assessment protocol, detailing that primary school students could not repeat a year as a consequence of the exceptional health situation, while teachers were asked to be flexible in the forms of assessment and to favour students in the grading process. The haste in adapting teaching from a face-to-face to a virtual model, as well as the uncertainty and lack of knowledge about the new situation, meant that educational decisions were adjusted and modified over the almost 100 days that the confinement lasted (in the beginning, the confinement was established to last 15 days).

Participant-produced drawings were used for data collection. We used participant-produced drawings in this study because they are a way to tap quickly into the emotional lives of participants (Vince 1995; Vince and Broussine 1996), inviting children to visualise their ideas (Nyberg 2019; Robb, Jindal-Snape, and Levy 2021). Graphical representations such as drawings have the capacity to surface unspoken thoughts and feelings. Drawings offer a different kind of glimpse into human sense-making than written or spoken texts do because they can express that which is not easily put into words: the ineffable, the elusive, the not-yet-thought-through, the subconscious (Weber and Mitchell 1995). A pre-text (such as a drawing) is a stimulus that can be used to motivate, set a scene, and build emotion (O'Neill 1995).

To gather this data, tutors asked the children to complete a voluntary task at the end of the school year. The task included creating three drawings: one representing their lives before the pandemic, one depicting their current situation during lockdown, and one imagining their lives after the pandemic. Students also answered three open-ended questions: (1) 'What do you miss most about life before the virus?'; (2) 'What do you think is the best and worst thing about life since the virus appeared and you have had to be at home?'; and (3) 'What do you imagine life will be like in the future, when the virus is gone or a vaccine has been created?' Tutors sent the instructions for this task via email, and families helped the children complete it. The drawings and answers were returned to the first author within a week. Weekly communication between the first author and families ensured that the task was carried out in a supportive and stress-free environment.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) Familiarisation with the data: The researchers repeatedly reviewed the drawings and written responses to identify initial patterns; (2) Generation of initial codes:

Relevant segments of the data were labeled, categorising aspects related to spatial reconfiguration, emotions, and adaptation to technology. The four researchers worked independently on the data to ensure inter-coder reliability, and discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. Themes were identified at both semantic (explicit) and latent (interpretative) levels; (3) Searching for themes: The codes were grouped into preliminary themes, such as 'spatial reconfiguration', 'emotional response', and 'adaptation to technological change'; (4) Reviewing themes: The identified themes were refined through discussions among the researchers to ensure coherence and relevance. The criteria of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity were applied. For example, in the theme 'emotional response', it was ensured that all related data described specific emotions (internal homogeneity), while this theme was clearly differentiated from 'adaptation to technological change', which included data on the use of digital tools (external heterogeneity). If a data extract did not fit within a theme, it was relocated or discarded; (5) Defining and naming themes: Each theme was defined and assigned a representative name, ensuring through researcher consensus that it captured the essence of the data; and (6) Producing the final report: The themes were integrated into a report that included representative quotes and visual examples of the drawings to support the findings.

The four researchers worked independently on the data to ensure inter-coder reliability, and discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. This process revealed themes such as 'spatial reconfiguration', 'emotional response', and 'adaptation to technology' to support the findings, representative drawings and written responses were included.

Ethical considerations were central to the research design. Informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians, and verbal assent was secured from the children. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by assigning pseudonyms to participants and securely storing all data in accordance with Spanish data protection regulations. In addition, the task was designed to minimise potential distress and to provide children with an opportunity for creative and emotional expression. Special attention was given to avoiding any form of discomfort or undue emotional burden. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Valladolid, following international guidelines on research involving minors to ensure a comprehensive ethical approach that considers both the physical and emotional well-being of the participants.

Findings

The students' drawings reflect changes in classroom methodologies, as well as in recess practices and the use of intermediate spaces. Three focal points or perspectives from the researcher's eye go beyond this initial cut, allowing us to advance in an interpretative process that is always partial. It also helps us think about the highlighted scenarios and areas, represented and experienced as those that underwent the most changes. To analyse these axes, we present the findings in an inside-out movement, depicting how spaces were experienced within the classroom and how they were experienced outside. In both spaces, we incorporate the idea of intermediate spaces as a way of experiencing the pandemic in school from the perspective of the children. From these two major dimensions of analysis – inside and outside – a third dimension emerges regarding the senses and meanings of school that are shaped during the pandemic, derived from the drawings of the children when looking at a second and third level.

Within the classroom: empty spaces or the new world during the pandemic

Concerning the classrooms, spaces are transformed to emphasise methodologies centered on the teacher, the blackboard, and the computer, moving away from participatory, active, and socio-constructivist methodologies. In this 'new school', there is a distancing from others, with interpersonal contact disappearing.
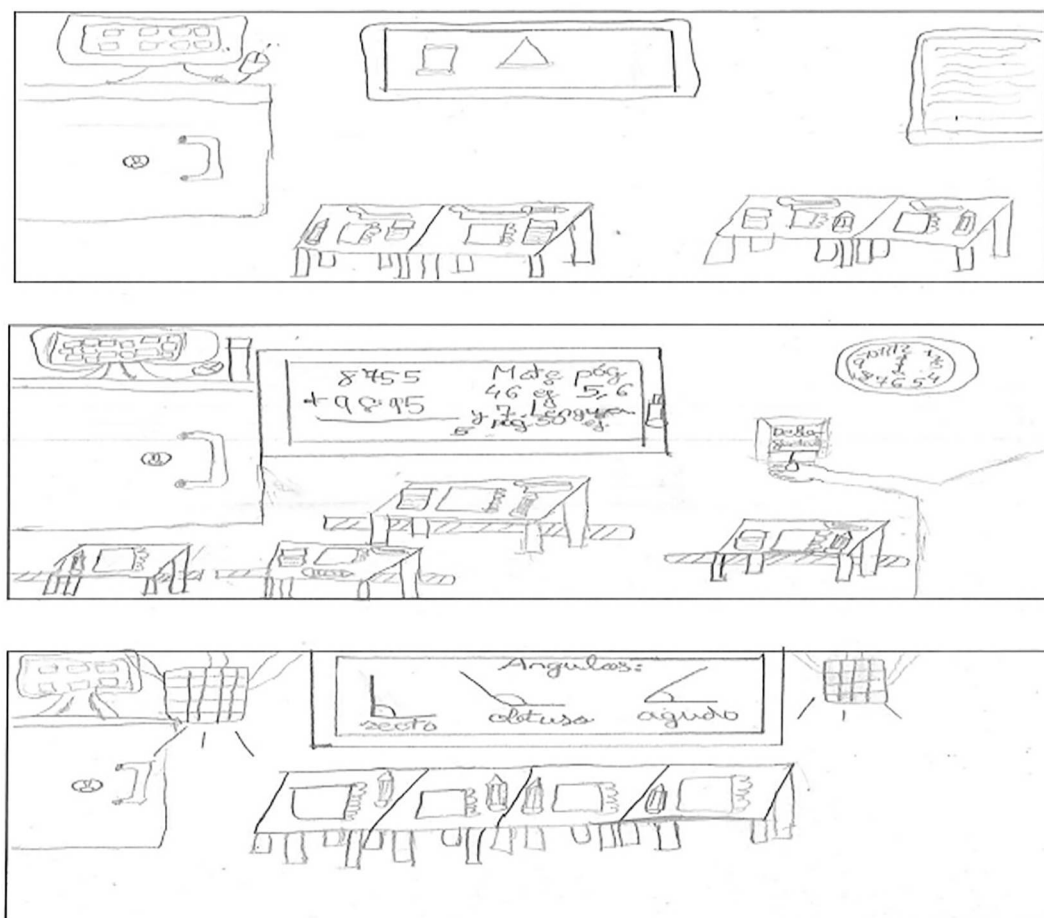
Figure 1. Drawings of a 4th grader showing the 'before', 'now' and 'future' of the classroom.

The new spatial arrangements highlight the separation between students and their orientation towards a screen or a blackboard as a point of attention reference.

For example, the drawings in Figure 1 depict things that remain and change during the 'new normal' period. Changes include the contents noted on the blackboard, the addition of speakers in the drawing of the near future, and the arrangement of the tables. Regarding the latter detail, the tables are paired in the 'before', separated in the 'during', and all together in the future, suggesting a desire for this person to reunite with the rest of their classmates as an ideal distribution in the classroom.

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With regard to the classrooms, spaces are transformed to emphasise methodologies centered on the teacher, the chalkboard, and the computer; moving away from participatory, active, and socio-constructivist methodologies. In this 'new school', there is a distancing from others, with interpersonal contact disappearing.

This wish is ratified in her writing, stating: 'the best thing will be that we can all be together again'. Although this is a widespread wish, we have collected cases in which this is not the case:

> Before, the worst thing was that we were all so close together at the tables. (A., 4th grade)

> Now, the best thing is that we are separated by tables. (K., 4th grade)

> Now, the best thing is that in exams, no one copies from you. (S., 4th grade).

The preceding illustration depicts an 'empty classroom', signifying a space devoid of 'actors' (i.e., without teachers or students). Although Todd (2014) suggested that liminal spaces can be described as locations and practices where teachers and students find themselves at a threshold, encountering the indeterminate, this is challenging to identify in spaces where neither teachers nor students are present. Liminal spaces are contextual, relational, and corporeal, involving the teacher-student relationship in classroom situations or the students' transition between classrooms and corridors. However, spaces cannot be liminal if the people who make them liminal are absent (e.g., students, teachers …).

In the following drawings, students and/or teachers are represented in the spaces but in a 'different' manner. Several drawings depict new spatial arrangements emphasising the separation between students and their orientation towards a screen or a chalkboard as a focal point of attention.

In the drawings of Figure 2, common features are maintained (teacher's desk and teacher facing the students, students in individual desks, and a chalkboard), highlighting the separation among students during the 'new normal' period. The desks and the teacher's desk underscore the distance in interaction. Teachers shield themselves behind their desks and, from there, oversee the group ('be quiet', says the teacher in the 'before' and the 'now', although in the future, they envision a more open attitude with a 'yes' and addressing students by their names).

The teacher-student distance is emphasised in certain drawings that reflect the role of space in the manifestation of hierarchies and power relations (Todd 2014). Physical spaces materialise past practices and social relationships, thereby predisposing current practices to emulate past practices.

The 'learning' experience restricts bodily cognition to 'bodily silence' (Martínez Álvarez and & González-Calvo 2016), and interaction with content is mediated through documents and the chalkboard. Some girls depict the separation between the interior and exterior of the classroom through windows (e.g., Figure 3), contrasting the chalkboard as a 'window to knowledge' with the 'windows to reality' (sun, tree with fruit). It is interesting to consider this 'dislocation' in terms of how knowledge is perceived or can be perceived through the rupture of spaces or the familiar way of being in and recognising classroom spaces.

The school as an inside-outside space, inside: a reflection of the society that hosts it but isolated from it. According to official documents, these spaces aim to provide the citizens access to the culture that surrounds them, but by isolating themselves from it. This isolation of schools from the contexts that surround them has been accentuated during the pandemic. In Spain, rules have been established to prevent anyone other than workers or students from crossing the external boundaries of schools. With this, we witness a reinforcement of contextual isolations, isolation of groups ('bubble groups'), and individuals in a matryoshka of Panopticons.

Some students (as in Figure 4) associate the future with an 'opening', possibly metaphorical for the classroom space, drawing a sun that illuminates the class space. In this way, Daniela's drawing contradicts Bauman's (2007) concept of 'zombie institutions', as some participants expressed their ideas of a future that is yet to be born.
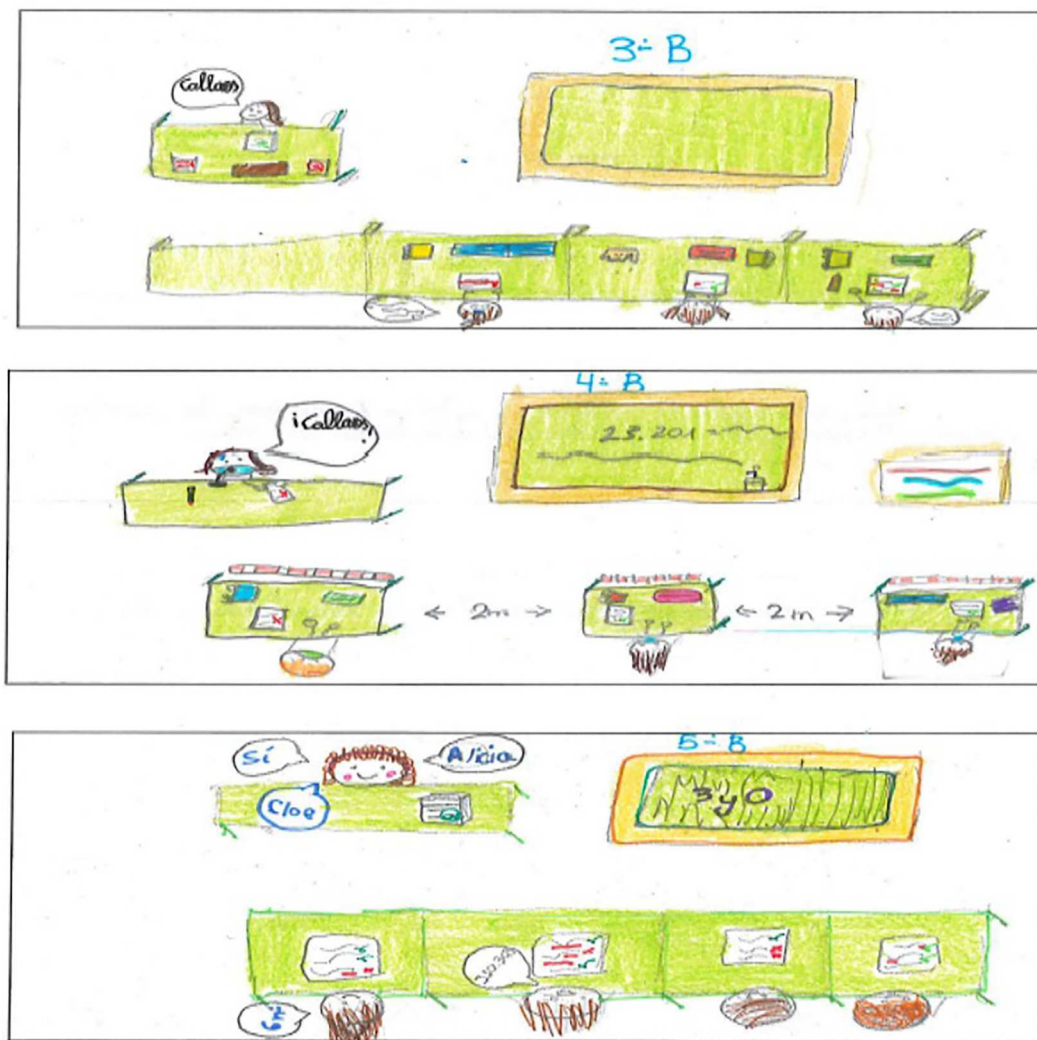
Figure 2. Sequence of 'before', 'now' and 'future' showing the distribution of students (together-separated) anchored to desks and facing the teacher's desk and the blackboard.

The changes introduced in the classroom during the pandemic, far from favouring an opening of education to the socio-cultural and environmental context that surrounds it and gives meaning to learning processes, open it up to virtual contexts. Children introduce laptops on their desks, digital screens, or browsers into their drawings (Figure 5):

> In the near future the best thing will be that they will adapt to online needs. (D., 4th grade)

> In the near future the best thing will be that there will be more technology. (I., 4th grade)

Technology emerges as a salvific resource or one that can solve everything without considering the individuals involved … technology resolves, distances or separates, controls space, and outlines a possible future.

In this way, we are witnessing liminal spaces, as we move from one space to another, even if only temporarily. On the other hand, the new rules remove the only way for students to ensure that the

Figure 3. Drawing of the classroom with a view of the outside through a window.

teaching-learning process does not focus solely on the teacher-learner relationship. The possibilities for interaction with peers have been eliminated, increasing the separation from the rest, not only physically, but also as a methodological possibility.

The children's desire is to return to closer contact between pupils, i.e., to return to lost/stolen/ abandoned spaces that refuse to die (Bauman 2007), allowing children to return to earlier practices.

The body would be more of an object anchored to a nullifying space, the text or communicative body (Bernstein 2000).

There are those who weigh the losses and gains and value positively the substitution of friends for machines:

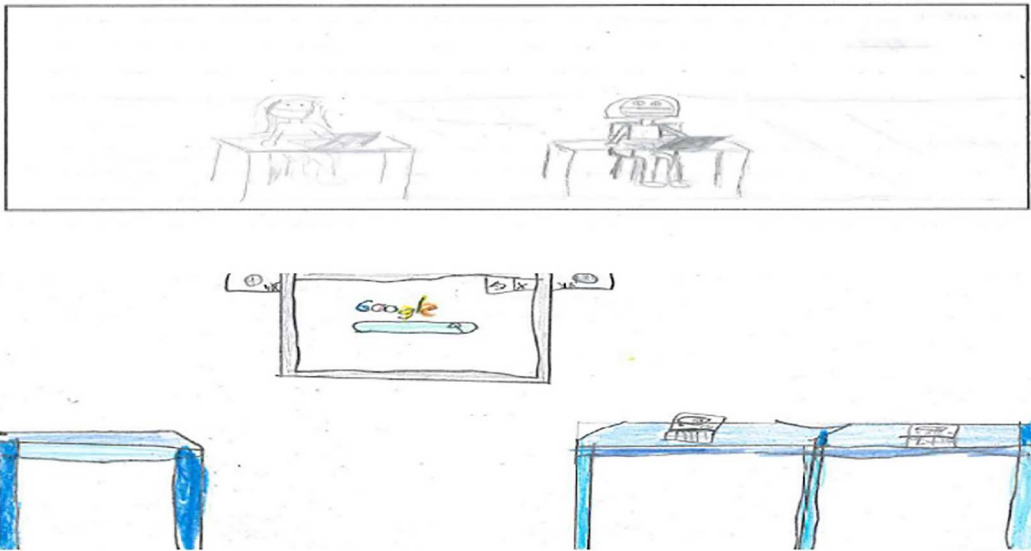**Figure 4.** Drawing in which the sun floods the classroom.

Figure 5. Drawings of school children with laptops and classroom with a digital whiteboard.

> Before the virus we could be together at the tables and join the other classes. Now we can't, but in exchange we have more cleanliness, more technologies … (I., 4th grade)

The distances have a secondary effect on the classroom atmosphere, with several children reporting a decrease in conflicts and distractions and an increase in attention in class:

> Before the worst thing was that they hit each other a lot. Now the best thing is that we don't hit each other because we can't touch each other. (L., 4th grade)

> Now the best thing is that I can pay more attention to the teacher. (L.A., 4th grade)

> Now the best thing is that in class you can concentrate more because you are at a distance. (M., 4th grade)

The choice of classroom placements has been restricted. In doing so, spaces have become tighter, restricting students' bodies and the way they move around the space. They can no longer stand close to friends; a factor that leads to possible distractions, but which provides an affective incentive in classroom processes (Figure 6).

> Now they don't let us stand where we want with new friends. (I., 4th grade).

Playground and other shared spaces: the outside

Playgrounds have also undergone transformations and have led to changes in activities and forms of interaction which are reflected in pupils' drawings and comments. Safety distances have been introduced (e.g., Figure 7):

> Now the worst thing: That we must play with distance and games without touching each other. (S., 4th grade)

Spaces and possibilities for interaction between groups have been limited. This transition of spaces, and the consequences it entails, can be both problematic and an opportunity for change. Some value this limitation in interaction with other groups as positive:

> Now the best thing is that we don't hang out with people who are not from our class. (R., 4th grade)
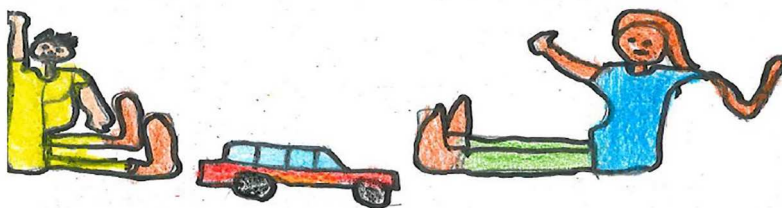
Figure 6. Drawings that influence the exchange of objects between children as a form of interaction in the classroom.
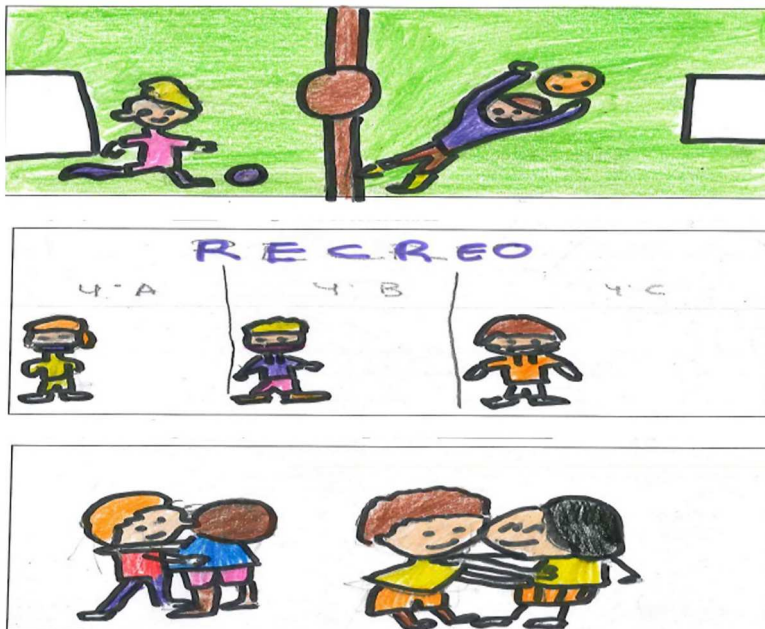

Figure 7. Drawing of the 'before' playing football; the 'now' marking the separations by groups; and the 'future' hugging each other.

And others as negative:

> Before the best thing was that we could be all the classes together. (C., 4th grade)

The restrictions have brought changes in body practices and in groupings. Some children point out that in the future they want to go back to playing whatever they want (although this apparent freedom is conditioned by the facilities and dominant practices), and, in this way, there is a past space associated with practices that refuse to be forgotten.

Several schoolchildren point to the limitations in the use of balls in the pandemic situation as a problem and see the best thing in the future as being that they will again be allowed to bring balls.

> Now the worst thing: they don't let us have balls. (I., 4th grade)

Football is shown as a dominant practice, longed for and expected in the future.

> In the near future, the best thing will be that we can all play football together. (C., 4th grade)

On the other hand, this situation reveals the limitation of the pupils' recreational repertoire.
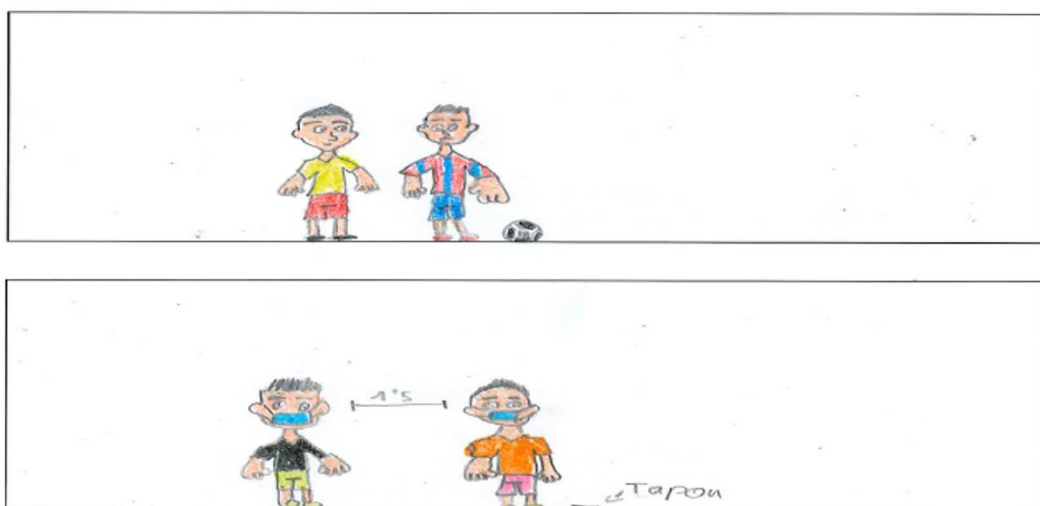
Figure 8. Children 'then' and 'now' playing football with different materials (ball and bottle top).

Now the worst thing: we can't play almost anything. (L., 4th grade)

In fact, the novelties in the games involve adapting the materials available to them to the dominant practices. Children use the leftovers from their lunches (foil balls, caps, or drink containers) to play football (Figure 8).

One case (Figure 9) reflects an interesting change brought about by the new restrictions. A girl draws a group of girls watching the boys playing football from the stands (before). She then draws the space separated by groups (during the coronavirus restrictions). These groups are mixed and play football. The drawing of the future show's boys and girls of different sizes (we understand that they may be of different ages) sharing the space.

Several drawings reflect this period as a parenthesis with small modifications (use of masks), as well as the entrenchment of certain playful practices.

In one case, he sees that the near future will leave certain habits such as the cleaning of sports equipment (Figure 10).

Others point to more profound changes in interaction and mood, but also show this situation as a parenthesis in their drawings (Figure 11).

Others pupils go further and idealise a future that is much better than the past, incorporating colourful, greener facilities or equipped with new materials such as slides and swimming pools (Figures 12–14).

In the future the best thing will be that we will have refurbished the swings. (I.P., 4th grade)

Although there are also some less positive views that see the school as a refuge in the future (Figure 15).

The best thing will be a bunker school where there will no covid 19. (M.H., 4th grade)

The toilets are also represented, together with the school corridors. These would be in-between spaces:

Before the worst thing was there was not much cleanliness and there was no paper. Now the best thing is that there is more cleanliness in the toilets and that we have learned applications, for example, Teams. (I. F., 4th grade)

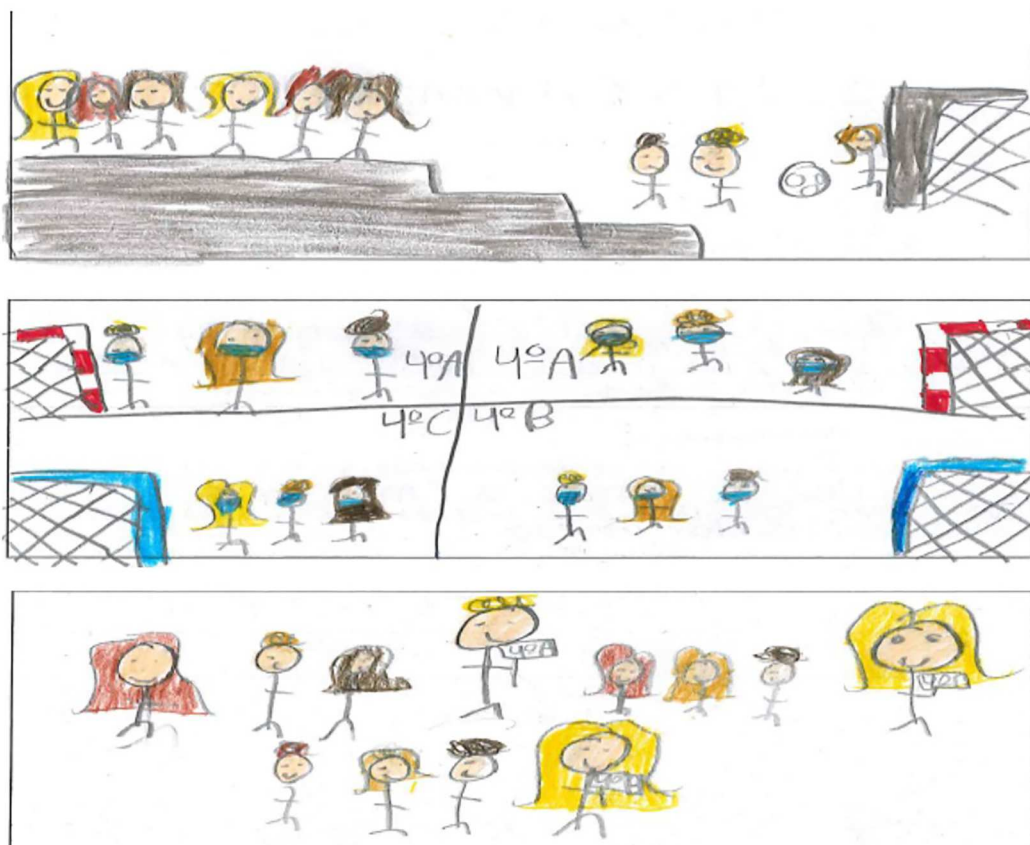Before the worst thing was the toilets were very dirty and there was no paper. (M.A., 4th grade)

Figure 9. Drawings of 'before' (girls in the stands watching football), 'now' (girls and boys playing separately in groups) and 'future' (boys and girls of different ages sharing space).

Discussion

What the children bring us through their drawings leads us to reflect on a model of school that was configured during the pandemic. A model that on the one hand takes up historical, social, pedagogical, and political meanings and traditions in an uncritical way (González-Calvo and Arias-Carballal 2022; González-Calvo 2025), and on the other, what is most worrying, is the legitimacy of a model that is currently being reinforced (González-Calvo 2025).

A first tension has to do with how, in the context of isolation and security rules, the relationship between cooperation and individualism comes into play. The pupils miss the possibility of working together, but also mention that there may be fewer problems if everyone is on their own. In this aspect we can also include the ideas of conflict and coexistence that are perceived from the work that can be done in the classroom.

A second tension covers the relational world that develops during the pandemic, contact is avoided as the first norm and from there relationships, communication, dialogue, and listening are flooded with distances, permitted and prohibited forms that once again provoke estrangement and nostalgia in the pupils. They are accepted and permeate in such a way that at present the relational level is quite affected (González-Calvo et al. 2020, 2025; Varea, González-Calvo, and García-Monge 2022).

A third tension can be observed in the use of technologies and the messages or meanings that go beyond them. It seems that technologies as salvation, as mediation between knowledge, learning
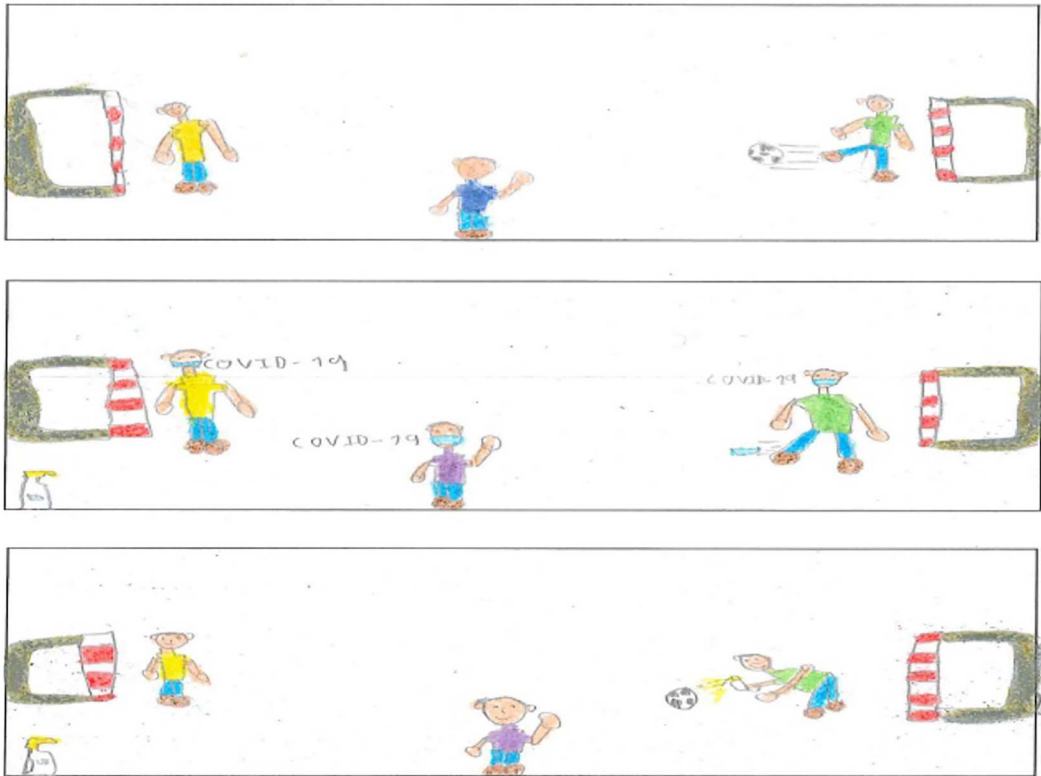
Figure 10. The activity is continued throughout the sequence, but in the 'future' the habit of disinfecting the ball remains.
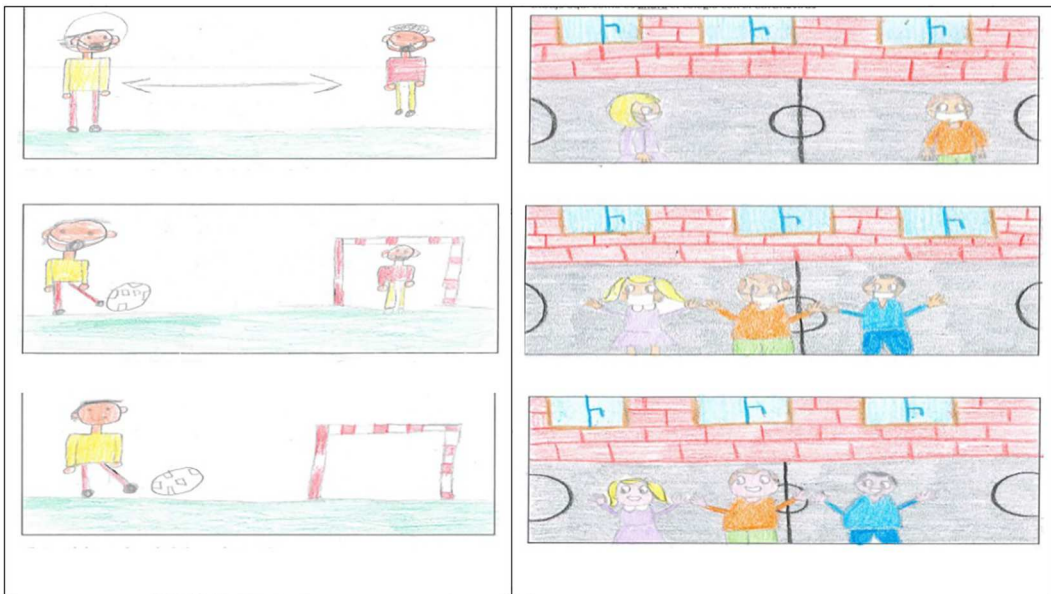

Figure 11. Sequences of drawings in which in the 'now' there is a 'parenthesis' with an attitude of decay and suspension of playful practices.
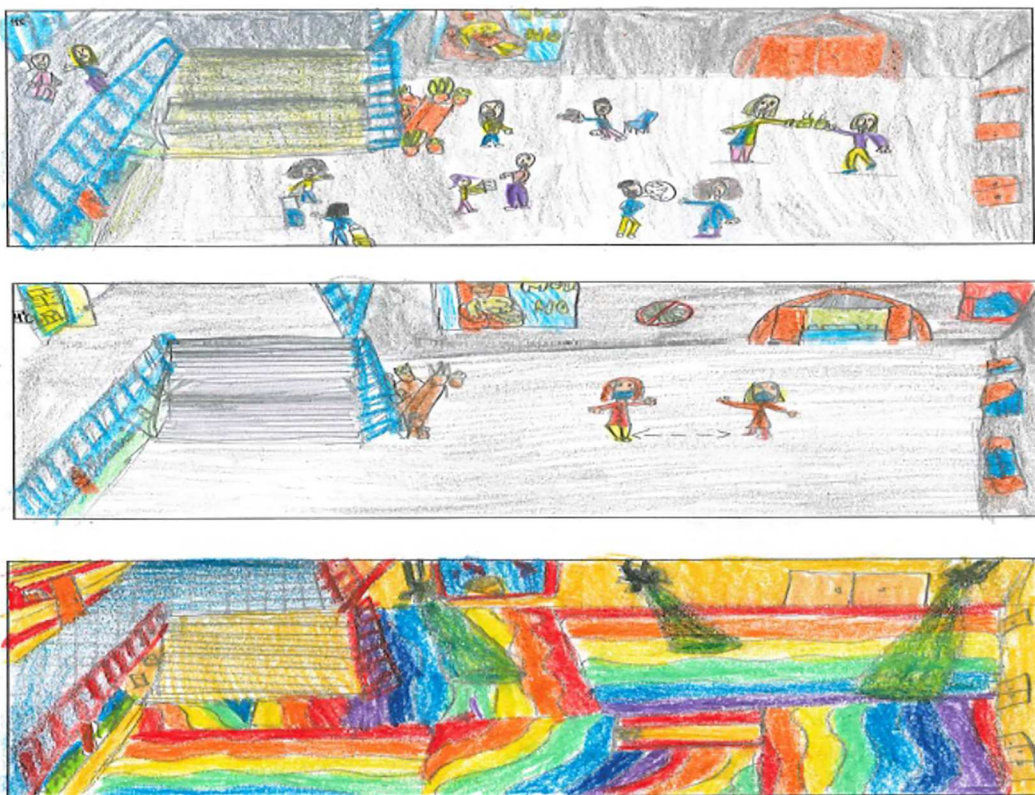
Figure 12. Sequence of vignettes in which the playground of the 'future' is represented full of colours.
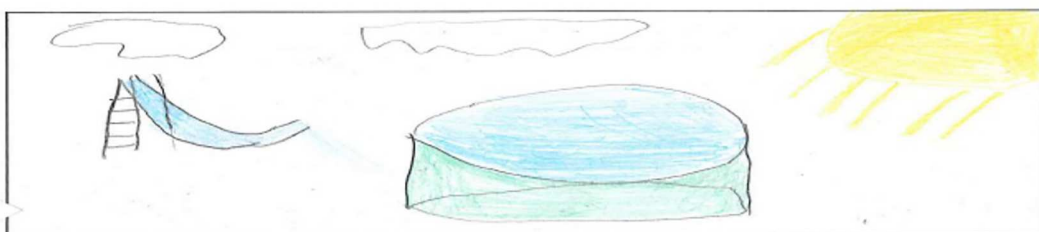

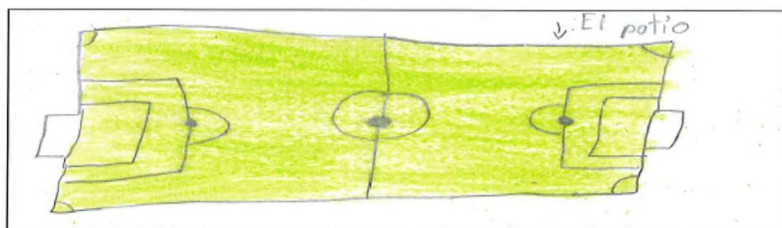**Figure 13.** Drawing of the playground of the 'future' with a slide, a swimming pool and sunshine.

Figure 14. Drawing of a 'future' playground depicting a regulation grass football pitch.

Figure 15. Drawing of the school of the 'future' in which the pupil points out that.

and teaching, have gained strength, and although during the pandemic the use of technologies helped or partly sustained the continuity of teaching-learning processes, it also made inequalities and difficulties in access visible. Another important nuance has to do with certain connotations associated with technology such as asepsis, neutrality, and efficiency (Díez Gutiérrez and Gajardo Espinoza 2020).

A final tension includes the visibility of some school practices highlighted by students that lead us to review conceptions, beliefs and stereotypes that continue to be reinforced. A first practice that emerges is the issue of assessment, the way in which the pandemic is managed in the classroom, which can avoid some tendencies such as copying in exams and at the same time reinforces a single practice, exams. The idea of closeness-farness as a dimension of learning that students recognise as transversal. The relevance of certain school objects as dominant in space and time requires careful reflection to recover pedagogical senses of the curriculum (González-Calvo 2025).

Furthermore, the liminal spaces described by Todd (2014) can be defined as locations and practices where teachers and students position themselves at a threshold, encountering the indeterminate. While these encounters may not always be fully articulated with words, they have the potential to change and transform the participants. Liminal spaces in schools, such as the relationship between teachers and students in classrooms or students' movements within and between classrooms, corridors, and changing rooms, always involve engagement with a particular context and other individuals, making them contextual, relational, and embodied. This means that both students and teachers can be understood as becoming someone-body in these liminal spaces.

Recognising the intermediate spaces through which we become who we are at this moment, beyond the rigid intentionality that often frames teaching work, opens the possibility to address politics, evaluation, and curriculum not only as guidelines, documents, or discourses but fundamentally as practices that are always materially at play among bodies in the present and unpredictably facing a future that is always unknown (Todd 2014).

In our study, we have explored how school spaces have adapted to the new situation, reflecting institutional priorities and 'new visions' about teaching. The school has a very particular link with the context in which it operates, both due to the possibilities offered by that context and the meanings constructed around it (Frelin and Grannäs 2014; Mulcahy 2012). In any case, a space can be conceived very differently by different teachers (Kostogriz and Peeler 2007), resulting in the generation and delineation of sub-spaces that define distinct pedagogical practices.

While spaces are linked to pedagogical logic, due to current circumstances, they often resemble sterile, somewhat 'threatening' spaces. Metaphorically speaking, schools are now understood more like a hospital (which can be used by multiple guests without being owned by anyone and where the proper use and health of its occupants must be ensured) than a personal room. Therefore, the prevailing logic in their design, maintenance, and use is not necessarily, nor predominantly, pedagogical.

The rules established in the spaces of the 'new normal' are still under construction and consensus, varying depending on the evolution of the health crisis. Therefore, the ways of being/knowing are difficult to ascertain at the moment. Since the currently occupied spaces are liminal and have not

been experienced before, there is the potential for a greater contribution to creating a new emerging cultural norm around professional teaching practice that takes into consideration the needs of students and educators.

It becomes necessary to rethink the role of the body and emotions in the generation and representation of knowledge, acknowledging how the intensity of social events influences the cultural, social, and spatial organisation of our experiences (Le Breton and Castignani 2018). Schools have emptied their physical spaces but not their feverish activity: everything is done at a distance (whether virtual or apart from each other), leaving the physical spaces of contact, gesture, corporality, and proximity relegated to a non-existent plane.

In our study, we have observed how students perceive the new school as a tense, dehumanised space, tinged with individualism and strict control of safety measures and distance that affect desire, pedagogical practice, and the ability to interact and learn together.

Conclusions

The changes brought about by the health emergency situation stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic in schools have gone beyond spatial reorganisation and preventive care. The influence of these measures on individuals who share spaces has brought to light issues not previously considered, as it has modified the ways of life in school settings.

While physical health has been placed at the core of concerns, little progress has been made in understanding and addressing the impact of routine changes on students and how their bodies have experienced the circumstances, including fears, concerns, frustration, etc. In this sense, our study contributes to showcasing, highlighting, or making visible – through the perspectives and perceptions of children – a often invisible connection between the organisation of spaces and the shaping of bodily awareness based on what they feel and experience as possibilities and limitations. Moreover, this connection is influenced by the impact or effect of COVID, with all its implications in terms of health, social, cultural, economic, and political conditions.

The possibility of expressing through drawings what goes through their minds has brought to the forefront all these issues that were initially relegated to the background, but whose consequences are still observed in school classrooms sometime after the return to classes.

The formation of stable groups and the consequent prohibition of contact with other classmates has been one of the most significant aspects, highlighting the need to reestablish interactions, both physical and emotional, with other teachers and school groups. On the other hand, the acceptance of imposed rules and limitations on free access to common areas may have distanced the sense of belonging to the center, causing individuals to no longer consider the places they inhabit as their own.

This has also led to a lack of connection between schools and the outside world, as it does not allow the entry of non-members such as family members, social workers, volunteers, etc. This findings in schools becoming more closed places, less participatory in community life, making communication with families, essential for the comprehensive development of students beyond purely academic aspects, more challenging.

Looking back, we realise that, even with conditions similar to those before the pandemic, the weight of these months is still present in school life. On the one hand, in a positive way, it has provided teachers with the opportunity for specific training in digital competence, which was crucial during the early stages of the pandemic. Protocols and more suitable response measures for similar circumstances have also been developed.

However, we cannot overlook the fact that in our classrooms, we encounter students facing more difficulties in interpersonal relationships and a lower tolerance for frustration, still bearing the consequences of the pandemic without fully understanding its real dimensions. This continues to affect them both personally and, in their learning, and classroom work with peers. The children's drawings serve as a powerful testimony to how they experienced the imposed distancing and the 'mandated'

way of working dictated by the circumstances, with no alternatives, and a forced acceptance that becomes evident through their images and graphic expressions. This represents an important contribution of the study, highlighting the value of drawing and graphic expression as tools to explore and understand the emotional world of children.

In conclusion, while the adopted measures were essential to safeguard the health of students and teachers, they have had a significant impact on children. We understand the need to provide strategies that allow them to express and share their understanding of what has happened. We also see it as crucial to offer them emotional support to help them address their concerns and fears, ensuring they feel protected and accompanied during these complex times.

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