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"Just… the thing you get at the end"?
A Case Study examining Student and Teacher Experiences of Assessment in Art and Design in a Year 11 GCSE Class during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Assessment has long been an area of contention, controversy and discomfort in art education. How do educators define, regulate and assess that which is so often indefinable, idiosyncratic and subjective? Through a qualitative, small-scale case study focusing on a Year 11 GCSE Art and Design class at a mixed, comprehensive secondary school in Cambridgeshire, England, this paper seeks to examine how students and teachers experienced assessment in and beyond the art classroom. Undertaken in the spring of 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic, my research finds that assessment negotiated a varied and nuanced relationship with the motivations and creative processes of students and the professional and pedagogical practices of teachers. Art assessment is found to have yielded both support and structure as well as prescription and restriction, whilst responding to the pressures of the pandemic in resilient and dynamic ways.

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Introduction

The concept of assessment has long been an area of contention, controversy and discomfort in art education (Ash & Schofield, 2015; Bhroin, 2015; Granville, 2015; Rayment, 2007). As Trevor Rayment and Brian Britton contend, art and assessment can be considered "mutually and implacably hostile" (Rayment & Britton, 2007, p.41). The latter seeks to evaluate, define and regulate, whilst the former can be characterised by its individuality, autonomy, open-endedness and, in many ways, indefinability (Rayment, 2007; Rayment & Britton, 2007). Art consists of processes, experiences and outcomes that are inherently subjective and personal to the creator and viewer (Hardy, 2007). Indeed, as Gary Bennett suggests, art is not so much a quantifiable body of knowledge as a "mysterious phenomenon [of] idiosyncrasy, divergence and uniqueness" (Bennett, 1989, p.247). How then is this elusive and expansive creature assessed and regulated within educational contexts?

I do not attempt to resolve such wider conceptual tensions within the parameters of this case study. Rather, I examine the ways in which assessment in art is experienced by students and teachers themselves, focusing on a Year 11 class studying GCSE Art and Design in Cambridgeshire, England, during the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2021. Through exploring how the frameworks and processes of assessment shape and reflect experiences in the art classroom, I seek greater empirical understanding to inform future practice and research, focusing in particular on the impact of assessment on students' creative processes and motivations, and teachers' professional and pedagogical practices.

I encounter the topic of art assessment as a practising visual artist and early-career student-teacher, with a 'pedagogic identity' shaped by my own personal, educational and professional experiences with art (Addison, 2010; Buffington et al., 2016; Orr, 2011). As a school and university student, I

wondered about the mysterious system allocating percentage values to students' unique and subjectively conceived artwork. Yet I was also undeniably motivated, regulated and validated by the formal avenues of assessment which shaped my early artistic and academic development. Having since experienced a sense of liberation transitioning beyond these structures into a wider world of creative practice, I find myself repositioned within the fray as an art teacher, now carrying the weighty professional responsibility of assessing a new generation of students' artwork myself. The "catalytic validity" (Taber, 2013, p.202) of this study therefore derives from my own motivation to establish an empirically informed and conceptually robust foundation for future professional practice, grounded in students' and teachers' lived experiences of assessment in art.

This study also reflects a time of historic and global upheaval in education, with the Covid-19 pandemic causing significant uncertainty, disruption and trauma in the lives of student and teachers. I seek to address how the pandemic has affected art assessment experiences, focusing specifically on the changes to arrangements relating to coursework components and teacher assessment.

I begin by reviewing key literature on art assessment, from which I arrive at my research questions focusing firstly on students' creative processes and motivations, secondly on teachers' pedagogical and professional practices, and finally on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. I then detail my research methodology, consisting of a small-scale case study in which I collected and analysed qualitative data from student and teacher participants. Consequently, I present my findings and engage in critical discussion in light of the literature, before offering conclusions and implications for future practice and research.

Literature Review

The literature presents a recurring theme of the dominance of assessment, measurement and accountability on classroom practice. After exploring this context, I engage with selected perspectives critiquing the frameworks and practices of assessment in art and design, particularly the structure of Assessment Objectives. Following Rachel Mason and John Steers' (2007) major scoping review highlighting the scarcity of empirical studies on the topic, I explore prior research on the impact of assessment on art and design teaching and learning, focusing on students' motivations and creative processes, and teachers' pedagogical and professional practices. Finally, I address the context of the

Covid-19 pandemic, citing the academic and policy literature on its impact on educational experiences and assessment arrangements.

Assessment Ascendant

Students and teachers do not only experience assessment as a discrete phenomenon within the art classroom, but rather against an expansive backdrop of measurement, accountability and competition dominating systems of education both locally and globally (Atkinson, 2013; Biesta, 2018; Gude, 2013; Hickman, 2015; Jagodzinski, 2013; Steers, 2013). The UK itself has been described as "a nation obsessed with assessment" (Mason & Steers, 2007, p.23). Students at GCSE-level experience concurrent formal assessments across an average total of nine academic subjects (Carroll & Gill, 2018, p.1), whilst teachers are themselves subject to increasing levels of standardised measurement and results-driven accountability (Hardy, 2012; Taubman, 2009). Dennis Atkinson (2011) critiques this "exponential growth of audit cultures" (p.98), with Gert Biesta (2018) lamenting that "the entire globe [has become] obsessed with measurable learning outcomes, league tables, comparison and competition" (p.11).

Perhaps the response from art educators should be as Richard Hickman (2015) suggests: to fundamentally shift our mindsets and "demote the status of [assessment]" altogether (p.27). Or in a more radical call from Atkinson (2015), might art educators actively resist the dominant "policing frameworks" of assessment, accountability and measurement, to create more emancipated, equal and inclusive spaces for real learning in art? (p.202).

Elliot Eisner (2002), however, suggests that to abandon assessment would be to renounce a crucial professional responsibility of the art teacher. For Eisner, assessment is an invaluable mechanism both for improving our pedagogical practice and for evaluating the technical, inventive, expressive and aesthetic qualities of students' work (ibid.). How then do we reconcile this dominant paradigm of assessment, measurement and accountability with authentic teaching and learning in art education? (Cunliffe, 2007; Eisner, 2002; Gipps & Stobart, 1993; Hickman, 2015).

Assessment *of* Learning, Assessment *as* Learning

Discourses on assessment frequently discriminate between *formative* assessment *for* learning and *summative* assessment *of* learning. The former refers to the continual evaluation, feedback and

response facilitated throughout the learning process, whilst the latter refers to the summary examination or judgement marking its conclusion (Granville, 2015; Hickman, 2015). Further distinctions highlight *ipsative* and *diagnostic* assessment, referring formerly to the judgement of individually-measured progress and achievement, and latterly to the negotiated evaluation of a particular ability towards identifying targets (Ash & Schofield, 2015; Hickman, 2015).

Assessment in art and design can be said to absorb and even transcend such distinctions: as Gary Granville (2015) contends, in art we may even conceive of "assessment *as* learning", given the subject's unique reliance on "constant judgement and evaluation, peer and self-assessment and collaborative teacher-learning interaction" (p.19). This study follows Granville in understanding assessment in art as a holistic and multi-faceted process, rather than presupposing one type of assessment in the experiences and interpretations of student and teacher participants.

A Tyranny of Objectives?

The policy literature locates the framework of Assessment Objectives at the centre of GCSE Art and Design study (Ofqual, 2015; Pearson Edexcel, 2016). Students are assessed on their development of ideas from contextual research; their refinement of work through exploring different ideas, materials, media and techniques; their recording of observations and insights, both visually and through written annotations; and their presentation of a personal, meaningful and informed resolution which realises their artistic intentions (Pearson Edexcel, 2016, p.33-34).

As Garry Bennett (1989) contends, the framework of assessment objectives in art and design was conceived to establish greater fairness: it seeks to level evaluative judgements against set criteria, rather than comparing subjectively amongst students. Indeed, Leslie Cunliffe (2007) argues that well-formulated and explicitly-stated communal standards are crucial for informing teacher's judgements, avoiding recourse to "occult-like intuition" (p.97). Moreover, Rayment and Britton (2007) concluded in their study of a mixed, 11-18, English comprehensive school that GCSE art results based on assessment objectives did reliably map onto students' measured cognitive abilities, in terms of verbal, qualitative and non-verbal reasoning. Whether this is relevant, desirable or appropriate as a gauge in art is another question.

The framework of assessment objectives in art education is certainly not short of critics. Eisner laments the narrow "infatuation" with criterion-referenced objectives in art (Eisner, 1985, p.376),

reminding us of the "iconoclastic" nature of much of humankind's greatest art forms which "fit none of the criteria that existed at the time they were created" (Eisner, 1973, p.4). For Hardy (2007), the "modular straitjacket" (p.51) and equal weighting given to each objective rewards "the spurious over the essential" (ibid., p.53), a concern echoed by Steers in his warning against the formulaic and modular "fragmentation of the subject" in what should be an open-ended discipline (n.d., as cited in Hardy, 2007, p.51). Moreover, Hickman (2015) speaks of the "tyranny of objectives" (p.28), which he critiques as imposing an industrialised, pre-determined approach to a subject where learning and creativity should emerge meaningfully and authentically from the individual student.

Atkinson (2011) similarly bemoans the imposition of assessment objectives "upon which we rely, slavishly and submissively" (p.98) at the expense of authentic learning and creativity. He describes the dissection of students' work into separately assessed criteria as "ludicrous" and "mechanistic" (ibid., p.103), failing to capture the holistic and experiential process of art. Atkinson does, however, accept that institutionalised education demands some criteria to evaluate students' learning, progress and achievements. Whilst this study does not seek to conceptualise alternative frameworks, the literature clearly establishes that the impact of objectives-led assessment on student and teacher experiences in art is a vital focus for research.

Student Motivation and Creative Process

Through the literature, a key theme emerges on how assessment frameworks and practices impact students' creative processes and motivations in art. Seconding John Steers' (2015) argument that formative assessment in art should receive greater emphasis for its role in cultivating students' self-direction, Máire Ní Bhroin (2015) also found that objectives-led formative assessment proved beneficial in enhancing the motivation, engagement and visual outcomes for primary school art students. In secondary education, Talita Groenendijk et al. (2020) found that students in Austria, Hungary, Germany and the Netherlands experienced visual self-assessment objectives as a positive and useful framework for structuring and informing their coursework, whilst providing greater clarity on teachers' expectations and areas on which to focus. Cunliffe (2007), however, found that UK art assessment practices neglected the development of students' "self-regulated cognition and creativity" and their ability to autonomously "learn how to learn" (p.98).

One constructive practice highlighted by the literature is portfolio coursework assessment, which Teresa Torres de Eça (2005) found increased Portuguese secondary school art students' sense of

autonomy, motivation and ability to self-reflect and develop as active and responsible learners (p.216). This lies in contrast with the practice of external examination, which de Eça (2004) found limited autonomy, creativity and motivation for students in both England and Portugal. Steers (2015) and Hickman (2015) both agree, arguing that the student-centred and negotiated dialogue between learner and teacher, at the core of portfolio-based coursework assessment, presents a more 'authentic' approach than external examination, reflecting and embracing the unique and dynamic creative processes of individual students. As Hardy (2007; 2012) similarly critiques, teachers and students can find controlled external examination to be restrictive and constraining to creativity, requiring them to trivially retrace skills already evidenced.

Moreover, Hardy (2007; 2012) invites us to consider how assessment more broadly stifles students' creative processes in art and design. He laments how "by prescribing more, you will end up with less" (Hardy, 2007, p.65) whilst finding that students "struggle to reconcile their desire to produce idiosyncratic work of substance with the need to jump through circumscribed hoops necessary for the all-important grades" (Hardy, 2012, p.51). Similarly, Granville (2015) contends that prescriptive criteria can have a "cumulatively oppressive effect on the learner" (p.20), through pre-ordaining and inhibiting student responses and outcomes.

This literature speaks to the ways in which assessment frameworks can presuppose and legitimise a particular view of 'art', as found by Garry Bennett (1989) in his study of the use of criterion-referenced assessment in UK GCSE Art and Design. Bennett contends that the use of exemplar material to visualise assessment criteria can ultimately restrict and exclude those who might utilise different processes. This theme is further explored at length by Atkinson (1998; 2007; 2011), who argues that students' "pedagogized identities" (Atkinson, 2007, p.108) are constructed, subjectivised and regulated according to dominant perspectival and representational paradigms in art. Atkinson found that assessment practices anticipate and construct students as particular kinds of artists, therefore underplaying, pathologizing and excluding those who fall beyond legitimised and normative forms of accepted practice (Atkinson, 1998). For Atkinson, learning in art must be considered in ontological terms as an uncertain "process of becoming" (Atkinson, 2011, p.112), grounded in the singular, differentiated and local experiences of individual students (Atkinson, 1998) rather than smothered by the certain and "petrifying tendencies of established patterns of being" imposed by assessment paradigms (Atkinson, 2011, p.112). Responding to this literature, I explore

the role of assessment in shaping students' experiences of their creative processes and motivations in art as my first research question.

Teacher Assessment and Pedagogical Practice

The ways in which assessment shapes teachers' experiences, perspectives and practices in art education is a further major theme emerging from the literature. In his study of GCSE Art and Design, Bennett (1989) found that teachers' use of criterion-based assessment objectives lacked validity and reliability, with teachers ultimately resorting to their own subjective experiences and normative perspectives to interpret and apply exemplar material when assessing students' artwork. This echoes Atkinson's (1998; 2007; 2011) contention that normative discourses are imposed and reproduced in art education through dominant assessment practices. Indeed, as Susan Orr found in her study of fine art assessment in higher education, the subjective experiences, values and identities of educators remain central to their evaluative judgements of students' work (Orr, 2011).

For Steers (2015), however, the notion of objective judgement in art is "spurious": assessment rests on the "comparative, experiential knowledge" (p.113) developed by teachers through an inherently subjective, ongoing and negotiated dialogue with students' intentions and progression. As Hickman (2015) contends, teachers' informed judgements stem from their unique positionality as an "expert or connoisseur", whose instincts and "heightened perceptions" are forged through continual and holistic familiarity with students' work (p.29). Similarly, Granville (2015) contends that the judgement of individual art teachers is an essential and esteemed professional quality, through which teachers pool a "deep reservoir of information" (p.16) consisting of their cumulative, holistic and embedded insights into students' artistic intentions and creative processes, in contrast with the shallow picture offered by singular external examinations. As Ash and Schofield (2015) remind us, the word *assessment* derives from the Latin *assidere*, meaning "to sit beside someone" in deliberation (p.97). Echoing this, de Eça's (2005) study of Portuguese secondary education found that the practice of portfolio coursework assessment engendered a constructive dialogue through which teachers could literally and figuratively sit alongside students, facilitating enhanced formative feedback and richer insights to inform evaluative judgements.

A range of studies, however, suggest that assessment practices do not always play out positively in the classroom experiences of art teachers. Hickman (2015) qualifies his championing of teacher connoisseurship with a damming critique of the ways in which dominant assessment regimes have

de-professionalised teaching, leading to a "trimming of the curriculum" (p.23) and the adoption of conformist and orthodox approaches. Granville (2015) similarly warns against the danger of teachers' professional judgements being replaced by a reliance on stated criteria and assessment objectives. Furthermore, Hardy (2007) opines on the ways in which assessment regimes lead educators to both teach and evaluate according to the "shackles of the syllabus" (p.51), calling for the art teacher to re-emerge as "an agent of change" (Hardy, 2012, p.153) liberated from "looking over their shoulders, unhindered by anything but concern for their students' creative life." (ibid., p.163). Atkinson (2011; 2015) identifies this tension within teachers' practices, who he finds regularly acknowledge the unique ontological and epistemological dimensions of students' creative practices, whilst nonetheless continuing to impose normative values and practices derived from the dominant frameworks of assessment. Following from this literature, my second research question focuses on the interplay between assessment and the experiences of teachers in relation to their professional and pedagogical practices in the art classroom.

The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Due to the recent, ongoing and unprecedented nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, there remains a predictable gap in the research literature studying its impact on teaching, learning and assessment in schools, let alone art education. This study therefore seeks to contribute knowledge within this largely unexplored yet historic context. Reviewing the global educational landscape more broadly, Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) describe the Covid-19 pandemic as "the largest disruption of education systems in human history" (p.133). Pokhrel and Chhetri (2021) highlight the physical closure of schools; the imposition of restrictions upon movement; the cancellation of formal assessment examinations; and the varying socio-economic contexts impacting access to education during periods of remote learning.

From the policy literature, the UK's National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD) (2021) articulate the specific ways the pandemic has disproportionately impacted art education in UK schools. NSEAD stress the subject's unique practical and studio-based nature, with GCSE students experiencing 44 percent less studio time and access to school resources as a result of the pandemic (ibid., p.2). NSEAD further highlight the impact of the pandemic on interrupting students' creative processes; restricting their access to, and exploration of, different media, materials and technical resources; reducing contextual and conceptual depth in students' learning due to the limitations on

engaging in formative dialogue with specialist teachers; and entrenching inequities through varying levels of access to equipment, workspace and technology for remote learning (ibid., p.3-4).

With regards to the impact of the pandemic on changes to GCSE Art and Design assessment arrangements, the UK Government confirmed during the period of this study that "the student's grade must be based on the portfolio only, whether or not it has been completed" (Ofqual, 2021, p.4). This change involved the cancellation of the 'Unit 2' externally-set assignment component, previously making up 40 percent of the qualification and involving a ten-hour 'sustained focus' session in which students would complete the assignment under examination conditions. This component would be replaced with an extension of the 'Unit 1' portfolio component, increasing from 60 percent to 100 percent of students' summative grades (Pearson Edexcel, 2016, p.4-5) and inviting students to further refine and resolve their coursework developed over both Years 10 and 11. Secondly, in light of the cancellation of GCSE examinations in all subjects, the government announced that grades should be solely assessed based on teachers' informed and "holistic judgement of each student's performance" (Ofqual, 2021, p.6), with a focus on internal school-based moderation and quality assurance (ibid., p.13-15) over external and national moderation.

Student and teacher experiences of these changes to assessment arrangements forms the basis of my third research question, alongside the wider impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on students' creative processes and motivation towards assessment.

Methodology

Research Questions

Following from the literature, my case study examines experiences of assessment in art and design guided by the following three research questions (RQ):

RQ1: How does assessment shape students' experiences of the creative process and motivation in art and design?

RQ2: How does assessment shape and reflect teachers' experiences of professional and pedagogical practice in art and design?

RQ3: How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on students' and teachers' experiences of assessment in art and design?

By assessment, I refer specifically to both assessment *frameworks*, such as the use of Assessment Objectives, grade levels and targets, and assessment *practices* such as coursework evaluation and teacher assessment. This is guided by the literature, the context of the case study, and the emerging responses of participants.

Research Methodology

Case Study Focus

My research methodology consisted of an exploratory, qualitative case study approach, defined as the "exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources." (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p.544). The 'case' was a Year 11 class in their second and final year of GCSE Art and Design study (Ofqual, 2015; Pearson Edexcel, 2016), at a mixed, 11-18, comprehensive, state-funded academy school in Cambridgeshire, England.

I selected Year 11 as my focus firstly due to the Covid-19 pandemic impacting both years of their GCSE course, and secondly due to the imminent summative assessment of their final grades in the academic year. The specific school and class group was determined by my position as a trainee teacher on placement and assigned to the class.

With the national lockdown of early 2021 imposing an initial period of online teaching, I selected the case group with limited prior knowledge beyond insights from their class teacher, available student data, and my initial experiences teaching the class remotely via the Zoom platform. Students and teachers participated in data collection during the first two weeks of school reopening following lockdown, falling two months prior to the final course assessment.

My choice of a case study methodology was both "context-directed" (Taber, 2013, p.126) and designed to meet my research objectives, namely to develop in-depth insights into experiences of assessment within a specific and immediate professional context. Furthermore, the limited time and resources associated with conducting research as a student-teacher, not least within an active school amidst the throes of the Covid-19 pandemic, placed alternative theoretical, phenomenological, ethnographic or narrative approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2017) beyond the scope of the study.

Subjectivity and Positionality

Alongside my research role I negotiated a number of intersecting 'pedagogic identities' (Addison, 2010; Orr, 2011). Participants simultaneously encountered me as an artist specialising in drawing; a teacher delivering lessons and tutorials, including on the Assessment Objectives; an assessor who would be imminently contributing to summative portfolio assessment; and a student myself fulfilling an assignment within my own educational journey of learning, practice and assessment.

The inherent subjectivity and interpersonal dynamics resulting from my embedded position in the art classroom must therefore be taken into account, when considering participants' responses and my framing of the study. For example, students' responses may have been influenced – particularly in terms of acquiescence or desirability biases - by their experience of my own recent teaching of the Assessment Objectives, and their awareness that I would soon be contributing to teacher assessment for their final grade. I sought to address this in the design and conduct of my methodology, establishing a safe and open dialogical space for participants, distinct from my teaching role, in which I endeavoured to puncture the inherent teacher-student power dynamic.

Moreover, as Simons (2009) notes, subjectivity is an intrinsic feature of the complex human experiences and processes located within classroom practice, and is therefore to be embraced rather than overlooked or mistaken for bias. Indeed, it was precisely my subjectivity and positionality which granted me privileged access and insights into classroom practice during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Generalisability

The small-scale, case study approach does present limitations for the generalisability of my findings. The case was located in a specific temporal and geographical context, whilst the sample was small, context-driven and further determined by participants' (and their parents') self-selection. Rich additional perspectives may have been missed, for example from different social and economic backgrounds, those absent from school due to Covid-19, or those disinclined or demotivated from sharing their assessment experiences. My study does not therefore purport to represent a full spectrum of student and teacher experiences.

Small-scale, classroom-based and practitioner-led research is anchored, however, by an acknowledgement that there is no 'typical' student, classroom or school day (De Vaus 2011;

Rawlinson-Mills, 2020). Indeed, my study seeks to generate "context-bound knowledge" (Taber, 2013, p.126) which may inform current and future practice within the specific case in focus, regardless of whether this can be generalisable further afield. From this case, readers may draw relevant and generalisable insights and identify similarities and differences transferable to their own or wider contexts (Simons, 2009).

Participants

Of the Year 11 class of 15 students, five participated in the study based on parental and student consent. The students were all adolescents aged between 15 and 16 years, consisting of three boys and two girls. I refer to them anonymously, using the pseudonyms of Sam, Ellie, Toby, Hannah and Michael. All were white and spoke English as their first language, with Michael experiencing mild learning needs relating to communication and interaction. The students reflected a broad range of targeted and anticipated attainment, ranging from GCSE Levels 4 to 8 (on a scale of 1 to 9).

Furthermore, two teachers participated in the study, both white females and named pseudonymously as Naomi and Ruth. The former was the class' assigned art teacher, whilst the latter was the Head of Art and Design, with oversight over teaching, learning and assessment across Year 11 and GCSE.

Data Collection

My data collection focused on gathering and verifying student and teacher experiences, triangulated from multiple participant sources and methods, as presented in Table 1 and further detailed below.

Research Question	Data Collection Methods	Participants
RQ1: How does assessment shape students' experiences of their creative processes and motivation in art and design?	Questionnaires	Five students
	Focus Group	Three students
	Semi-structured interviews	Five students Two teachers
RQ2: How does assessment shape and reflect teachers' experiences of professional and pedagogical practice in art and design?	Semi-structured interviews	Two teachers
RQ3: How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on students' and teachers' experiences of assessment in art and design?	Questionnaires	Five students
	Semi-structured interviews	Five students Two teachers

Table 1: Data Collection Methods and Participants

Questionnaires

I used a short, written questionnaire to collect initial student responses, posing a series of structured statements accompanied by a five-point, ordinal Likert scale for participants to indicate the extent of their agreement (Likert, 1932). I also included two open questions requiring short, written responses.

The Likert-scale design was advantageous for its accessibility and ease-of-use for young participants (Laerhoven et al., 2004), with a worded-scale chosen for the increased likelihood of eliciting reliable responses (Mellor & Moore, 2014). Moreover, the short responses provided concise data for qualitative analysis and initial openings for further discussion. However, the questionnaire as a data source alone provided limited in-depth insights, lacking wider contextualisation and dialogic interaction. This method was further limited by the potential for unanswered or misinterpreted questions and biases of central-tendency, acquiescence and desirability (Pimentel, 2019). I accounted for these limitations through arranging a focus group and individual interviews shortly after the questionnaire, through which I set out to probe, unpack and ascertain perspectives in greater depth.

Focus Group

I utilised a focus group method involving three student participants: Sam, Ellie and Hannah. Michael and Toby were unable to attend due to absence, whilst I opted not to group teacher participants for focused discussion due to timetabling conflicts.

To stimulate discussion, students were invited to partake in a self-and-peer assessment activity referring to their sketchbooks against the Assessment Objective criteria. Students then engaged in a short focus group discussion, prompted by open-ended questions designed to elicit their responses to the assessment framework.

Limitations of this method included the potential for responses to be influenced by dominant voices and to tend towards reproducing normative discourses as a group (Smithson, 2000), as well as the potential for acquiescence and desirability biases resulting from my moderating presence as a teacher-researcher. Compensation for these limitations came with the benefits of mutual discussion for generating and illuminating emerging perspectives, prior to one-to-one interviews.

Semi-structured Interviews

Finally, to acquire my richest data, I gathered insights from all participants through one-to-one interviews, in which I posed a semi-structured series of questions on pre-determined but open-ended themes relating to the literature and study context.

Whilst mindful of the inter-positional dynamics between myself as the teacher-researcher and my student-participants, I sought to harness the subjectivity inherent in social research through this dialogic and organic method, with emerging responses and themes guiding follow-up discussion. I was able to apply and extend my pre-existing rapport with participants as an embedded student-teacher, choosing a more natural and relaxed forum for discussion over potentially alienating modes of formalised, structured communication.

Ethics

The research was conducted according to BERA (2018) ethical guidelines, with approval received from both Faculty and school staff. No adverse impact on participants was identified in the study's design, conduct or reporting.

Informed consent was received from participants following transparent verbal and written communication of the purpose and nature of the research. Signed letters of consent were secured from students' parents or guardians.

Participants' involvement and responses remain confidential and anonymous. All data collected was transcribed anonymously and stored securely, with original audio recordings destroyed. Moreover, participants were assured that their participation, or lack thereof, would have no negative consequences for their educational, professional or interpersonal experiences in school. Conversely, no incentives were offered.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted in open and accessible classrooms following school safeguarding procedures. Covid-19 health and safety precautions were followed, namely social distancing, hand sanitising and use of face masks.

Moreover, care was taken to timetable and conduct the research with due sensitivity to the demands facing students and teachers, particularly within the context of the concurrent reopening of schools following national lockdown.

Data Analysis

I utilised a method of qualitative thematic analysis to identify, code and group themes emerging across my three collection methods, aiming to develop a rich thematic description of my data set conveying predominant and important themes.

Following the six stages of thematic analysis articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006), I firstly familiarised myself with the collected data through transcribing, reading and re-reading responses from questionnaires, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. Secondly, I generated initial codes which mapped onto interesting features of the data set, collating relevant data extracts for each code. Thirdly I collated codes into potential emerging themes, before fourthly reviewing these themes to ensure they accurately reflected both my coded extracts and the entire data set. Finally, I refined and defined the themes, before producing a report of my findings featuring selected, compelling extracts, as follows.

Findings

RQ1: How does assessment shape students' experiences of the creative process and motivation in art and design?

Assessment Objectives and the student creative process

Some students found the Assessment Objectives framework to be supportive of the creative process. Toby praised their focus on the development of ideas from contextual research for inspiring and informing his work. Similarly for Ellie, the Objectives helped to facilitate her creativity, prompting her to explore new ideas, influences and materials. Michael also felt they helped "to focus on areas I need to work on."

However, students did not regularly engage in self-assessment using the Objectives criteria, with Ellie "just doing [her coursework] without thinking whether it's good for the AOs" and Michael shrugging

that he "just kind of gets on with it." Students found the grading terminology to be often "overwhelming", "difficult to interpret" and "abstract", whilst describing the assessment grid as "forgotten and abandoned" in their sketchbook. For Hannah, the Objectives were not felt to shape her creative process, commenting that "I don't really think about them, it's more for teachers."

Moreover, some students felt the Assessment Objectives framework could be restrictive to their creative freedom. Even Toby, who praised the overall structure, commented that "they do somewhat impinge your creativity, because you feel like you have to stick to a certain thing once you gather your research. And you're always thinking – how is this going to add to my final piece?"

The focus on artist research could be particularly frustrating for Sam, who exhaled "oh no… artist research, man. Sometimes I just want to get on with what I want to do, you know? I guess it's a form of laziness, but it's quite boring 'cause half the time you spend printing out pictures and waffling on, basically." Sam also expressed how the continual focus on working towards a final piece reduced his creative enjoyment. However, he noted one benefit of the modular Objectives framework, in that the final piece is "just a quarter, so if you mess up, you're left with your remaining three and can't just fluff it up at the end."

From the perspective of Ruth, the head of department, students found themselves so "over-assessed in every direction" that they often failed to grasp the freedom and openness she felt the Assessment Objectives offered, reflecting "all the natural steps of the creative process". Through including contextual research, the development of ideas and exploration of media and materials, Ruth felt that the Assessment Objectives offered greater inclusivity for students "who take art, love art, but don't have that technical skill set." Despite this, Ruth felt that many students disliked the perceived "long, hard slog through the pads", in which they had to justify and evidence their process rather than just "coming in and doing what they want".

Similarly, Naomi found that GCSE students often "just want to get on with it" rather than show their artist research and thought process. For Naomi, students have to "find their way around" the Assessment Objectives so that they are not restricted, but she felt students also found the structure useful as a prompt and guide to push forward their development through the creative process.

Grades, targets and motivations in art

A dominant assessment discourse, used across the school and amongst the study's participants, centred on *target* and *anticipated* grades. Students, in Art and Design as with all other subjects at the school, were assigned *target* grades based on their prior attainment from primary school (non-art) Standard Assessment Tests (SATs), representing the summative grades towards which they should aim at GCSE. Students' *anticipated* grades were based on their teacher's ongoing formative assessment of their coursework portfolio, representing the summative grade which they would currently, or were on track to, achieve.

Within this context, all but two students agreed to having some motivation towards achieving a particular summative grade in art. A notable exception was Hannah, with both a target and anticipated grade of a 5, who strongly felt that target grades were not motivating. She felt that "if you don't get your target, it's stressful, like everyone has overestimated you." However, she found art to be somewhat different "because you can interpret it in different ways, so grades don't really mean anything. I don't really mind what I get. It's just… the thing you get at the end." Instead, Hannah felt motivated by showing "the meaning behind what I'm doing, like feminism. It isn't just a picture that looks nice."

Sam, with a target and anticipated grade of a 6 and 7 respectively, was ambivalent and referred to grades in art as "just the thing that has to happen". He recognised that he would "like a nice grade obviously, but I'm just going to draw what I want to. It doesn't matter tremendously to me." For Sam, art was about "producing something aesthetically pleasing" and so grades should simply be "a measure of artistic ability and skill", to the extent that "if you do nothing all year, then pop out with an incredible final piece, for me that's fine. You're just good at art, like you might be in maths." Moreover, Sam felt that art was for "enjoyment, satisfaction" and "nothing more than a hobby. It's just sort of, like, rewind time."

Anticipated to achieve an 8 and exceeding her target of a 7, Ellie felt motivated working towards a grade, but believed that this should "reflect that I'm doing something interesting. If I like what I'm doing, then I'll continue doing it. If I don't, I won't." She felt particularly driven to explore "ideas that I think are cool", incorporating them into a final piece she "felt proud of".

However, for Ellie, basing target grades on prior SATs attainment rendered them less meaningful in art, because "they definitely don't relate to your artistic ability. You just use a different part of your brain in art – you can be creative but really bad at maths. It's just a different kind of subject."

From Naomi's perspective as a teacher, students assigned with lower targets and attainment levels could be demotivated and demoralised into "changing how they see themselves in art", even if they enjoy the subject. However, she accepted that targets and grades had a place in GCSE, given its purpose as a "standardised qualification". Although Ruth noted that some students felt motivated and supported when working towards a grade, she found that an increasing focus on targets and grades made GCSE students less independent and more demanding, expecting direction and results from teachers rather than regulating their own creative development. Moreover, both teachers agreed that target grades based on SATs results in English and maths seemed "farcical" when applied to the idiosyncratic subject of art.

RQ2: How does assessment shape and reflect teachers' experiences of their professional and pedagogical practice?

Objectives and Teacher Assessment

Both Naomi and Ruth found that the Assessment Objectives framework offered a valuable degree of structure and objectivity to guide teacher assessment. Ruth, who reflected on changing assessment practices over her decades-long experience, felt that the framework was "spot on". When implemented, she felt Assessment Objectives created "a greater sense of fairness" and a more sympathetic and inclusive approach, compared with her characterisation of an overtly subjective prior practice in which "one teacher would go, I think it's a C. Then somebody else would say, oh no, it's a B. And honestly… the rows!"

Naomi was less praiseworthy, describing the structure of Assessment Objectives as "the lesser of two evils" which offered a greater degree of validity compared with "having teachers go, well I like little Joey Smith, or I like modernism, so I'm going to give him an A". However, Naomi also found the assessment framework to be "an absolute game" and "a hoop-jumping exercise", noting that some teachers played the game better than others through being very "prescriptive" in their approach to GCSE subject content and direction.

However, Naomi did feel confident in making professional judgements based on her "gut instinct" and her cumulative, embedded and holistic understanding of students' progress and coursework. She noted that there remains an unavoidable element of subjectivity in teachers' interpretations of criterion terminology such as 'basic', 'limited', 'competent', 'confident' and 'exceptional': "what I might think is basic, you might think is very complicated!"

Yet Naomi found that the process of internal and collaborative moderation was constructive and positive, when assessing in dialogue with Ruth. Similarly, Ruth felt assessment was "enriched" by working collaboratively with Naomi, with whom - despite at times bringing a "polar opposite rationale" and "totally different thoughts and pathways" – Ruth always felt able to engage in a "healthy and honest" dialogue through which they could confidently settle on a summative grade.

Ruth further endorsed how the Assessment Objectives framework allowed teachers to evaluate wider facets of the artistic process, such as the use of media and materials, contextual understanding, and a personal and meaningful development of ideas. Despite this, Naomi felt that the standardised exemplar material and norms of external moderation still anticipated a "traditional idea of skill, based on an ingrained view that a person is good at art because they are good at drawing. Students could make art out of recycled rubbish, but I still think GCSE art expects a pretty picture."

Assessment shaping Pedagogical Experiences

Regarding the ways in which assessment shaped teachers' experiences of pedagogy in the art classroom, Naomi summarised her feelings by saying that, "put it this way, if I taught art privately, I wouldn't get that assessment grid out." She felt that teaching "school art" was focused on meeting assessment criteria, whereas wider conceptions of art allowed for the fact that "*everyone* is an artist. You don't need to learn to be an artist. I mean, who decided you need to do a tonal drawing?"

Due to the dominance of assessment and the conditioning of students into being "spoon-fed by other subjects", Naomi found that teaching had become somewhat of a "tick box exercise" and often "soulless". She mused that "they're just going to replace teachers with robots one of these days" and pondered the possibilities of living during a different era where art was taught more freely and expressively. Naomi did, however, recognise that art had less prescription and greater opportunities for freedom than elsewhere in the school curriculum.

As a department head, Ruth found that the assessment framework allowed her to sit with greater esteem and equality alongside other subject leads, able to justify and evidence a rigorous teaching and assessment structure against prevailing perceptions of art as being "oh, just art." However, Ruth did feel that teachers were subjected to greater accountability than ever before, expected to do "everything for the students" who often lacked their own independence, initiative and responsibility.

RQ3: How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on students' and teachers' experiences of assessment in art and design?

Assessment Objectives: Attainment and Liberation

Students largely expressed minimal concern for the impact of the pandemic on their attainment of the Assessment Objectives. Whilst Hannah found that the sustained uncertainty over assessment was "a lot to handle", she felt less concerned about her GCSE in Art and Design due to its focus on assessing portfolio coursework, which she could continue at home. Largely ambivalent about the pandemic's impact on their attainment, Sam and Toby did acknowledge that working remotely likely decreased their productivity. Both students singled out not having a printer at home for reducing the scale and range of their work.

During periods of remote learning, however, Sam expressed feeling a sense of liberation from the timetabled structure of "school art" and Assessment Objectives. He felt that this was beneficial for his authentic creative process, remarking that "my productivity changed, but my enjoyment and freedom increased." Sam continued:

> *I really enjoy drawing, but then art GCSE happened, and I stopped drawing at home as much. Then lockdown happened, and I started again. I did art in big chunks, not necessarily in my online lessons, when I'd maybe go eat, sit outside and read a bit. Then basically when I felt like it, I'd draw what I want, without anyone saying "how's that going to affect your final piece?"*

Similarly, Ellie found that working from home during lockdown was liberating and productive for the development of her ideas and creative process. She reflected on how spending increased time online led her to encounter new and inspiring ideas, whilst she embraced extended periods of practice uninterrupted by timetabled lessons. Moreover, Ellie felt able to continue exploring media and materials, having "quite a lot of supplies at home."

Furthermore, Naomi felt that the existing framework of art assessment allowed the subject to respond flexibly to the conditions of the pandemic. In her view, the open Assessment Objectives framework and its lack of prescribed subject content meant that students were not missing out on specific 'topics' and could focus on developing the quality of their coursework, rather than its quantity and coverage: "I mean, you can't fail because you haven't looked at Picasso, can you?".

Nonetheless, both teachers felt that students' varying levels of access to resources and learning during periods of remote provision would impact the depth and breadth of how they met the Assessment Objectives. Naomi recognised that differing home situations and socio-economic circumstances would result in some students having less support and access to art materials during lockdown, potentially "having done nothing" in terms of coursework. For Ruth, the greatest concern was the interruption and fragmentation of students' creative processes and access to studio practice, and the loss of time and opportunity for students to get into the "flow" of their coursework.

Extended coursework and cancelled examinations

Regarding the cancellation of the externally-set assignment component of GCSE Art and Design (Unit 2), including its ten-hour 'sustained focus' session in exam conditions, students and teachers all expressed feeling more positive and less pressured having extended time to develop and consolidate the coursework portfolio component.

Sam was particularly relieved about the cancellation of the ten-hour controlled session, which he described as "the incarnation of boredom" involving "sitting down just doing the same thing, staring into space and waiting for a break", adding that everyone he knew felt the same.

However, students expressed some initial reservations about the cancellation of Unit 2. Ellie was originally "not the happiest, because [Unit 2] is a fresh start. You kind of run out of ideas on one topic [in Unit 1], but now you have to expand a lot further, so it's a bit harder." Moreover, Toby felt reticent about having to further develop his Unit 1 coursework into a second "final piece", although he echoed Ellie in acknowledging the benefits of having more room to explore a new direction.

Naomi expressed similar initial reservations about the extension of Unit 1 coursework, commenting that she first thought "oh my god… they're going to get really bored. But actually, it doesn't make any difference. Art is art, whatever you call it." She now felt the continuation of one unit throughout

the year was preferable for allowing more flow and exploration, whilst Ruth agreed that the opportunity to "build and build" through extended coursework could be an "eye-opener" representing a new and exciting way of teaching for the department.

Teacher Assessment and External Moderation

Naomi and Ruth both felt that the renewed national focus on teacher assessment, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, served to highlight the centrality of teachers' continual and holistic judgements already practiced in art. Since they were already accustomed to gathering continual and cumulative evidence of student performance and utilising their embedded understanding of student intentions and progression, both Naomi and Ruth felt that the changes to assessment arrangements did not significantly change their experiences. Moreover, they felt that the pandemic had highlighted the validity and effectiveness of teacher judgement and collaborative moderation in art assessment practices, from which other subjects could learn.

Both were unconcerned by the absence of external moderation, feeling confident in their honesty and integrity when evaluating and grading students' work and their reputation from previous years for their fairness and accuracy. Indeed, Naomi added that she did not support external moderation anyway, feeling it was "an insult to be moderated" given her close and long-term understanding of each students' coursework which an external examiner could never grasp.

From a student perspective on teacher assessment, Hannah agreed that "it's good that your teacher marks you, because they know you and they've seen the effort you put in throughout the year", whilst Ellie seconded that "teachers have seen you working throughout the year, so they can take everything into account." None felt concerned about the prospect of their grades being decided solely by their teachers in art, reflecting on the fact that this was their expectation already.

Discussion

Based on my qualitative findings of student and teacher experiences, it is clear that assessment continues to be a dominant discourse in the art classroom, as the literature suggests (Atkinson, 2013; Biesta, 2018; Hickman, 2015; Steers, 2013). However, this case study presents a nuanced picture of the differing ways in which assessment relates to students' motivations and experiences of the creative process, and to teacher's experiences of their professional and pedagogical practices.

Assessment, Student Motivation and Creative Process

Students expressed finding a degree of support and guidance in the framework of the Assessment Objectives, yet perceived that these did not always play an active role in informing and steering their creative practice. Their professed lack of purposeful engagement with the written assessment criteria reflects the finding of Groenendijk et al. (2020) that textual assessment material can prove inaccessible for students. This finding also reinforces Cunliffe (2007) and Steers' (2015) assertions that UK art assessment practices should place a greater emphasis on cultivating students' own capabilities for self-reflection and self-regulation, ensuring that the assessment process is an active domain for learners as well as teachers.

Furthermore, despite Rayment and Britton's (2007) conclusion that results in GCSE art assessment do correlate with measured cognitive ability, this study finds a critical scepticism amongst some student and teacher participants regarding the validity of applying target grades, based on prior attainment in standardised literacy and numeracy tests, upon the discrete subject of art. Whilst most participants did find that grades offered some degree of motivation, some questioned the utility and validity of applying non-art-based target grades to measure the unique creative practices of students in the art classroom. Furthermore, perspectives from both student and teacher participants echoed Atkinson's (1998; 2007; 2011) critiques of the ways in which dominant assessment discourses can subjectify and predetermine how students see themselves in the art classroom. In the experiences of some participants, students labelled with low targets and grades could become demoralised and demotivated: positioned – and positioning themselves - within a hierarchy of measurement, despite art being a discipline often noted for its idiosyncratic, label-defying and open-ended nature (Bennett, 1989; Hardy, 2007; Rayment & Britton, 2007).

However, an emerging perspective shared by both lower and higher attaining students suggests that assessment, and the pursuit of a particular summative grade, may be less valued and motivating when compared to other subjects and in relation to alternative value judgements, such as how meaningful, personal or enjoyable the creative process and resulting artwork is felt to be. Alongside students reporting a degree of disengagement from the Assessment Objectives, this finding suggests that the dominance of assessment may be less pronounced in students' experiences of the art classroom than elsewhere in formal education. From this we may paint a less alarmist picture than Hickman's (2015) excoriation of the "tyranny of objectives" or Hardy's (2007) rejection of the "modular straitjacket"

that he found the framework to represent. Rather, students appear able to utilise the assessment framework insofar as this guides and motivates the creative process, whilst otherwise proceeding to pursue the creation of personal and meaningful artwork.

Participants did articulate a degree of critical awareness of the ways in which the framework of formal assessment can limit or frustrate students' creative processes, reflecting Hardy's (2007) and Granville's (2015) findings on the restrictive effect of assessment on students' creativity and authentic artistic experiences. Further research would prove beneficial for building a greater conceptual and empirical understanding of the ways in which assessment discourses and practices shape and presuppose students' perceptions of what is valuable, meaningful and possible in art. Considering the restricted context and power dynamics inherent in formal school education, students may present less critical competency in their capacity to think beyond the parameters of the school art paradigm constructed around them. Their perceptions of the impact of assessment on their creative practice may privilege the system they know, rather than alternative pedagogical and assessment approaches beyond their current awareness and imagination. Indeed, it is not only students, but also educators, policymakers and artists whose subjective perceptions remain shaped, conditioned and regulated by the social, educational and professional contexts through which they pass.

Art Assessment and Teachers' Professional and Pedagogical Practice

My findings on teachers' experiences of using the Assessment Objectives framework suggest an alignment with Bennett (1989) and Cunliffe (2007), who highlight the benefits of teachers evaluating student artwork against a collectively applied set of criterion-led objectives for improving fairness, objectivity and validity in the assessment process. Teacher participants compared this framework positively against prior practices, which they felt were more susceptible to subjective opinions about students and their artwork.

However, in agreement with Hickman (2015), Granville (2015) and Steers (2015), both teacher participants acknowledged the inherent place for subjective judgement in the process of art assessment. Indeed they commended the process of constructive dialogue and moderation, through which they could bring different interpretations and perspectives to the table towards mutually agreeing on summative grades for their GCSE cohort. Teachers felt able to apply informed, fair and honest judgements, echoing Hickman's (2015) and Granvilles' (2015) commentary on the unique

connoisseurship and insights developed by art teachers through their embedded, holistic and continual dialogue with students as they progress through the GCSE course.

However, my findings also echo the literature in suggesting that assessment can play a normative and restrictive role in dominating and narrowing the pedagogical and professional practices of teachers in the art classroom (Granville, 2015; Hardy, 2007; Hickman, 2015). Whilst teachers found guidance and structure in the assessment framework and felt able to navigate students through the creative process in line with its objectives, they also lamented the dominance of assessment and the increased prescriptiveness, automation and accountability shaping their experiences of teaching art as a result. This juxtaposition feeds into Atkinson's (2011; 2015) assertion that educators often negotiate a conflicted pedagogical position, in which they both acknowledge and strive to facilitate the authentic and individual creative practices of students, yet proceed to fulfil a professional role steering themselves and students through a system of assessment which can prescribe and reproduce normative discourses, in tension with the wider ontological and epistemological possibilities of art.

Art Assessment and the Impact of Covid-19

This study's findings on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on GCSE art assessment reflect both Pokhrel and Chhetri's (2021) and NSEAD's (2021) articulation of the myriad ways in which formal education has been affected, in terms of divergent levels of access to learning, facilities and resources, reduced in-depth teaching and dialogue, and altered assessment arrangements. However, a silver lining of relief and opportunity may be revealed by the fact that students and teachers expressed less concern for the pandemic's impact on their experiences and attainment in GCSE Art and Design than in other subjects, due to its existing holistic focus on students' coursework, its malleability when adapting to changes in assessment arrangements, and the already open nature of its course content.

Moreover, both students and teachers commented on the ways in which the pandemic had exposed new possibilities for their own creative and pedagogical processes, presenting an opening to rediscover or engage with new, constructive and authentic rhythms of practice in and beyond the art classroom. For example, students and teachers both welcomed the extension of portfolio coursework development and the cancellation of controlled examinations, pointing to an alternative assessment structure which could be sustained for GCSE Art and Design and allow for a more authentic, fluid and holistic approach, unfragmented by separately assessed components. Such rethinking of existing assessment frameworks in light of the Covid-19 pandemic may offer a response to Atkinson's (1998;

2011) call for art education to embrace and liberate students' divergent, heterogenous and localised creative responses, whilst redressing the fracturing of an inherently interconnected and open-ended subject (Hardy, 2007).

Conclusion

As Rayment notes, any resolution to the 'problem' of assessment in art is contingent on how we conceive of the rationale behind art education (Rayment, 2007), whether this be to foster creativity, self-expression, visual literacy, technical skill, economic value or socio-political transformation (Atkinson, 2015; Efland, 1990; Eisner, 2002; Hickman, 2004; Siegesmund, 1998). Wherever one settles in this conceptual cacophony, the question remains as to how the prevailing practices of assessment shape and reflect the lived experiences of students and teachers in the actual art classroom.

In this case study of a Year 11 GCSE Art and Design class in Cambridgeshire, England, I present student and teacher experiences of art assessment which, whilst located in a specific context, may contribute insights informing wider practice and research. Future research could consist of a comparative approach exploring how alternative pedagogical and assessment frameworks in art education, including across different cultural and geographical contexts, shape students' and teachers' experiences in similar and divergent ways. Furthermore, a focused examination of a particular assessment practice, such as the use of target and anticipated grades, self-and-peer assessment or interpretations of evaluative terminology in art assessment frameworks, would build an ever richer empirical record of classroom practice.

As recounted in the literature and reflected within this study's findings, assessment in art education has been found to facilitate constructive and formative dialogue, support teaching and learning practice, and provide a structured framework for both students and teachers to discuss, develop and evaluate artwork (Bhroin, 2015; de Eça, 2005; Eisner, 2002; Groenendijk et al., 2020; Hickman, 2015; Steers, 2015). Nonetheless, my findings also reaffirm the relevance of an ongoing critical discussion about the complex ways in which assessment both converges *and* diverges from the creative processes and motivations of students, and the pedagogical and professional practices of teachers. Considering implications for future practice and research, my findings suggest that one area of enquiry for educators and policymakers might be to evaluate the utility and validity of applying target grades, based on prior attainment in literacy and numeracy, to the discrete ontological and

epistemological space of art education. Furthermore, my findings suggest that students may benefit from greater self-directed engagement with interpreting and applying the Assessment Objectives, which could be achieved through students having increased opportunity for self-and-peer assessment, alongside further purposeful dialogue with teachers on their ideas and intentions as an integral part of the evaluation process. Moreover, art teachers – whose ranks I now join - must continue to negotiate the complex challenge of communicating the framework of Assessment Objectives clearly and transparently in a way which informs, motivates and structures students' creative processes, whilst facilitating a learning environment in which students feel supported and liberated to create personal, meaningful and authentic artwork free from the restrictive and prescriptive shackles of Hickman's (2015) "tyranny of objectives" (p.28).

In the shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic, the creative liberation experienced by some students during periods of remote learning suggests a further constructive opening, which teachers should surely strive to harness and (re)discover in the art classroom. Despite the severe challenges and traumas brought about by the pandemic, might educators carve out new possibilities from this time of tragic upheaval, dismantling our preconceived notions of what is practiced and expected in school art to pursue greater creative emancipation for both students and teachers? With its open-ended learning content and flexible assessment practices, the subject of Art and Design in schools may already present an alternative to the prevailing 'catch-up' narrative circulating in educational discourse. As one participant noted, "*everyone* is an artist", and as the world turns to post-pandemic recovery, educators and policymakers have the unique opportunity to carefully rethink authentic learning in the classroom, pushing beyond the narrative of a fallen-behind 'lost generation' catching up on prescribed knowledge. In this time of undeniable challenge, art education has proven itself to be uniquely malleable to the turbulent demands of teaching and assessment, highlighting the resilience, fluidity and dynamism of this idiosyncratic subject, which students and teachers must surely pursue and embrace as we return to the classroom, and to the expansive world of art beyond its walls.

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