

# ***How Art education moves beyond Covid-19?***

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# ***How Art education moves beyond Covid-19?***

## **INTRODUCTION**

### Rationale

This practice-based inquiry focuses upon the impact Art education has undergone due to Covid-19. As a result, there is now an opportunity for Art education to re-evaluate how it is structured and ultimately taught. This inquiry addresses how Art education moves beyond Covid 19. To do this I will investigate a series of sub-questions that will be structured through a chapter system; How is Art taught now? How has Art education changed? How has Covid-19 affected Art education? What are the solutions for Art education post Covid-19? This will act as a framework to unpack the current limitations Art education is faced with and explore possible solutions for the key areas for Art education to re-evaluate and positively move forward post Covid-19.

### Methodology

Due to limitations, timing and restrictions surrounding using secondary research, the parameters for the research focus on online articles, journals and books discussing key areas around the particular topic. The research-gap indicates a focus on highlighting the issues but rarely suggests plausible solutions.

### Aims

This essay uses secondary research methods to critically investigate how Art education moves beyond Covid 19, to investigate the barriers and key issues and to propose possible solutions for Art education to move forward post Covid-19.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND DATA ANALYSIS

### How is Art taught now?

Alain de Botton (2016) claims that “Since the beginning of the twentieth century, our relationship to Art has been weakened by a profound institutional reluctance to address the question of what Art is for” (de Botton, 2016:4). De Botton argues that the question of *what Art is for* has been dismissed hence the curriculum for Further Education (FE) Art has suffered a misunderstanding of its real purpose.

From my observations at placement and the wider literature studied, Art education at FE level is taught through the guise of a predominantly product-focused curriculum, which focuses more on the outcome rather than the process. As John Dewey (1934) states:

“Every Art communicates because it expresses. It enables us to share vividly and deeply in meanings... For communication is not announcing things...Communication is the process of creating participation, of making common what had been isolated and singular...” (Dewey, 1934).

Dewey argues that Art is a process of developing through expression and experience. Due to the product curriculum, Art education can negate this process. My observation in placement would concur with Dewey; the way in which Art is currently taught is inappropriately prescribed and structured in a way that isn't conducive for effective learning to occur in an Art education environment, further affected by the way students are marked and graded. This is done through predominantly project-based work following a set brief. One of the main issues I witnessed on placement is the disconnect from the students; a sense of being lost by the prescribed and restrictive briefs with very little consideration for the individual exploring their own inspirations, motivations and meanings. Surely, we have a responsibility to facilitate the students to learn the specifics of a particular subject, whilst creating a space for the students to learn about and develop their own learning process (Kolb, 1984). Often, I look through the students' sketchbooks and practical work, questioning where the individuality lies within this. There seems to be a disconnection between what the students are doing and why they are doing it, linking this to their “intrinsic and extrinsic motivations” (Watt et al, 2014). Another factor that is quite concerning at FE level is the lack of contact time; the students need more from their teachers especially with the ongoing impact of Covid-19 not only affecting their social and personal development but also their mental health and well-being. This is also impacted by the amount of guidance the students are given; especially in context to the amount and kind of guidance that teachers are able to give. As a result of following a product-based curriculum, teachers are more focused on the

outcome rather than focussing on how the students are working, how they are learning and how they are developing.

Geoff Petty (2017) poses that this mindset is one of the main difficulties for creative people due to the way in which the individual approaches the creative process (Petty, 2017). This is due to the way in which the creative individual interprets and interacts with the creative process. Petty (2017) further outlines some key considerations the creative individual must develop through their work; inspiration, clarification, evaluation, distillation, incubation and perspiration. The creative individual “needs to switch continually between these ... different mindsets ... some individuals find that they are stronger in some than others” (Petty,2017:20). As Art educators working with students, we must facilitate a pathway to enable safe exploration, experimentation and development with their own creative process.

### **How has Art education changed?**

Sarah Gamboa (n.d) explains that the word *technology* evokes images of whirling lights and bundles of wires rather than simple machines and hardworking carpenters (Gamboa, n.d).

Gamboa (n.d) further explains that, in a similar way,

“The word *art* has also undergone a rebirth; it now evokes images of digital art as well as classical paintings and sculpture. Where architecture was perhaps the best example of this marriage of art and technology, today computers are the new face of this union. Art and technology have become unavoidably linked in that as one evolves, so does the other. This means not just changes in the way that art is created, but in the way that it is viewed, appreciated and subsequently sold” (Gamboa,n.d:3-4).

Today, students enter the classroom able to utilise more resources with more opportunities for further development, whether progressing to university, jobs, or apprenticeships (UCAS, n.d). Over time, changes have occurred and so has the depth of work being developed and produced; the variety of developments of what Art is presently and what Art has progressed greatly in the different styles, movements and applications of Art (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2020). This has been very beneficial for Art students, as they are able to expand on and further develop their own work, from having more access to rich Art history, through the internet, television or in books, rather than the limited available resources of the past. “As Art students of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the accessibility to and availability of Art has never been easier and especially with access now being available through virtual and online modes. This means that students are able to be exposed to and can experience Art in a more inclusive

way through virtual sources and resources rather than being restricted to limited access to Art, especially in the context of “people who might otherwise never get to see the real thing up close” (Sood,2011:6).

Integrated technology builds confidence through developing more efficient ways of making Art. Technology can address issues around inclusion by giving these individuals other means of making Art, creating new Art forms expanding from the more traditional modes of making Art. The use of technology can also be used to promote collaboration and engagement, becoming a key tool in helping students show their work, share ideas and collaborate on creative projects (Smith system blog, 2021).

### **How has Covid-19 affected Art education?**

With the outbreak of Covid-19 and the closures of educational institutions, teaching consequently resorted to online learning platforms. Although necessary, these closures had consequences and significant long-term effects on the education, social life and mental health of students (Odziozola-Gonzalez et al. 2020). Furthermore, the strict isolation measures exacerbated students’ mental health (Cao et al. 2020). The change of the delivery mode from face-to-face classroom teaching to online has become an obstacle for some students, especially for those living in remote or deprived areas that do not have access to laptops and internet facilities at home, causing mental stress (Sahu, 2020). Furthermore, as stated in Consilz Tan’s (2020) study, this sudden move to use online learning platforms as a way to ensure learning is maintained, meant that teachers were unprepared for the necessary transition to online teaching. Therefore, the quality of teaching and learning was negatively impacted with students not being able to be supported appropriately during this time. Kunal Chaturvedi et al. (2020) further highlights “changes in daily routine including lack of outdoor activity, disturbed sleeping patterns and social distancing have affected the mental well-being of the students” (Chaturvedi et al. 2020:1). Further, it could be argued that the main benefit for students taking Art is the in-person, practical explorations, through materials and processes and in the context of a space that is conducive to learning. Taking this away has restricted the ability for “... a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control and the habits of minds which secure social changes without giving disorder” (Dewey, 1938:99). Marie Montessori (1996) advocates the importance of the environment being rich in motives that lend interest to activity and invite explorations of their own experiences (Montessori, 1996) and where consequences are tried and explored (Skinner, 1974) in a safe learning environment. Consequently, Art education is not as adaptable as STEM subjects as it relies heavily on an

in-person (Rogers, 1951), hands-on (Montessori, 1964) and experiential (Dewey, 1938) approach to teaching and learning. Maximising learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it (Kolb, 1984). As a result of these consequences of Covid-19, the students are returning to education afraid of the institution and environment itself, with low self-confidence and self-esteem, and many of these learners who suffer from pre-existing mental health or learning difficulties are particularly concerned about their safety and wellbeing, within a place that is now unfamiliar. Khan et al (2020) supports this view and explains that previous research has revealed a profound and broad spectrum of psychological impact that outbreaks can inflict on people. Furthermore, as identified in Sharma et al (2020) study, this also extends to the ongoing implications of grading inflation on education, highlighting three key areas it has impacted teaching and learning. Grading inflation, especially in context to Covid-19 has caused an uneven distribution of higher grades. In 2021 the government implemented a grading system that does not sufficiently inform policymakers about learning loss or inequalities created within and between exam centres (Timmins, 2021). Consequently, this draws attention to how transparent the exam grading process is and whether it is a fair assessment of the student's abilities (Sharma et al. 2021:1). Covid-19 has caused educational institutions to take a very different route to grading. Instead, the students are graded through a hypothetical prediction of what they are working towards rather than what they are achieving. This not only impacts the wider educational system but also the student's development. From compulsory to post-compulsory education, students have been unfairly assessed based on other factors rather than their abilities taken from exams and calculated grades. From this, though, there is an opportunity here to develop a more inclusive and adaptable grading system that moves away from quantitative aspects of learning that tend "to depress creativity, foster fear of failure, and undermine interest" (Butler and Nisan 1986) to a more process-driven system of assessment.

### **What are the solutions for Art education post Covid-19?**

While Covid-19 has restricted various aspects of *normal* teaching, it has also highlighted key areas where Art education could be improved. However, due to money, time and resources, some of these suggested solutions are not presently possible but something to consider for the future, especially with the Arts experiencing even more cuts, lack of funding and investment. Funding, in particular, has decreased significantly since the 2008 financial crash, and now looking to be cut even more (Harvey, 2016). Harvey (2016) further explains that

currently, “it is difficult to see how the Arts can continue without the development of new delivery models, new funding streams and new partnerships” (Harvey, 2016:16).

### Focus on Process

As identified in the previous sections of the essay, the restrictions to the curriculum; how Art education is structured and taught, and its current focus on the end-product could be revisited to make it more accessible and student-focused. Presently, it seems too focused on the end-product and what can sometimes seem arbitrary tick-box measurement. It does not give enough emphasis on developing a process whereby the students can establish their relationship to Art; what Art is (now), can be (future) and how it can be used (for themselves). By embedding a framework where social and emotional education is encouraged, creativity, as defined by Mary Jarett et al. (2013), can be used as a framework “... for its potential to heal people, express hidden emotions, reduce stress, fear and anxiety, and promote a sense of autonomy...” (Jarret et al. 2013:2). In this way, Art can also be used to unpack their sense of themselves in a very different way to formal education, providing different opportunities for young people to explore their identity, skills and abilities (Jarrett et al. 2013). Further, education through the Arts can be focused on integration with another subject to enhance cognitive, emotional, and learning processes (Rieger & Chernomas, 2013). Therefore, learning through Art means that the learner approaches a subject matter by actively creating, responding or performing Art, and not just by studying Art as a theoretical discipline (Rieger & Chernomas, 2013). Developing a balance between practice and theory enables students to actively participate in the classroom to develop their knowledge and skills that can also transcend beyond the classroom (Petty, 2017). This can be further encouraged by using Gardner’s multiple intelligences framework (Gardner, 2000) to differentiate student’s learning based on the understanding that every individual learns differently. For Gardner (2000), intelligence is not defined as one unified example, but is complex and has different identifications. Gardner (2011) identifies them as; linguistic, logical, spatial, bodily, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist (Gardner, 2011). Using Gardner’s model will positively impact the classroom environment, making it more accessible and inclusive.

Currently, due to the impact Covid-19 has had on confidence and motivation, students feel disconnected from the current approaches to teaching and learning. Consequently, there is a need for a more fundamental connection between “Art and life, re-introducing Art as a tool” (de Botton, 2013) not just a subject. For de Botton (2013) “Like other tools, Art has the power to extend our capacities beyond those that nature has originally endowed us with. Art compensates us for certain inborn weaknesses, this case of the mind rather than the body,

weaknesses that we can refer to as psychological frailties ... it becomes a tool; an extension of the body ... and can be used to discover the purpose of Art, we must ask what kind of things do we need to do with our minds and emotions but have trouble with” (de Botton,2013:4-5). Encouraging creative freedoms can also be recognised for its potential to heal, express emotions, reduce stress, fear and anxiety and promote a sense of autonomy (Jarret et al. n.d).

Joseph Albers advocates that, “our central and consistent effort is to teach method, not content; to emphasise process, not results” (Slow and Sow,2020). If teachers were able to focus on the process rather than the end-product, it would, in turn, allow more time for facilitating and being with their students, enabling them to develop their ideas, creative processes and subject themes and working holistically with the students; developing the individual by incorporating Dewey’s (1997) ‘learning by doing’ principle (Dewey,1997) and Montessori’s (n.d) ‘individualised learning’ and ‘educating the whole child’ principles (Montessori Academy, n.d).

### Virtual Learning

In addition to this move away from end-product evaluation, incorporating virtual learning platforms will be effective for SEN students and learners with other learning difficulties as it will give them another strategy to use to keep in contact with their teachers. A more proactive integration with using in-classroom teaching and a virtual platform will allow a more balanced teaching pedagogy to emerge.

Unfortunately, Art education was not as adaptable to virtual learning platforms (VLP) as other subjects due to its practical nature and approach. “Much like healthcare, the economy and everyday life, education has had to reinvent the dynamic interactions between people” (Tuttle and Hansen, 2021:2). Consequently, due to this barrier, students with SEN, in particular, have struggled to maintain a positive consistency to their education needs as these students require not only the teacher’s support but also one-to-one assistance of a learning support assistant (LSA).

By encouraging more opportunities to use a variety of virtual and in-person learning environments, the students will not only be able to continue to develop in new ways, but it will also enhance the overall teaching and learning experiences (Pokhrel et al. 2021).



## More Contact Time

A process-driven approach plus integration of new virtual and technology-based opportunities will allow more contact time. Due to the amount of time spent on administration and testing in an end-product focussed curriculum, teachers are unable to spend enough time with their students. This was exacerbated by the suspension of face-to-face instruction during COVID-19 leading to concerns about the consequences for students' learning coming back into the classroom environment (Enzell et al. 2021).

Teachers have a responsibility for finding the best strategies to support learners, to make connections with what they already know and bring it forward to what they are learning now (Wearmouth, 2016). Contact time is vital when referring to the support needed in the classroom, particularly for students with SEN and other learning needs. One-to-one learning relationships empower students with SEN or other learning difficulties, to take control over their studies, have the confidence to communicate what they need and receive the personalised attention that enables them to succeed (White, n.d). Consequently, during Covid 19, this did not transfer and therefore did not provide sufficient support whilst the classes remained virtual. Support needed for some students is not just with learning; it is also with emotional, physical, psychological and social issues (Maslow, 2019). This can also be implemented by adjusting more inclusive and adaptive teaching pedagogies to enable students of all abilities to develop.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the impact of the findings indicated some key areas in which Art education should consider revising and changing to positively move forward post Covid-19. This inquiry intended to establish the current state of Art education and to highlight the possible areas in which it should focus. Art education was not as adaptable as STEM subjects in tackling the change from in-person to virtual learning spaces due to Art's physical nature and how dependant Art education is on in-person teaching. Moving forward, Art education must create physical and virtual learning spaces. The research undertaken highlights; there are three key areas identified as indicators for where Art education should investigate further; process-driven curriculum, more contact time, and virtual learning.

These solutions are interconnected and would be best treated as a whole. Fundamentally, the key is more contact time which can be achieved with a combination of moving to a process-driven approach freeing up teachers from the onerous focus on the end-product and

the time required to measure and record this, plus a creative approach to the possibilities afforded by virtual solutions which will allow more contact and interaction with teacher and student.

From this, I propose that the next steps for further investigation and research needs to be conducted to explore how we can move away from the end-product focussed curriculum and towards the process. Primary research would allow an investigation into ways to accomplish this, de-emphasising the prescriptive tick-box approach without losing rigorous evaluation. Furthermore, primary research should be undertaken into technology and virtual-learning options to discover how these could be utilised as a part of the teaching environment. If successful, both of these areas of research could point the way to the key objective of facilitating more contact time between teacher and student.

## APPENDIXES

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