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**What makes a good Art and Design Curriculum? A grounded theory  
exploration of perspectives from Primary student teachers.**

**Megan Purton**

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
BA (Hons) Primary Education Studies

York St John University  
School of Education, Language and Psychology

May 2023

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this research project; both participants and friends who encouraged me along the way. I would not have been able to do it without you, so thank you.

To the best academic tutor, lecturer, and dissertation supervisor I could have asked for, a huge thank you to Peter Raymond for all of the support over the last three years. It has been a joy to have been taught by you.

## **Abstract**

The Primary Art and Design National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) has somewhat negatively impacted the teaching and learning of the subject in the classroom, as skill development and time allocated to art and design have declined since its arrival (Payne and Hall, 2017). Art and design are vital in the classroom for children to express themselves, represent experiences and feelings, and develop their creativity, making it an essential subject for a child's education. This research explores Primary student teachers' perspectives on what makes a good art and design curriculum, whilst evaluating the successes and challenges of the art and design National Curriculum (DfE, 2013). Research was carried out using a grounded theory, mixed methods approach, and convenience sampling was used. A questionnaire with 37 respondents and a focus group with 5 volunteers provided data that was coded thematically, resulting in three themes for discussion. Findings suggest that student teachers perceived a good art and design curriculum to have a suggested time allocation for the subject to increase the hours spent learning art and design in the classroom, as well as clear direction on how the structure of thematic and stand-alone art and design lessons can impact the subject. Another theme discussed was statutory and non-statutory guidance, as student teachers suggested there should be substantial guidance in the art and design curriculum to increase teachers' confidence and inspiration. Finally, a broader range of skills and topics were perceived to be a feature of a good art and design curriculum, as this was found to provide more content for children that could interest them, developing their self-confidence and creating a positive perception of the subject.

Word count: 6265

# **What makes a good Art and Design Curriculum? A grounded theory exploration of perspectives from Primary student teachers.**

## **Introduction**

This research project aims to explore Primary student teachers' perspectives towards the Art and Design Curriculum, evaluating the current National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) as well as suggesting some new ideas. With support from literature, themes such as statutory guidance, assessment strategies and teacher autonomy came into question once data was analysed. The focus of this small-scale research project was chosen due to the researcher's interest in the arts, and its rapid decline in schools across the country (Payne and Hall, 2017). With particular interest in education policy, this study aims to contribute to a wider discourse on subject relevance in the curriculum (Barnes, 2015).

The research project was carried out using a grounded theory, mixed methods approach. Data was collected through questionnaires, with a response rate of 40%, and a semi-structured focus group with five volunteer participants. Data collected was coded thematically and broken down into three large themes that make a good art and design curriculum:

- the frequency and structure of lessons
- the guidance for teachers
- the content of the curriculum for the students

Results showed that student teachers perceived a good art and design curriculum to have non-statutory guidance that gave teachers ideas but promoted freedom in the arts, and that a suggested time allowance in the curriculum may be beneficial.

## **Literature review**

### **The Art and Design Primary Curriculum**

Early twenty-first century primary education in England was characterised by growth in creativity (Craft et.al, 2013), however, the arrival of the 2012 National Curriculum saw a different perspective appear in the classroom. Children who were once seen as active and capable artists and craft makers became vulnerable, passive and novices (Craft, 2011). The perception of art and design in the curriculum is at an all-time low (Payne and Hall, 2017), with the subject being under-valued by policy makers. It is vital to understand the impact of these perceptions as they can be viewed as one of the causes of teacher's perceptions of art and design, due to the trickle-down effect of perceived value in the curriculum (Payne and Hall, 2017). The 2016 report from the National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD) stated that government policy has negatively affected art, craft and design education, attributing this to a misconception to regard art and design as an add-on subject that can be covered in extra-curricular time as well as teachers using this time to catch up on missed work (DfE, 2016). Although this may be necessary in the school week, it is far from ideal, and the perceived value of art and design becomes worse as the subject is seen as dispensable. Steers (2014) suggests that it is no surprise that the art and design curriculum is an uninspiring document that lacks ambition, as the government consistently advocates a restricted agenda for arts education (Payne and Hall, 2017). The art and design National Curriculum (DfE, 2013), how it is written, how it is taught and how the policy makers view it, have all had an impact on student teachers' perspectives, and this literature will explore the themes surrounding the curriculum.

## **Frequency and structure**

The NSEAD report (2016) published statistics that showed time allocated for art and design in primary school had decreased in the last five years, amplifying the impact of what the current curriculum and teacher perspectives can have on a subject. The frequency of art and design in primary schools varies, as Ofsted's 'Making a Mark' document (2012) stated that early year's settings have a higher frequency of art, craft, and design learning, with more personalisation, experimentation, and demonstration, and have better results because of this. However, as children progress through the key stages, drawing progress slows considerably as there is less encouragement for improvement (Ofsted, 2012). Comparing the progress and practices of the early years and key stages one and two shows that the frequency of lessons can have quite an impact on pupils, as simply having more art and design lessons could improve children's knowledge and skills. The NSEAD report (2016) suggested schools should review time allocated for art and design in the curriculum, however, the timing issue may be better resolved if it were to become policy or recommended by the Department for Education (DfE). In 2019, the DfE produced a School Sport Action Plan, providing two million pounds to improve sports facilities in schools across the country, detailing a push towards better exercise habits for children, and promoting sixty minutes of physical activity every day. The plan explained that sport can enrich young people's lives and should be considered alongside other important activities, art being one of them (DfE, 2019). An art and design action plan could help to achieve a higher frequency of lessons in school, increase funding, and lead to a more positive perception of the subject.

The structure of lessons can have an impact on both the teacher's and student's perceptions of the subject, and most notably with art and design learning, teaching



thematically can be seen as problematic. Thematic learning, or cross-curricular learning is learning through topics or themes rather than subjects (Barnes, 2015). For example studying the topic of volcanoes, the teacher could incorporate geography, maths, and art into this over a series of lessons, rather than deliver stand-alone art and design lessons. When art and design is only taught thematically, teachers and children can perceive it as a subject that does not have a valued place in the curriculum (Hallam, Gupta, and Lee, 2008). Art and design are often utilised in the teaching of other subjects or topics as teachers know children enjoy it and it will be the hook into their learning (Kneen et.al, 2020), however, the value of art for art's sake is lost here (Hallam, Gupta, and Lee, 2008). Despite this, Barnes (2015) compliments the use of cross-curricular teaching and learning in school as he explains that our experience of the world is cross-curricular, as we see and understand the world from different perspectives.

### **Guidance for teachers**

The Primary National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) provides direction for teachers in the core and foundation subjects, utilising guidance to support lesson planning, however, the curriculum has also been described as fatally flawed and overly prescriptive (Roberts, 2014). The primary art and design guidance has one of the smallest 'chapters' in the National Curriculum, providing little information for teachers on the subject, whereas subjects such as history and geography have statutory and non-statutory guidance to give direction (DfE, 2013). While the art and design guidance may not be 'overly prescriptive', it is possible it is 'fatally flawed' (Roberts, 2014). The Department for Education's White paper on the Importance of teaching (2010) stated that the National Curriculum was meant to be limited in scope; the curriculum is a benchmark, not a straitjacket, however, it is important to recognise how limited the

scope is in the art and design curriculum, and how this can affect the teaching of the subject. The National Curriculum sets out the knowledge that children should acquire and leaves teachers to decide how to teach the content effectively (DfE, 2010), however, when the content set out is vague and meaningless (Barnes, 2015), teachers may struggle to be inspired by the curriculum, negatively impacting children's learning. Winner et.al (2013) suggests that the arts in school have been grossly neglected due to a focus on training what are considered more academic skills; reading, writing and maths. Viewing the arts as peripheral and a form of entertainment rather than as a serious subject (Winner et.al, 2013) has resulted in a minimal amount of statutory guidance in the curriculum, and a complete lack of non-statutory guidance to provide direction.

On the other hand, there is a great deal of room for teacher choice, as what little guidance there is does not confine teachers to certain topics. The DfE (2010) described the National Curriculum as being a benchmark for teaching, so teachers are expected to teach the statutory content and go beyond the curriculum. Although this may be the goal in theory, it does not automatically lead to good practice (Barnes, 2015). An absence of learning objectives, targets and assessment criteria stand out in the art and design National Curriculum (DfE, 2013), further promoting the view that the subject has been neglected (Winner et.al, 2013). Barnes (2015) explains that it could be argued that teachers should be able to create these for themselves, but that would be to ignore the problems in putting theory into practice. When teachers are left to create learning objectives and a series of lessons that appropriately challenge pupils, there is no guarantee that this will result in good practice (Barnes, 2015). With very little guidance on art and design, tentative teachers may struggle to teach the subject. Non-statutory guidance, not yet present in the art and design curriculum, could provide

some direction for teachers, modelling topics and skills whilst also allowing teachers to exercise their own vision and imagination in their lessons (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009). The nature of non-statutory guidance is to provide ideas or starting points for teachers so they can adapt the topic to suit the needs or interests of their students, which aligns with how the curriculum was intended to be used as a benchmark (DfE, 2010). Day and Smethem (2009) suggest that teachers often comply with non-statutory guidance in other subjects as they feel pressured to do so, making the non-statutory appear as statutory. In this way the guidance may not allow for teacher choice in the curriculum, however, the study did not consider teachers views on the art and design guidance and how this may affect their freedom. Teacher autonomy is an important aspect of the curriculum to look at, as autonomy is an essential element in teaching where decision making and judgement calls must be made constantly (Hoyle and Wallace, 2009 & Biesta, 2009). Too much statutory guidance in the curriculum may seem overly prescriptive to teachers and limiting to their freedom, however, Parker (2015) implies that teacher autonomy only exists to a certain extent. His term 'regulated autonomy' describes teachers freedom existing within a vacuum of limited scope, often to the oblivion of teachers. Similarly, Berry's (2012) 'occupational autonomy' describes teachers' freedom as a journey that can be of one's own determination, but the destination is set in stone. When applying these to the art and design National Curriculum (DfE, 2013), the lack of guidance may first be seen as a positive for teacher autonomy, yet this sense of freedom is limited as teachers are focused on the small statutory destination in the curriculum.

### **Content for students**

Children use art to give meaning to what they encounter, reconstruct experiences, and conceptualise themselves in relation to the world (Malin, 2013 & Barnes, 2015),

making art and design an essential subject in the curriculum for their personal development. The primary art and design guidance in the curriculum will be beneficial if it not only suits the needs of teachers but of pupils as well, giving them a well-rounded art and design education. Hallam, Gupta, and Lee (2008) investigated teacher understanding of art and design in the primary school and found that many teachers were not following the curriculum, instead opting for a more child-centred approach. The teachers focused on what they knew the children would enjoy, rather than focusing on developing skills, as they said this prevented them from working in expressive ways. This implies that the art and design curriculum is not allowing children the freedom of personal expression as the curriculum is too restricted (Hallam, Gupta, and Lee, 2008). The intention of art and design is to be imaginative and creative, values that children see as important (Malin, 2013), yet the curriculum appears ineffective, in this regard.

Assessment in art and design has been an issue among primary educators for many years as there is very little guidance on the topic, but it also needs to be addressed for its purpose in children's art and design development. Formal assessments with tests and grades may not be appropriate for this subject as art is subjective, but assessment can be used to guide students along their own path of development (Sawyer, 2017). Feedback as a form of assessment in art and design can encourage students to reflect on their work and make next steps for the future, allowing for a pedagogical interaction with the teacher (Sawyer, 2017). In higher education, this feedback is called a critique, however, Dannels (2011) explains that critiques can be stressful for students as they feel competitive. A concern of using feedback with art and design is that the assessment can feel personal as the student's art may be special to them, and students will compare their art to their peers. Orr (2010) suggests the use of feedback

and rubrics together to allow a blend of the structured assessment with the open-ended conversational nature of the feedback. Rubrics, being a list of criteria that a student is expected to meet and given a score, allows for more comparable results to assess pupils' development which would be beneficial at the end of years or key stages (Sawyer, 2017). Childrens art and design progression has slowed in primary school (Ofsted, 2012), so the curriculum should guide teachers on how to encourage development in this subject.

## **Methodology**

### **Research approach**

This research project explores Primary student teachers' perspectives on the art and design curriculum through a grounded theory, mixed methods approach. A grounded theory approach consists of systematic guidelines for collecting and analysing data (Charmaz, 2014), enabling researchers to construct a theory 'grounded' in their data (Coe et.al, 2021). One begins with an area of study, in this case the primary art and design curriculum, and collects the data necessary for themes to emerge. Data collection and analysis happen in an iterative process, one informing the other (Charmaz, 2014 and Coe et.al, 2021), and themes are discussed and evaluated as theory. Charmaz (2014) favours a grounded theory approach, stating that it gives you more focus on what is actually happening in your data as the processes of refining and coding give you more knowledge. Glaser and Strauss (1967) invited researchers to use grounded theory strategies flexibly in their own way, stating that there should not be rules or requirements. The grounded theory approach blended well with this small-scale research project, as elements of the method could be used where

appropriate such as coding one set of data to inform the collection of the next set, allowing the data to shape the focus of the research project.

### **Data collection**

Convenience sampling was used as the cohort of third year Primary Education students was accessible and appropriate for the research design and data collection, allowing for validity as the participants are the relevant target population (Cohen et.al, 2011). The sample was composed of thirty-seven primary student teachers for the questionnaire, and five volunteers from the sample for the focus group. A mixed methods approach to data collection was utilised to obtain a rich understanding of what a good art and design curriculum looks like. The use of quantitative and qualitative data in an explanatory design allows results to be explained (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2011), gaining a more in-depth understanding as the second phase builds on the first. Punch (2014) suggests that blending methods can combine the strengths, while compensating for the weaknesses, of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, making it a stronger approach (Charmaz, 2014). The numerical nature of quantitative data may give a fast and efficient account of your findings, but qualitative data provides rich meaning behind your findings that allows data to be explained (Punch, 2014).

The first phase of data collection was a quantitative questionnaire (See appendix 1) distributed by email. It was important for the questionnaire to be simple and accessible to all that would complete it, as response rate can quickly decrease if it is not convenient to fill out (Kumar, 2019). Administering the questionnaire online made the process economical and efficient for responders (Check and Schutt, 2012), and allowed greater anonymity as there was no face-to-face interaction (Kumar, 2019).

The questionnaire focused on some broad themes surrounding the current art and design National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) and hypothetical art and design practices, with a mix of Likert scale and multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire provides a representative picture of the perspectives of the target population (Check and Schutt, 2012), which informed the next phase of data collection.

The qualitative semi-structured focus group was used to collect a more in-depth account of student teacher perspectives of the primary art and design curriculum. An interview guide (see appendix 2) was used to provide direction (Stewart et.al, 2007) which included open-ended questions with flexibility to ask many more during the discussion. The research design favoured a focus group rather than individual interviews as the target population have a collective experience, being student teachers, which lends well to a group discussion (Kumar, 2019). The focus group was conducted online via Microsoft Teams which made the process accessible for participants from various locations and enabled the researcher to easily record the discussion for transcription.

### **Data analysis**

The data was analysed thematically following the questionnaire, to inform the questions for the focus group in the explanatory, mixed methods design. Thematic analysis suited the grounded theory approach as relevant themes could emerge and be coded or given descriptive labels (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2020). Once coded, the new themes were analysed (Waring, 2021) in an iterative process as the researcher reflects on perspectives and meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2022). With the research project being a small-scale endeavour, this iterative process only has two cycles, however in a larger project, the analysis of data and themes may never stop

(Coe et.al, 2021 and Charmaz, 2014), as researchers should reflect on their practice (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

### **Limitations**

It is important to address the study's limitations. Firstly, with the use of an online questionnaire. Kumar (2019) explains that online questionnaires can often have a low response rate as they are not compulsory, meaning the results may not be able to be generalised to the wider population of primary student teachers. With a response rate of forty per cent, the small-scale study aims to show a perspective from student teachers, not the entire target populations perspectives. Glaser (1998) cautions against the use of interview guides for focus groups, stating that simply creating one can preconceive the data and therefore the analysis. This is of concern when carrying out a grounded theory project as the researcher wants their data to inform their theory, yet having pre-prepared questions means the data has already been categorised before you have started (Glaser, 1998). Similarly, prior knowledge can hinder conducting research in one's own field, as the researcher will have bias on the topic being investigated (Khat, 2010), so this was addressed by carefully planning questions that were not leading or appear to favour the topic.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical clearance was received from the York St John School of Education, Language and Psychology Ethics Committee and ethical guidelines were followed throughout. Participants consented to the use of their data, and it was made clear at all stages of the project that they were free to withdraw consent at any point (Kumar, 2019). Names were anonymised on the records and stored confidentially and securely, as recommended by Hammersley (2021).



## **Findings**

After thematic analysis of questionnaire responses, the three themes that emerged formed the focus of the research project and led into the focus group. The findings present student teachers' perspectives on what makes a good art and design curriculum, which interestingly does not align with some of the current policy. Frequency and structure of art and design lessons, guidance for teachers, and content for students were the themes that were most frequently coded when analysing the raw data, which will be presented in more detail.

### **Frequency and structure**

The frequency of art and design lessons was of interest, as 50% of questionnaire respondents stated that they taught the subject less than once a week. When discussed in the focus group, participants considered the use of a mandatory amount of time to improve the hours spent on art and design, however this had mixed results. The student teachers reported they “would feel quite stressed” as there is physically not enough time in the school week to “get everything done”. All participants agreed that more time should be spent in the classroom doing art and design but discussed that a suggested amount of time in the curriculum may be more practical as it is “easier to fit in”. When considering the structure of art and design lessons, participants reported that the use of thematic teaching and having stand-alone lessons were beneficial, however, too many thematic lessons involving art and design can impact it negatively. One respondent explained that the links in thematic learning are “often tedious if they’re forced”, whereas another suggested that thematic teaching is ideal for engaging younger children in other subjects as the art and design makes it

enjoyable and believed this method of teaching should be demonstrated on the curriculum.

### **Guidance for teachers**

A theme that student teachers saw as an indicator of a good art and design curriculum was the amount and type of guidance for teachers. 78% of respondents of the questionnaire reported that they would look to the national curriculum when planning an art and design lesson, however, 65% of respondents also reported that the art and design curriculum is not sufficiently detailed for teaching and learning. When discussing the need for more detail in the focus group, respondents reported wanting guidance on topics, resources, and assessment strategies. 73% of questionnaire respondents reported that having non-statutory guidance in the art and design curriculum would be “very useful”, explaining the added guidance would make them feel more comfortable and confident with the subject and give them more ideas and starting points for lesson planning. Interestingly, one respondent suggested that adding more guidance to the curriculum would not only support teachers but would also “help with the perception of the subject... because it's so vague it implies it's not important.” A topic of debate in the focus group was freedom within the curriculum, and whether more statutory or non-statutory guidance would restrict this. The student teachers gave a range of opinions, one being that having more guidance would not result in less freedom “because we want it to know what we're doing is right”, but they were concerned that more guidance may remove the “fun and creativity” of art and design. Another perspective from a participant suggested that there is too much freedom in the art and design curriculum, to the point that they felt they did not know what they were doing when teaching the subject. Participants reported finding the art

and design curriculum “rigid” and lacking in fun, sharing the same experiences of struggling to plan lessons as their confidence diminished.

### **Content for students**

Following the questionnaire, student teachers reported a range of skills and topics that they perceived were important for a good art and design curriculum. First looking at the statutory guidance in the curriculum, participants shared they had frequently taught drawing and painting but had very rarely taught sculpting in their classroom. 68% of participants had taught about artists, 14% about craft makers, 12% about designers and 6% had not taught about any, yet these are all statutory in the curriculum. When discussing whether these skills and topics should be in the curriculum, the focus group participants were unanimous in their response. The student teachers saw these skills as essential to the curriculum and suggested the guidance should include more than three skills as it is very limiting. A notable finding was developed around childrens self-confidence in art and design, as the student teachers suggested that if a child struggles with the three skills listed in the curriculum, they may perceive themselves negatively in the subject. The student teachers discussed that having more than three skills in the curriculum may allow children greater room to find a skill that “they are good at and will believe in themselves” as an artist. Participants reported that spending more time teaching about artistic people would be beneficial for children, as it would be “inspirational” and relevant to our culture. One participant suggested the teaching of artists, craft makers and designers should be non-statutory, as being taught “facts about an artist...children won’t remember that.” The student teachers proposed the idea of learning about local artists as this would still be “exciting but would make art more achievable for children”, discussing that studying famous artists may seem out of reach to their students. Participants described a well-rounded art and design

education as having flexible, physical, and social elements to it, utilising outdoor spaces and collaboration. The student teachers saw value in children spending time to learn artistic skills and copy techniques but stated that equal time should be spent on free expression and creating art freely in the classroom. The participants dismissed the idea of using formal assessments in art and design and suggested the use of self-assessment as “it’s more beneficial for the child to work on themselves as an artist”, explaining that assessment from the teacher may “take the fun out of it”. The findings suggest that student teachers perceive a good art and design curriculum to have a broad range of topics and skills that can appeal to all children, developing their self-confidence in the subject with a focus on informal assessment strategies to ensure progression.

## **Discussion**

Overall, the findings of this study report that primary student teachers perceive a good art and design curriculum to have a considerable amount of guidance for teachers and content that inspires and encourages students, with an increase of art and design in the classroom for all children. It is of note that the student teachers' perceptions of a good art and design curriculum are dissimilar to the current guidance from the art and design national curriculum and will be discussed with the implications for future practice.

### **Frequency and structure**

The desire for an increase of art and design lessons in primary school, as suggested by the evidence of the research, aligns with the NSEAD report (2016) stating that time allocated to the subject needs to be reviewed. However, the student teachers saw this

as something that needed to be discussed amongst policy makers, whereas the NSEAD report (2016) suggested it was something schools could do to improve their practice. With very little time being spent on art and design in the classroom, the evidence collected suggested that the use of a Department for Education-made document that included a suggested amount of time for the subject would encourage teachers to increase the time they spent doing art and design in the classroom, as it would be recommended in the curriculum. Evidence also suggested that having a mandatory number of hours per week teaching art and design in primary school attributed to a good curriculum, as the student teachers considered whether this was the only way to ensure that the subject had its rightful place in the school week. Student teachers found the structure of art and design lessons to be an indicator of a good curriculum, with varying perspectives on thematic or cross-curricular learning that mirrored the research from Barnes (2015) and Kneen et.al (2020). Although student teachers established positive aspects of cross-curricular learning, such as being a great way to engage young children, this method of teaching art and design comes with concerns. Evidence suggests that when teachers use thematic learning too often, the links are forced, and learning is lost. Student teachers suggested a good curriculum would encourage the use of both thematic and stand-alone art and design learning but would detail the importance of having stand-alone lessons to teach skills and encourage free expression (Hallam, Gupta & Lee, 2008).

### **Guidance for teachers**

Steers' (2014) journal describing the art and design National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) as a half-hearted document limited in ambition and pedagogic understanding represents the views of the evidence collected, as student teachers seek more guidance in the subject. Participants described the curriculum as restricted and rigid

despite the lack of guidance and stated that a good art and design curriculum should have a considerable amount of guidance that can direct and inspire teachers. The negative perception of the art and design curriculum due to it lacking in guidance may be unexpected at first, as this would appear to allow for more freedom for teachers. However, evidence from the research suggests that the lack of guidance is what makes the curriculum feel restricted. Student teachers described feeling hesitant when teaching the subject due to the lack of guidance which would lead to a lack of confidence to teach beyond the curriculum, leaving them feeling restricted by the rigid curriculum. Similarly, in Payne and Hall's (2017) critique of the NSEAD survey report (2016), they describe art and design education as having a restricted agenda due to its perceived value (Winner et.al, 2013), and claim it is fundamentally misunderstood. Perception of art and design was discussed in the research, and evidence found that including more guidance in the curriculum could help to improve the perception of the subject. Student teachers discussed how the vague nature of the art and design curriculum has negatively impacted the perception of the subject and stated that a good curriculum would have more guidance to not only help teachers but with the perception of the subject too.

Evidence suggested that non-statutory guidance would be very useful for teachers in art and design to provide guidelines for topics and skills that children can learn, making them feel more confident in the delivery of the subject. The participants expressed general concerns around art and design, sharing that they did not know what they were doing when they taught it, but expressed that a good curriculum, a curriculum that they could use, would have a substantial amount of guidance for teachers. Regarding Parker's (2015) 'regulated autonomy' that he uses to describe teachers' freedom existing within a vacuum of limited scope, the evidence from this research

confirms this as student teachers discussed their lack of freedom and awareness of it. Participants were firm in their belief in teacher autonomy in the classroom, mirroring Hoyle and Wallace (2009) and Biesta (2009) in advocating for more decision making by teachers. Evidence suggested that student teachers perceived more guidance, and therefore, more choice, to be a contributing factor to a good art and design curriculum, allowing for teacher autonomy as the scope has been widened.

### **Content for students**

An overarching perspective from student teachers was that children should learn a range of topics and skills in art and design to develop their understanding and encourage their creativity. When discussing the current art and design National Curriculum (DfE, 2013), participants expressed disappointment at the lack of skills children are required to learn, as they explained that art and design is much more than just drawing, painting, and sculpting. Barnes (2015) explains that a few decades ago, teachers believed art was only for a few gifted children, whereas in the modern classroom, most children are regarded as being creative. The evidence suggests the student teachers agree with viewing every child as having the potential to be artists and designers, and that a good art and design curriculum can encourage and develop these skills. Participants discussed the use of other skills and topics in the curriculum and how this would benefit their students, such as collage and printing, as it would allow children to experience more activities that they may find they enjoy or excel in. Self-esteem and confidence in the subject were important topics of interest for the participants, as they shared that their students often lacked confidence in art and design as they did not take to painting or drawing easily. As this was the only art and design the children were doing, they then had a negative perception of the subject and could not see themselves as an artist. Evidence suggests that by including more skills

and topics in the curriculum, children will experience a broader range of activities but may also develop their confidence in the subject and find an artistic practice they can succeed in. In 2012, Ofsted encouraged schools to increase pupils' confidence in drawing, however, the student teachers perceived drawing to be a skill that children naturally develop and discussed that a good art and design curriculum would encourage more than just drawing. Evidence also suggested that studying local artists and designers would be beneficial in the art and design curriculum, as children can be inspired by the professionals whilst viewing the experience as something that is attainable for them.

The student teachers' perceptions of a good art and design curriculum regarding assessment are somewhat different to previous literature discussed, as the participants favoured more informal methods. Assessment from teachers using formal methods such as rubrics or critiques are commonly used in higher education and can be helpful for individuals to improve on their work, providing some objectivity (Orr, 2010 and Sawyer, 2017), however, when applied to primary school it is not surprising that these methods are not preferred. Student teachers expressed that not only did they as teachers not know how to assess pupils' art, but children did not know what they were aiming for, like they would do in other subjects with clear guidelines. Participants expressed that a good art and design curriculum would make it clear for students where they were heading in their arts education, as they also felt this was important for the perception of the subject. Evidence suggested that self-assessment was favoured by student teachers, as it allowed pupils to set their own goals and work on themselves as artists.



## **Limitations**

A limitation of this research is its sample size, as the data was collected in a small-scale research project, therefore impacting the validity of the findings. The evidence presents student teachers perspectives from a sample of their population and allows for the opportunity for future research with a larger sample size. Student teachers were chosen based on convenience sampling, but future research may benefit from having qualified teachers' perspectives considered. Despite these limitations, the data collected provides a reliable account of a sample of student teachers' perspectives on what makes a good art and design curriculum.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this small-scale grounded theory research has found that student teachers perceive a good primary art and design curriculum to have a suggested amount of time for the subject in the classroom to improve practice, a sizeable bank of guidance for the benefit of teachers, and a wide variety of skills and topics for the interests of every child. The frequency and structure of lessons were defined as being one of three key components of a good art and design curriculum, as student teachers discussed the importance of children engaging with the subject on a more regular basis, along with how cross-curricular or stand-alone art and design lessons can affect the learning and perception of the subject. A recurring theme when coding data was the importance of guidance for teachers in the art and design curriculum. Evidence suggested that having a higher volume of statutory and non-statutory guidance for the subject would make student teachers feel more comfortable, confident, and inspired

when delivering art and design to their pupils, as they would have a starting point to take ideas from. An interesting topic was teacher autonomy and whether more guidance in the curriculum would limit teachers' freedom, however, participants believed that having non-statutory guidance would only inspire their teaching rather than restrict it. Teacher autonomy, regulated autonomy (Parker, 2015) and occupational autonomy (Berry, 2012) would be an insightful topic for future research in relation to art and design. Finally, the skills and topics that children will learn were the third theme that student teachers considered. Findings suggested having a range of skills and topics in the art and design curriculum would allow children to find one they enjoyed or excelled in, resulting in self-confidence in the subject and a positive perception of art and design. Participants perceived a good art and design curriculum to enable pupil progress through informal self-assessment methods, as student teachers valued the idea of children working on themselves as artists rather than the teacher critiquing them. The results of the study could be generalised to the target population to provide a broad understanding of student teachers perceptions of a good art and design curriculum.

It was clear from the data collected that these perceptions of a good art and design curriculum differed from the guidance in the art and design National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) which brings to light the implications for future research and practice. With very little guidance for teachers, the art and design National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) does not inspire practitioners, let alone provide children with a range of skills and experiences that could be described as a good arts education. Art provides children the opportunity to learn, understand and communicate whilst reconstructing experiences (Barnes, 2015), making it a vital subject in primary school for children to

express themselves. This area of study should be researched further as the art and design National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) may not be providing children a satisfactory education on the subject, and current practice should be questioned for its purpose (Barnes, 2015).

Overall, student teachers perceived a good primary art and design curriculum to feature a suggested time allowance for the subject, statutory and non-statutory guidance, and a range of topics and skills for the interests of all children.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

1. Have you observed/taught Art and design on any of your school experience placements? Yes/No
2. How often have you observed/taught Art and Design on your placement?

Less than once a week/ once a week/ twice a week/ more than twice a week/  
n/a

3. Rate these statements from strongly disagree to strongly agree:
  - 'I enjoy Art and Design.'
  - 'I feel confident teaching an art and design lesson.'
  - 'When planning an art and design lesson, I would look at the National Curriculum to inform my lesson.'
  - 'I understand the terminology used in the art and design National Curriculum, for example, creativity, using the language of art, the differences between pattern, texture, shape, form and space etc.'
  - 'The art and design guidance in the National Curriculum is sufficiently detailed for teaching and learning'.

4. Order these Art and Design techniques from the National Curriculum from most taught in the classroom to least:

Painting, sculpting, drawing.

5. Have you seen/taught any other Art and Design techniques in the classroom?  
For example: printing, collage...

[text box]

6. Should there be equal time spent learning different Art and Design techniques? For example: painting, sculpting, printing, drawing and collage?

Yes/ No/ Unsure

7. Some subjects in the Primary curriculum have non-statutory guidance to provide examples for topics/lessons. How useful would this be for art and design?

Very useful, somewhat useful, not useful.

8. The art and design curriculum says children should learn about artists, architects, and designers. Who have you taught about in school? Tick all that apply.

Artists, architects, designers, none of the above.

9. Rate these statements from strongly disagree to strongly agree:
- Children should learn about more artists, architects, and designers.
  - Teaching children about artists, architects and designers discourages them from creating art as they feel they are not good enough.
  - Children should learn about historical and modern artists.
  - Children should learn about how painting, drawing, and sculpting has changed through history.
  - Art and design should be taught with other lessons as a thematic approach e.g. With history, geography, languages etc.
  - Art and design should be taught as a subject in its own right.
  - Children should only create art independently.
  - The art and design curriculum should feature statutory topics and skills that children are required to learn.
  - The art and design curriculum should have more freedom for teachers.

## **Appendix 2 – Focus Group questions**

- Today you will be discussing what you think would make a good primary school art and design curriculum for the interests of teachers as well as benefitting the children. Everyone's opinion is welcome and encouraged. We will try to share one at a time so the audio recording can be transcribed clearly, and this will be anonymised for your privacy. You are free to withdraw consent now before we begin if you do not wish to take part.
- Frequency/structure of lessons:
- After conducting a survey of student teachers' thoughts on the teaching and learning of art and design, many respondents reported that they taught art less than once a week. If a mandatory amount of time per week of art and design teaching was part of



the curriculum, would you see this as a positive or negative change from the current curriculum? Why? E.g., Like PE

- How would you feel about a suggested amount of time in the curriculum for art and design per week? Would this impact your teaching? Why? Does it need to be mandatory for a greater impact?
- What are your thoughts on thematic vs stand-alone art and design lessons? Should this be part of the curriculum or a teacher's choice? Does only thematic learning take away from the art and design experience?
- Usefulness of curriculum for teachers:
  - More than half of the respondents of the survey said the art and design curriculum is not sufficiently detailed for teaching and learning. What details or parts of the curriculum do you think could be expanded on? What would be most useful to you to have more guidance on?
  - Would having statutory or non-statutory guidance make you feel the curriculum was more detailed? Would more guidance make you feel more confident teaching art and design?
- 73% of respondents said that non-statutory guidance in the curriculum would be very useful, but nearly 100% also said they wanted more freedom for teachers in the curriculum. Do you think statutory/ non-statutory guidance in the curriculum limits teacher's freedom?
- Are there any aspects of the current art and design curriculum that do not give teachers freedom? Currently no guidance...
- Content of curriculum for the children:
  - The current art and design curriculum only has a few statutory topics, sculpting being one of them, however, it is rarely taught in school. Should art and design practices like sculpting, drawing, and painting be statutory topics in the curriculum? Do we

make them non-statutory, or do we add more statutory practices but with more detailed guidance?

- Printing, collage, and papier-mâché are often taught in school but are not in the curriculum. Should these become statutory topics, or do they not contribute much to a child's art education?
- What are your thoughts on children learning about a variety of artists, architects, and designers? Does this contribute anything to their art and design learning? Should there be some artists that are statutory to learn?
- How would you describe a well-rounded art and design education for children? Should more emphasis be put on skills rather than the joy of creating something? Should art and design be assessed with targets and LO's?
- Thinking about what you have taught in art, different skills, and topics you have seen, and your knowledge of the curriculum, how do you think we can make sure there is progression through the key stages in art and design? Are there certain skills that you would say are more for key stage 2? What should older children achieve at the end of primary school? (Gov have said there is very little development in drawing from LKS1 to year 6, decrease in creativity)
- To end – is there anything anybody would like to share about the current art and design curriculum, or any suggestions for a new and improved one?