

What Does Success Look Like?

Why do we teach art? What do pupils get from making art? In this post, [Paula Briggs](#) challenges us to think more openly about how we monitor art in the classroom. Through making no assumptions about what art can offer us (and that's a very important question relevant to us all), we might be surprised by what we find...



Johannes Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* (ca.1669–1671)

Many primary teachers ask us questions like:

- *What do age-related outcomes look like?*
- *What should Year 6 drawings look like?*

• How do we measure progress?

(All of which allude to the question: What does success look like?)

These questions are understandable, often driven by a pressure from above (SLT, Ofsted), but they can also demonstrate misunderstanding as to what progression in art might actually look like, and more worryingly, they can also limit HOW pupils benefit from learning about, and through, art.

Let's switch the language to change our understanding, and instead of asking "what does success look like?" let's ask:

What Does Success FEEL Like?

Asking "What Does Success Look Like?" puts the emphasis firmly on the external outcomes generated for others to judge.

Asking "What Does Success FEEL like?" switches the emphasis. This time the emphasis is on the child. What was the experience like for the child? How did they find it? How did they grow? Where did they struggle?

Art IS experiential, and every child will experience it in different ways. Putting the question "What Does Success Feel Like?" at the heart of your art lessons, reminds all involved (SLT, teachers, pupils, parents) why we make art. The answers to that single question force us to

think about all the things that art can do for us. It forces us to think about "Purpose".

Crucially, just as in the best art lessons the teacher cannot often second guess the outcomes of work produced, the teacher cannot always predict or know what success feels like to each child. That is the beauty and power of art, and it's for the children to tell us what it felt like for them.

So, when and how do we enable ourselves to ask that question, and how do we enable children to feel safe enough to answer? (And remember this is the opposite to children feeling measured and tested, this is about children telling us what they got out of an activity or experience. There is no right or wrong).

Let's think about the way you currently (probably) work in your school:

- You buy into [a scheme](#), or devise your own plans.
- You create support docs, many of which are formatted in the same way as all other subjects, just because that's the way SLT wants them, even though they might not be appropriate to the way we learn in art. These support docs are, worse case, stored for Ofsted, or best case, used to build every teachers' understanding of the way you teach art in your school.

- As part of the above, you think about how you will measure (ideally just capture) progress.
- The children then take part in the activities, progressing through their year, and you plot their progress against your predefined outcomes.

But again, switching the way you think can change the “space” within your curriculum, so that all pupils can benefit and progress, in ways relevant to them.

So, let’s think: Could you do it differently? In an approach which acknowledges that the ways in which we benefit /progress/grow through art are (and should be), messy, individual, non-linear (and exciting, rewarding, far-reaching...)?

Try this:

- You buy into [a scheme](#), or devise your own plans.
- You create support docs which reflect best practice in teaching art (and these often don’t follow the format of other subjects). These support docs are used to build every teachers’ understanding of the way you teach art in your school. You understand why you are doing what you are doing, the purpose of the lessons and pathways, how they inter-relate through the years, how they build skills and knowledge... BUT you leave a little

bit of space on any document which sums up your thinking about what success might look like, and how you monitor progression...

- The children then take part in the activities, progressing through their year. And here's the change, subtle but powerful. At regular points throughout the term, you make it your job to find out what success (and struggle) has FELT like for each child. Through conversation around sketchbooks and outcomes, you ask children:

- How did it feel to...?

- Was there anything you found tricky...? What did that feel like? What did you do?

- How does your artwork make you feel?

- How do you feel about the artwork of others?

- What made you feel good? Where did you feel you achieved?

- And you listen. You listen to what success feels like for each child. That way, "what success looks like" becomes totally relevant to the pupils without the teacher imposing what they think success SHOULD look like. The children will help you celebrate the value of art to them. And you can then write the

answers to that question into your support docs as examples of what success might look like for various year groups. In effect, the children write their own outcomes for you, once they have experienced the activities.

By switching numbers 3 and 4, you help create an environment in your classroom/school where children (and teachers) can be totally honest with the answers they give.

Why is this important?

Art is an experiential subject. It is a huge, exciting, amorphous subject – and its tentacles reach far and wide. Every child in your class will have their own experience and if you try to distil outcomes down to a standardised tick list of objectives to be met, you won't leave space for the richness of types of "success" which the subject offers you. In any one project, one child's success might be related to a drawing skill, another child's success might be that the activity gave them a sense of wellbeing. Another child might express pride that they were able to use certain materials in a certain way, and another's success may be in being able to talk about another child's work with eloquence.

So instead of restricting and limiting what success "looks" like, through pressure from SLT to create a neat tick sheet, enable and allow what success "feels" like to be captured – preferably

not via an Excel, but instead in something much more holistic and experiential: sketchbooks, visual outcomes, conversations, recorded chats, observations. If you don't want to record children directly, think about how you, the teacher, can capture each child's progress by making a quick recording on your phone of their work whilst talking into the camera.

For example:

"Ollie enjoyed using the Modroc and could manipulate the materials well. He showed great determination in making his sculpture stand up. He sketchbook makes him happy but he felt that some of the pages where he used ink didn't quite work as he would have liked. We talked about how slowing down might work better for him next time. He also said he'd like to try and work bigger one day. He spoke with more confidence than last term when we talked about the artists' work, and he expressed ways in which the artist's work might link to his own."

What do you think? Can we be brave and ask SLT to give us a year before we define any kind of expectation with regard to outcomes, so children can show us?

And by the way the answer to those questions at the top:

Q. What do age-related outcomes look like?

A. It's impossible to say. The artwork produced by each age group is entirely dependent on the opportunities offered to them over time. What Year 6 drawings look like in one school will be totally different to Year 6 drawings in another. There are no national standards in art, so you don't need to worry about this. Instead, concentrate on layering as many exciting and inspiring activities and experiences as you can for the children. Build their outcomes (and remember that even in visual art outcomes are not only visual, they are also verbal (about intention and reflection and understanding). And then over time you can see what outcomes are like in your school (and use that information to inform your future curriculum provision).

Q. What should Year 6 drawings look like?

A. See above.

Q. How do we measure progress?

A. Not by tick boxes and linear expectations. Read <https://www.accessart.org.uk/how-do-we-assess-creativity/> and capture progress (which will happen if your provision is sound) via sketchbooks, conversation and recording. Don't just measure progress. Celebrate progress (all progress) by embracing art in your school.

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