

**Cultivating Quality in International Baccalaureate Diploma Visual Arts:
Considering Insights from Teachers within International Schools**

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Considering Insights from Teachers within International Schools**

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Abstract

Cultivating Quality in International Baccalaureate Diploma Visual Arts: Considering Insights from Teachers within International Schools

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This research investigates how Visual Arts (VA) teachers within the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP) in international schools conceptualize and pursue quality in teaching, a goal often challenged by the demanding and multifaceted contexts in which they work. Using Charmaz's (2014) Grounded Theory and informed by Feminist Theory, this qualitative study leverages my positionality as a current DP VA teacher to explore the question: What is needed to create a support program to foster quality teaching in DP VA within international schools? Data was collected through three rounds of in-depth interviews with 16 DP VA teachers from international schools worldwide. Findings indicate that while these teachers unanimously value quality in teaching, systemic barriers, such as assessment communication challenges, institutional constraints, and management complexities, compromise their ability to achieve this goal. As a result, teachers adapt their interpretations of quality to align with the high achievement markers demanded by competitive international schools, often compromising their ideological perspectives. Informed by Villalobos' (2015) conflict model, this study identifies four key areas of conflict hindering the realization of quality teaching: (1) divergent understandings of quality among teachers, students, parents, and school communities; (2) tensions between the perception of DP VA in international schools and the broader art education field; (3) ideological conflicts between teachers' pedagogical values and the IB's assessment framework, including VA's optional Group 6 classification; and (4) conflicts between the holistic nature of VA and the achievement markers tied to competitive university admissions. This study provides a nuanced exploration of the challenges DP VA teachers face and emphasizes the need for systemic advocacy to the IB and universities. It also proposes the development of a university-offered micro-credential program to address these challenges, foster professional growth, and enhance communication between secondary and higher education systems, ultimately advancing quality teaching in DP VA.

Keywords: International Baccalaureate, Diploma Programme, Visual Arts, Quality, International Schools, Teacher Voice

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to all Diploma Visual Art teachers, whose passion, creativity, and unwavering commitment inspire and empower the next generation of artists. May this study serve as a tribute to your tireless efforts and a source of insight to inform and elevate your incredible work.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	xi
List of Tables	xii
List of Abbreviations	xiii
Introduction	1
Components of the study	3
Focus of the study: In-depth interviews	4
Contributions to research within the field	5
Relevance of my positionality	6
Chapter 1 : Theoretical Underpinnings	12
DP VA curriculum updates	12
International Baccalaureate 2030	13
UNESCO 2030	13
Questions unanswered	14
Impetus for exploring quality	16
Chapter 2 : On International Schools and the International Baccalaureate	18
What are international schools?	18
International school growth	19
International school educational environment	20
Evolution of the International Baccalaureate	21
Teaching IB in international schools	23
Considerations of the DP teacher	24
Hidden curriculums	25
Navigating cultural differences	25
On the IB DP Visual Arts framework	26
DP VA current framework (2016)	27
Assessment in DP VA	28
Considering the DP VA teacher experience	29
Considering professional development	31
Perceived difficulties of the DP VA course	32
Relevance of assessment scores	32
Highlighting inconsistencies: DP VA assessment scores	33
Chapter 3 : Considering Quality	36

Conceptualizing quality	36
Defining quality	37
Recognizing quality within Arts Education	38
Measuring quality in VA	39
Contextualizing quality within IB DP Visual Arts	40
Chapter 4 : Conflict Theory	47
Exploring ideological underpinnings.....	47
Exploring structural underpinnings.....	48
Considering quality within teaching within the theoretical underpinnings	50
Theoretical framework - Conflict Theory.....	50
Villalobos' Conflict Scale.....	51
Chapter 5 : Preliminary Studies	55
Phase 1: systematic literature review	55
Literature review method	55
Positionality of authors	56
Reflections on positionality of authors	57
Emergent themes within the literature.....	57
Phase 2: survey	58
Survey method	59
Explicit conceptualizations of quality.....	59
Contributors of and impacts to quality	60
Concerning resources for DP VA.....	62
Summary of Preliminary Studies.....	65
Chapter 6 : In-depth Interviews	66
In-depth interviews method.....	66
Research questions specific to the in-depth interviews.....	68
Recruitment of participants	68
Logistics and relevance the in-depth interview session timing.....	68
Interviews platform.....	68
Interviews timing.....	69
Interviews organization	69
Interviews questions	71
Coding process.....	71
Situating participants of in-depth interviews	73

Considering in-depth interview research question 2: Implicit discussions of quality	75
Chapter 7 : Explicit Conceptualizations of Quality	77
Evolving quality definition	77
Consistency in quality: technical vs conceptual.....	77
Perceptions of quality shifting over time/experience	78
Subjective understandings of quality as assessed	79
Quality in DP VA teaching	80
Fostering student autonomy and encouraging independent exploration	80
Development of critical thinking.....	81
Consideration of technical skills	82
Summary of explicit conceptualizations of quality	82
Chapter 8 : Implicit Conceptualizations of Quality: DP VA Curriculum Dynamics.....	84
Curriculum structure.....	84
Component focus	91
Assessment strategies	98
DP VA course benefits	103
Summary of DP VA curriculum dynamics	105
Chapter 9 : Implicit Conceptualizations of Quality: Assessment Complexities	106
Assessment uncertainty.....	106
Program reputation issues.....	109
Professional impact	110
Summary of assessment complexities	113
Chapter 10 : Implicit Conceptualizations of Quality: Management Complexities.....	114
VA medium preferences	114
Time management complexities.....	117
External learning experiences	120
Digital integration.....	122
Exhibition logistical complexities.....	123
Upload process complexity	125
Summary of DP VA management complexities.....	126
Chapter 11 : Implicit Conceptualizations of Quality: Supplementary Themes.....	127
Holistic art education practices.....	127
Mindful teaching practices	127
Individualized instruction.....	128

VA as personal growth.....	128
Student VA themes.....	129
Student autonomy and engagement.....	131
Inclusive practices	132
Educational and institutional challenges.....	133
School resources and budgets.....	134
Studio access time.....	135
Scheduling and space complexities	137
VA program marginalization	137
DP VA professional growth.....	138
Career evolution	139
DP VA training and examining experience.....	140
Personal artistic practice	140
Work-life balance	141
International school dynamics	141
Cultural navigation	142
Professional isolation.....	143
Achievement expectations.....	144
Summary of implicit conceptualizations of quality: Supplementary themes	146
Chapter 12 : Discussion of Findings.....	147
Discussion of Phase 3: in-depth interview findings	147
Explicit conceptions of quality	148
Current realization of quality within DP VA teaching	151
Chapter 13 : Analysis of the findings through the lens of conflict theory	156
Conflict of meaning	156
Conflicts of function	157
Conflict of position	157
Conflicts of power.....	158
Summary of analysis through the lens of Conflict Theory	159
Chapter 14 : Considering support for DP VA teachers	160
Proposal for a Micro-credential Program.....	161
Micro-Credential Program plan for DP VA teachers.....	162
Advocacy to Universities and the International Baccalaureate	165
But, what is Visual Arts?	168

A radical new direction.....	169
Chapter 15 : Contributions of the Study	172
Bridging the gap between theory and practice.....	172
Highlighting the situation of assessment challenges within DP VA.....	173
Chapter 16: Critical Reflections and Limitations.....	174
Taking it personal.....	174
Connecting with DP VA teachers.....	175
Reflecting on misalignment challenges.....	175
Selection of Conflict Theory	176
Limitations of the study	177
Further research directions.....	178
Final thoughts	180
References	182
Appendix A: Ethics Certificates	199
Appendix B: High-Quality	201
Appendix C: Brief History of DP VA.....	202
Appendix D: Online Forums discussing DP VA	210
Appendix E: Global Top IB Schools Ranking.....	218
Appendix F: News Post sharing DP results	219
Appendix G: Marketing Pamphlet leveraging DP Results	220
Appendix H: Group 6 Grade Distributions.....	221
Appendix I: DP VA Subject Grade Boundaries.....	227
Appendix J: Phase 1: Selected Art Teaching Journals.....	232
Appendix K: Phase 1: Literature Review Themes.....	235
Appendix L: Phase 2: List of Survey Questions.....	236
Appendix M: Phase 2: Call for Participation.....	251
Appendix N: Phase 2: Numerical Responses for Teaching Resources.....	253
Appendix O: Phase 3: In-depth Interviews Interview Question Plan.....	254
Appendix P: Phase 3: Interview Participant Information and Schedule	258
Appendix Q: Phase 3: In-depth Interviews, Coding Phase 1	260
Appendix R: Phase 3: In-depth Interviews, Emergent Codes	261
Appendix S: Phase 3: In-depth Interviews, Coding Phase 2.....	262

List of Figures

Figure 1. Visualization of the components of the study	4
Figure 2. IB Diploma Programme info graph	22
Figure 3. The Interconnected core areas, practices and assessment components within the DP VA	28
Figure 4. Enrolment of Group 6 DP subjects from Northern hemisphere sessions, 2016-2024... 34	34
Figure 5. Grade Distribution for Group 6 (Arts) courses within the DP program for May 2024. 34	34
Figure 6. Percentage of DP students scoring 7 within Group 6 subjects from 2016-2024..... 35	35
Figure 7. Grade boundaries showing overall achievement score of 7 for DP VA differential from DP VA subject reports 2016 through to 2024..... 44	44
Figure 8. Percentage of DP VA Students (HL and SL) scoring 7 from 2016-2024	45
Figure 9. Analytical model of Conflict Theory	53
Figure 10. Visual showing explicit conceptions of quality and contributors of and impacts to quality as revealed through Phase 2:survey. 62	62
Figure 11. Visual of sources for resources ranked by survey respondents: teaching, creative ideas, artists..... 63	63
Figure 12. Visual of Art Education topics generated in Phase 1 compared with those of Phase 2. 64	64
Figure 13. Visual showing conceptualizations of explicit conceptualizations of quality as revealed through Phase 3: In-depth Interviews..... 83	83
Figure 14. Visual compilation of explicit conceptions of quality within teaching of DP VA.... 148	148
Figure 15. Visual compilation of contributors of and impacts to quality revealed through the study..... 151	151
Figure 16. Current realization of quality within the teaching of DP VA as revealed by the study	154
Figure 17. Visual of Compiled Analysis using Conflict Theory	158
Figure 18. Proposed organization for Micro-Credential Course Plan for DP VA teachers..... 163	163
Figure 19. Artwork from DP VA Student’s Exhibition Submission	167

List of Tables

Table 1. Details of submission requirements for (HL/SL) assessment components	41
Table 2. Summary of expectations for DP VA assessed components and implied quality of descriptors for top mark band of assessment rubrics.	42
Table 3. Grade Descriptor Qualifiers for Grades 1-7	43
Table 4. Data collection overview from literature review	56
Table 5. Author positionality overview from literature review	56
Table 6. Key themes from explicit discussions of quality	75
Table 7. Key themes revealed that are contributors of and impacts to quality in regards to teaching within the DP VA	75
Table 8. Codes identified within ‘evolving quality definition’	77
Table 9. Codes identified within ‘Quality in DP VA teaching’	80
Table 10. Codes identified within ‘DP VA curriculum dynamics’	84
Table 12. Codes identified within ‘DP VA assessment complexities’	106
Table 11. Codes identified within ‘DP VA management complexities’	114
Table 13. Codes identified within ‘holistic art education practices’	127
Table 14. Codes identified within ‘educational and institutional challenges’	133
Table 15. Codes identified within ‘DP VA professional growth’	138
Table 16. Codes identified within ‘international school dynamics’	141

List of Abbreviations

VA	Visual Arts
IB	International Baccalaureate <i>The International Baccalaureate Diploma Program is referred inconsistently within the literature as “IBDP,” “DP,” “IB,” “IBO,” ‘the IB’ or “IB DP.”</i> <i>Within this study “the IB” is used to refer to the IBO’s whole system of education. The Diploma Programme Visual Arts is referred to as DP VA</i>
DP	Diploma Programme
MYP	Middle Years Programme
PYP	Primary Years Programme
TOK	Theory of Knowledge Course
CAS	Creativity, Activity and Service Component
EE	Extended Essay
IAs	Internally Assessed Components
CS	Comparative Study
PP	Process Portfolio
EX	Exhibition
VA Journal	Visual Arts Journal
HL	Higher Level
SL	Standard Level
VACAF	Visual Arts Coursework Authentication Form
PG	Predicted Grade
DP1	Diploma 1 <i>Commonly used to refer to as the first year of the DP</i>
DP2	Diploma 2 <i>Commonly used to refer to the second year of the DP</i> <i>Since international schools follow many different national educational systems, it can get confusing with referring to levels by grades, for instance, U.S.A. and Canadian schools have grades 11 and 12 while the U.K. schools have 12 and 13. For easier understanding this study, I have changed mentions of grades to more simply DP 1 and DP 2</i>
Mock Exhibition	<i>Also referred to as Mocks</i> <i>A pre-exhibition activity independently organised by DP VA teachers to collaborate and assist students in visualising their final exhibition set ups *not sanctioned by IB</i>
Moderation	<i>An activity independently organised among DP VA teacher to share components for feedback and assessment opinions before external submission *not sanctioned by IB</i>
World Exams	IB World Exams are scheduled to be held on the same time/date as possible throughout the hemisphere (north/south).

IBIS	International Baccalaureate Information System <i>the online submission site for DP submissions</i>
MY IB	Teacher Support Site for IB <i>the online support and communication site for IB programs</i>
RM Assessor	Research Machines Assessor <i>the online assessment platform for DP</i>
DP Coordinator	Diploma Coordinator <i>Coordinator of the IB DP courses within international schools (also referred to as IB Coordinator)</i>
PD	Professional Development
OSSD	Ontario Secondary School Diploma (Ontario, Canada)
IGCSE	Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (Cambridge Assessment International Education, 2019)
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education (UK)
GCE	General Certificate of Education (Singapore-Cambridge)
A-Levels	Advanced Levels (UK)
AP	Advanced Placement (USA)
HSC	High School Certificate (Australia)
IS	International Schools
EARCOS	East Asia Regional Council of Schools
ARWAE	Asian Regionals Workshops for Art Educations
GATE	Global Art Teachers Exchange

Introduction

This chapter serves as an introduction to my dissertation, beginning with an exploration of the concept of high-quality as it is articulated within International Baccalaureate (IB) literature. I then outline the key theoretical frameworks of grounded theory, feminist theory, and conflict theory that underpin my study and discuss how these perspectives inform my research approach. Additionally, I present the overarching research question, provide a concise overview of the components of the study and summarize key findings. Furthermore, while I examine the contributions of my research to the field of art education, highlighting its implications and significance, I reflect on my positionality and its influence on my research process.

Cultivating Quality uses qualitative research methods to explore the conceptualizations of quality as it applies to the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program (DP) Visual Arts (VA) course from the perspectives of Visual Arts (VA) teachers who are currently teaching the Diploma Program Visual Arts (DP VA) course within international schools.

“The International Baccalaureate Organization (IB) offers four high-quality and challenging educational programmes for a worldwide community of schools, aiming to create a better, more peaceful world” (IBO, 2014, p. iv). By foregrounding the term “high-quality” in the opening line of its curriculum documents (as evidenced in Appendix B), the IB positions quality as a central pillar of its educational philosophy and a key objective across its programs. This emphasis suggests that within the Diploma Programme Visual Arts (DP VA) course, the realization of a high-quality program is contingent upon teachers’ understanding of what the IB defines as “high-quality” and their ability to translate this conceptualization into practice across the various components of the course. For teachers, this entails not only interpreting IB’s standards of quality but also embedding them effectively into their teaching practices to foster excellence in student outcomes.

My aim is an exploratory study into how DP VA teachers conceptualize quality within their teaching, the extent to which they feel supported by existing resources, and the factors that contribute to or impact the realization of quality in their classrooms. By gaining a deeper understanding of these dimensions, my research seeks to identify actionable strategies for providing targeted and meaningful support to DP VA teachers. Ultimately, with my study I aspire to bridge the gap between the IB’s aspirational vision of “high-quality” education and the practical realities faced by DP VA teachers, fostering a more robust and effective framework for quality teaching within the DP VA program.

My overarching question for this study is:

What do I need to know to create a support programme to encourage quality within the teaching of International Baccalaureate Diploma Visual Arts within International schools?

In order to unpack my question, my research is grounded in the constructivist grounded theory approach of sociologist and the developer of Constructivist Grounded Theory, Kathy Charmaz (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014) which allowed me to treat my research process as a construction, as “a way of thinking about, constructing, and interacting with data throughout the research process” (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021, p. 305). Using grounded theory as method enabled me to approach my study with a sense of reflexivity, creating space as I progressed to acknowledge and explore the multiple realities and diverse perspectives of the DP VA program, through the VA teacher’s perspective.

I embarked on this study, not as a natural observer and “value-free expert” (Charmaz, 2014, p.3), but as a current and experienced DP VA teacher. This positionality informed my study and allowed me access to materials and environments relevant to the study that may not be otherwise accessible. Since grounded theorists often begin their studies with certain guiding empirical interests and general concepts that form a loose framework in which to investigate, I was driven in my explorations by my own experiences and “hunches” (p.30).

As feminist writer and independent scholar Sara Ahmed (2017a) shares, “when we have to think strategically, we also have to accept our complicity: we forgo any illusions of purity; we give up the safety of exteriority. If we are not exterior to the problem under investigation, we too are the problem under investigation” (p. 93-114). Leaning on feminist theory has helped me to reflect and recognize the critical need to better understand my role as a DP VA teacher in order to understand and support DP VA teachers within international school settings

As intended within grounded theory, through the process of conducting and analysing the research, conflict theory emerged as a framework which I was able to use to ground my study. Conflict theory enabled me to explore the tensions that emerged within the conceptualization of quality within teaching of the DP VA within international schools, such as the marginalization of VA within school hierarchies, assessment practices, and the prioritization of university-driven educational models, which were revealed to influence DP VA teachers’ ability to sustain quality in their classrooms. To analyze conflict theory, I adapted a conceptual model devised by associate researcher at the Center for the Study of Policies and Practices in Education (CEPPE-UC) at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Cristóbal Villalobos (2015) for studying educational conflicts in contemporary societies. Villalobos’ model sees educational conflict as a social relationship between actors who are situated in their actions by the structure in which they find themselves, offering a theoretical structure for analyzing the interrelated conceptual domains of conflict within meaning, function, position, and power. These domains helped to identify and categorize the actors that are contributors of and create impacts to quality within the teaching of DP VA within international schools, providing clarity to the complex challenges DP VA teachers face.

Components of the study

Research for the study was collected through a series of three in-depth interviews with 16 current DP VA teachers working across international schools worldwide.

The study was originally designed as a three-phase explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), with Phase 1: Systemic Literature Review, Phase 2: Survey, and Phase 3: In-depth Interviews. Through the research process of reviewing and rethinking, Phase 3 emerged as having the largest impact on the study, and so I have chosen within the scope of this study to focus on this aspect in depth.

Findings for Phase 1 and 2 as shared within Chapter five, served as preliminary studies providing rich data and insights into the field of secondary and DP VA teaching, particularly in revealing the awareness and relevance of quality both within the field of art education and among DP VA teachers in international schools.

The literature review (Mertens, 2018) revealed a limited focus on quality teaching in art education with emphasis on inclusivity, equity, student-centered approaches, and inquiry-based learning while advocating for challenging dominant narratives to promote personal and artistic growth. Tensions arose between theoretical discourse in the literature, which downplayed the importance of technical skills, with the practical demands of DP VA teaching, where technical proficiency is a key component of assessment.

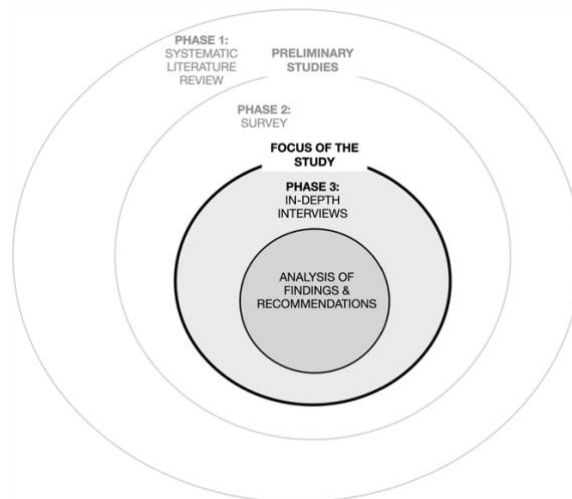
The survey (Fowler, 2009) was instrumental in recruiting participants for the in-depth interviews. It also identified quality teaching in DP VA as fostering intellectual rigour, holistic education, and balancing technical skill development with conceptual exploration. Survey respondents stressed the importance of access to materials, resources, and art spaces while expressing concerns about assessment challenges, such as unclear criteria, grading inconsistencies, and alignment pressures with IB frameworks. These issues were linked to student disengagement and the overall marginalization of VA in international school contexts.

Additionally, survey respondents reported relying heavily on online searches, teacher forums, and social media for teaching materials and inspiration, with minimal reliance on art education journals. This challenges earlier assumptions guiding Phase 1: literature review, questioning the influence of art education literature on the practice of DP VA teaching within international schools.

While these studies provided valuable insights into the field, their primary relevance within the scope of this dissertation lies in their role in acclimating me, as a researcher, to the understandings and challenges within secondary VA education. They informed the design and focus of phase 3, the in-depth interviews, which collected the most relevant data and served as the primary focus of this dissertation. Together, the literature review and survey provided

foundational context, helping me to refine the research process while underscoring the broader themes and tensions that informed the qualitative focus of the study.

Figure 1. Visualization of the components of the study



Note: Graphic created with Keynote, Amy Atkinson, 2025

Focus of the study: In-depth interviews

The main focus of my research centres around the in-depth interviews of sixteen current DP VA teachers situated in international schools globally to deliberately “study contextual conditions” (Yin, 2014, p.13). The aim of the in-depth interviews was to conduct “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (p. 8). For this research, I considered the understanding of quality as a “contemporary phenomenon” (p. 8) and was keen to unpack how quality was understood and implemented by DP VA teachers within the context of international schools. The research questions guiding the in-depth interviews were:

1. How do DP VA teachers in international schools conceive of quality?
2. What contributes to or impacts quality in regard to teaching within the DP VA programme in international schools?

The findings of the three-part thematic qualitative interview series (Seidman, 1998) revealed conceptions of quality within teaching of the DP VA as intrinsically tied to the student experience. Quality teaching was ideologically framed as fostering student autonomy, encouraging independent inquiry, and helping students connect personal interests with meaningful artistic outcomes, and was conceptualized as a delicate balance between conceptual exploration and technical skill development. As contributors to quality within the teaching of DP VA, pragmatic factors such as curricula dynamics, resources and budgeting, and holistic and mindful teaching practices that support students’ personal, artistic and intellectual growth, and align with a broader vision of holistic education were identified.

Assessment complexities emerged as a major theme that impacted quality teaching within DP VA, with interview participants expressing significant frustration about the lack of clarity, consistency, and support surrounding DP VA assessments. Participants described how unclear criteria and conflicting expectations from examiners create misalignments between their teaching goals and assessment outcomes. These challenges not only impact DP VA teaching practices but also contribute to broader tensions, such as student disengagement and the perception of DP VA as a difficult subject, contributing to the marginalization of the DP VA program within the broader international school context. A further tension emerged between the ideological underpinnings of the DP VA and the structural realities of teaching DP VA within international schools. The in-depth interviews revealed broad systemic and institutional barriers that complicate DP VA teachers' efforts to deliver quality teaching, such as conflicts with international school administration regarding the scheduling, resourcing, and prioritization of the DP VA program, which adds complexity to the teaching environment and the significant amount of time and energy required to support DP VA students.

These findings, discussed more in Chapters 12 and 13, showed that the impacts revealed to be detrimental to the quality of teaching in DP VA, creating a conceptualization and realization of quality teaching that focuses on assessment achievements, limiting student choice and hindering the creative process while diminishing the ideological aims both of DP VA curriculum and of DP VA teachers, exacerbating the stress and frustration of current DP VA teachers and students. This contributes to the negative reputation and marginalization of the DP VA course in international schools.

Contributions to research within the field

The greatest significance of my research lies in its ability to provide a rare, in-depth exploration of the experiences, priorities, and challenges faced by DP VA teachers working within the DP VA framework within international schools. DP VA teachers operate in a highly demanding context, balancing the creative, conceptual, and technical elements of art education with the assessment-driven framework of the IB curriculum.

Through this study, I am able to provide an in-depth exploration of the experiences, priorities, and challenges faced by DP VA teachers working within the DP VA framework in international schools through in-depth interviews of sixteen Diploma Visual Art teachers teaching in international schools in 8 different countries, conducting three interviews each, over the course of one school year. Elevating these voices of DP VA teachers contributes to a deeper understanding of how quality is conceptualized and achieved in DP VA classrooms, while also shedding light on the systemic barriers that hinder their efforts. By capturing the lived experiences of current DP VA teachers, I aim to challenge the field of art education to reconsider its priorities, ensuring that the practical realities of teaching within the IB framework and international school contexts are acknowledged.

During the process of my research, I conducted the first systemic literature review from the past decade of three top Art Education journals; *Art Education* (USA), *AD Magazine* (UK) and *Canadian Art Teacher / Enseigner les arts au Canada*, (CAN) uncovering a communication gap between K-12 Visual Art teachers and higher education. And through the process of reiterative coding, I uncovered critical issues that impact the experience of DP VA teachers. Using conflict theory as a tool, I uncovered a deeper understanding of the key issue of a systemic power structure. This led to my contribution to the field of education of a micro-credential program to bridge communication between K-12 teachers and higher education to support current DP VA teachers that can be adapted for use within universities.

I was inspired in my research by Learning Theory Professor and founder of the Journal of Education Policy, Ivor Goodson (2005) who argues, listening to teachers' stories is long overdue and Professor Emeritus from the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) in the history of consciousness and feminist studies, Donna Haraway (cited in Terranova, 2016) whose iconic statement reminds us that "we need different kinds of stories". I also align my thought process with Ahmed (2017a) as she shares that that our feminist worlds are "built through the effort to support those who are not supported because of who they are, what they want, what they do" (p. 35). In centering this study around the perspectives of DP VA teachers, this research amplifies the voices of those on the frontlines of delivering VA education. For marginalized fields like VA, storytelling becomes an essential tool for shedding light on often overlooked or minimized challenges. By capturing the voices of practitioners, this study reveals complex and multifaceted realities of conceptualizing and delivering quality VA teaching within the DP VA in international school settings.

What sets this study apart is my positionality as a researcher and practitioner engaged in authentic, collaborative conversations with DP VA teachers. It is my hope that these dialogues provide an unparalleled window into the realities of teaching DP VA within international schools. This is the first study of its kind to offer such a comprehensive and intimate account, capturing the invaluable richness of experience, dedication, and passion that these teachers bring to their work. In doing so, the research not only highlights the challenges they face but also celebrates their resilience, creativity, and commitment to fostering meaningful VA education.

Relevance of my positionality

I began my VA teaching journey at a public high school, teaching the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) with the Simcoe County Board of Education (SCBE). However, after three years, my school was slated for closure, and I was declared surplus. At these crossroads, a synchronistic turn unfolded: the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) was actively recruiting VA teachers internationally due to a shortage of creative subject educators. This was surprising to me, as my experience up to that point suggested VA was rarely prioritized, and so I accepted the opportunity. In Singapore, at Serangoon Gardens Secondary School (SGS), I was surprised to

find VA being treated as an equal academic subject. Within Singapore's Cambridge-based curriculum (GCE), students could choose VA as one of their six core subjects. All subjects are required to undergo a standardized assessment. For senior secondary levels, VA coursework was submitted for external evaluation, and students also sat for a final VA practical exam (externally graded). Singapore's educational climate is well known for both excellence and rigour. At SGS, the pressure to achieve high grades was intense, but I found the creative output of the VA students and their engagement unbelievably inspiring.

After two years at SGS, I was hired by the International School Eastern Seaboard (ISE) in Thailand to teach VA within the IB curriculum. Teaching at ISE was a transformative experience; I was the sole secondary VA teacher, responsible for grades 6 through 12, which introduced me to new opportunities and challenges within the international school setting.

As I reflect on my experiences in Singapore and Thailand, it was then I began to notice the increasing pressure around the grading system for students. In Singapore, while grades were critical, there was structured support from the MOE, including visits from VA specialists who guided curriculum implementation and connected me with other educators. In contrast, while the IB program at ISE was innovative, I felt the weight of navigating its complexities with little external support.

Teaching DP VA

It is important to note, for context, that I love teaching DP VA. To me, it represents a dynamic synergy of creativity, critical thinking, and personal growth. The DP VA classroom is a space where students delve into their individuality, express their ideas, and engage in meaningful dialogue about the world through the language of VA. I am continually inspired by the depth of inquiry and reflection the program fosters, as students tackle complex concepts while developing both technical skills and conceptual depth. Teaching DP VA allows me to guide students through the iterative process of art-making, watching them evolve not only as artists but also as thinkers and individuals. I cherish mentoring students as they explore their creative voices, situating their work within cultural, historical, and social contexts. The diversity of the international school community further enriches this experience, as students bring perspectives that constantly challenge and inspire me. Ultimately, teaching DP VA allows me to cultivate a classroom environment that prioritizes creativity, intellectual rigour, and holistic learning, preparing students to make meaningful contributions to the world through art.

However, while I deeply value teaching DP VA, there are aspects of the role that can be frustrating and, at times, disheartening. Coming from the public education system in Ontario, Canada, I was already familiar with the marginalization of VA; having to advocate for my subject, teach in a refurbished classroom that wasn't designed for VA, while also teaching multiple non-VA subjects (Atkinson, 2025). Yet one of the biggest challenges I encountered when I began teaching DP VA within international schools was navigating the rigid and often

unclear assessment framework of the IB curriculum. The lack of transparency and consistency in the assessment criteria, coupled with the pressure to prepare students for external moderation, created significant stress. I still recall my first-year teaching DP VA in Thailand, staying at school some nights until well after 10 PM during April to upload students' work to IB's assessment website (IBIS) and repeatedly reviewing submissions to ensure my predicted grades were accurate.

Teaching internationally can be exhilarating; you can experience life in a variety of locations, travel extensively, and work alongside like-minded educators who also chose an international education lifestyle. During this time, I also had the opportunity to join an international educational cohort through the University of San Francisco (USF), Washington State University, and Eastern Asia Regional Council of Schools (EARCOS), to complete my master's degree in international leadership. This experience further deepened my understanding of the complexities of international education. I continued my career in DP VA within international schools, moving to Yew Chung International School (YCIS) in Qingdao, China, where I taught K-12 and served as the Head of Department (HOD) for both Humanities and Arts, and then Shekou International School (SIS) in Shenzhen, where I took on the role of Grade 11 Head of Grade (HOG) alongside VA teaching duties. These experiences have shaped my understanding of the challenges and opportunities within international school education and reinforced my commitment to championing the value of DP VA in every context.

Teacher Support

It was during my time in Shekou that I created my website¹. With a background in information technology, creating an online resource felt like a natural extension of my skills. What began as a practical tool to support my students has since become one of the key impetuses for recognizing the broader need for this study.

I initially developed this site to address an immediate challenge. In my second year at SIS, I inherited a DP2 VA class that had struggled in DP1 and were significantly behind in skills, knowledge, and artworks. Determined to help them catch up, I spent many after-school hours devising strategies to support their learning. Drawing on research in flipped learning (Mazur, 2009), I created an online resource that broke down the DP VA components step by step, shared high-scoring exemplars, and clarified subject-specific vocabulary and expectations. By shifting instructional content to the website, I was able to dedicate class time to individualized support and art-making. Initially, the site functioned as an open-access blog for my students, but it quickly evolved into something far greater. The website I created in 2019, which initially had 5,000 visitors and 13,439 views in its first year, grew to 30,722 visitors and 109,777 views across 97 countries within two years (and still growing). For me, this overwhelming response

¹ <https://ibdpvawithmissa.com/>

underscored a widespread demand for accessible, practical support for DP VA teachers navigating the complexities of the curriculum.

As I have continued to develop as a DP VA teacher and examiner, I've observed a growing need among DP VA teachers for resources and community support. Participation in the private DP VA Facebook (Meta, Menlo Park, California, U.S.A.) groups that I am a member of has steadily increased, with membership numbers such as 2.7K in "IB Visual Arts Teachers" and 2.5K in "IB Visual Arts Teachers Group." The growth of my website has also opened the door to new opportunities, as I have been approached to mentor, collaborate, and host workshops for international schools worldwide, leading me to an awareness of the scale of the issue and prompting me to explore options to expand my knowledge on the issue within higher education.

Higher education

This led me to the Ph.D. program at Concordia University in Montreal. My doctoral studies deepened my understanding of the systemic challenges VA educators face. In a recent article (Atkinson, 2025), I shared how VA teachers often struggle with feelings of isolation, pressure, and undervaluation; issues that are far from unique to my own experience.

Ahmed (2017a) describes feminism as "a sensible reaction to the injustices of the world" (p. 20) and "making sense of what doesn't make sense" (Ahmed, 2017b, para 1.). She reflects on the process of becoming a feminist as a "bumpy journey" (para. 5), as one bumps into a world that doesn't accommodate them. This concept resonated with my experience as a DP VA teacher, navigating a system that often undervalues creativity and at times fails to support those working within it.

Through my studies, I also realized how little research exists on VA education in international schools, a context that remains underexplored in the field. This gap further fuelled my desire to advocate for the relevance, for me the importance, of VA studies in education and to contribute to the field through both research and practice.

During my time at Concordia, I took on the role of co-editor for *The Canadian Art*² journal with the Canadian Society for Education through Art/ Société canadienne d'éducation par l'art (CSEA/SCÉA)³ foundation, a position that has been both rewarding and challenging. When I began, my vision, shared with my co-editor Marie-France Berard, was to create a platform that would inspire art educators, share research, and provide practical ideas for the classroom. However, I quickly learned that encouraging submissions and engaging contributors is no easy task. The experience has given me a deeper appreciation for the complexities of academic publishing and the need to bridge the gap between research and practice in art education. It has

² www.canadianartteacher.com

³ <https://csea-scea.ca/>

also reinforced the importance of creating accessible resources for teachers who, like me, are navigating the challenges of teaching VA in diverse and often isolated contexts.

As my studies progressed to navigating my research in the field, I decided to return to teaching internationally. I felt that being immersed in the DP VA experience within international schools was essential to fully understand and build the professional networks necessary to support this study. I was fortunate to secure a position at the Canadian International School of Hong Kong (CDNIS), where I am currently the Head (HOD) of the Upper School (US) VA department. At this top-tier international school, I teach the DP VA program. In many ways, I now have the job I imagined when I began my teaching career: I teach *only* VA, and I've worked hard to develop a thriving program. As I write this, having just completed the organization of our DP VA exhibition, uploaded moderated submissions, reviewed process portfolios, and examined 100 external Comparative Studies (CS), I am mentally drained. The “feminist killjoy” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 571) in me asks: Why does this seem so challenging? Is it just me? Or is this a systemic issue faced by DP VA teachers within international schools globally?

Granted, balancing full-time teaching, department head responsibilities, and dissertation research has prolonged the timeline for completing my studies. At times, I feel frustrated by the lack of hours I have in a day to devote to both. However, my position has given me invaluable opportunities to connect with other DP VA teachers within international schools who have participated in my research. These conversations have been profoundly inspiring, as we've shared artist interests, gallery visits, and virtual tours of DP VA studios. Simply talking with others who understand the pressures of teaching within international schools has been a source of motivation. Despite the marginalization and relentless pressures we face, DP VA teachers continue to show up for their students, searching out artists, developing creative lessons, and celebrating the magic of the art-making process.

What began as an academic assignment has evolved into a passion project for me. Teaching DP VA and supporting DP VA teachers to rediscover the joy in teaching VA is deeply fulfilling. I am grateful for the Thomson Family Scholarship from Concordia's Art Education department, as it was the impetus for beginning this journey. I also acknowledge my privilege as a Canadian-born, native English-speaking female of European/Celtic ancestry, which has undoubtedly opened doors for me that may not be accessible to others. I recognize that my position within international school education is rooted in systems of privilege and Western hegemonic biases, and I strive to honour this awareness by acting as an ally and mentor to all teachers and students, regardless of background, to create more equitable teaching environments.

I also recognize that drawing on Ahmed's (2017a) writings while discussing issues within an elite, well-resourced educational system may seem discordant. However, Ahmed's ideas resonate with me because international school education is not isolated from broader systemic issues. Feminism, as Ahmed notes, begins by unpacking inequities where you are, and through this

study, I aim to shine further light on the inequities DP VA teachers face. The IB curriculum is expanding rapidly, even into national public education systems, and the students being taught within international schools today are future policymakers, leaders, and changemakers (Xoai, 2020). The work we do today as teachers has implications far beyond the classroom, it has the potential to shape the future.

Chapter 1 : Theoretical Underpinnings

In this chapter, I examine the pressing issues surrounding the recent updates to the DP Visual Arts (VA) curriculum, the International Baccalaureate (IB) 2030 strategic goals, and UNESCO's 2030 Agenda, with particular attention to the implications for teacher shortages. I argue that the findings of my study could address and influence these challenges in meaningful ways. I also discuss the thematic foundations of feminist theory, drawing on the work of scholars Sara Ahmed, Donna Haraway, Jillian Sandell, Georgia Collins, Karen Keifer-Boyd, and June King McFee. These perspectives offer a critical lens through which to analyze the intersections of gender, power, and education allowing me to revisit Linda Nochlin's (1971) seminal question, "Why have there been no great women artists?" as a conceptual framework to explore the structural inequities and narratives guiding my study. Through this exploration, I position my research within broader discourses of equity, representation, and art education.

DP VA curriculum updates

IB has recently released updates to the DP VA curriculum, set to be first examined in 2027, with first implementation beginning in August 2025 (for the Northern Hemisphere) (IBO, n.d. a). While the curriculum retains its core structure of three components, it introduces significant developments, such as the addition of word counts to address the extensive writing requirements and a stronger emphasis on visual reflections and evidence of the art-making process rather than relying heavily on written explanations. Additionally, the updates now provide clearer differentiation between Standard Level (SL) and Higher Level (HL) components, which many DP VA teachers may see as a welcome change. Perhaps most notably, the curriculum encourages students to situate themselves and their artworks within their local experiences; an inclusive and culturally responsive approach that allows for greater personal interpretation and relevance.

Despite these promising developments, significant concerns remain. Assessment practices, which were highlighted in this study as a major area of frustration and a critical factor impacting quality within DP VA teaching, will not be fully understood until the first round of examinations in May 2027. This delay leaves DP VA teachers navigating substantial changes without clarity on how these updates will translate into assessment outcomes. Findings from my research emphasize the isolation, lack of training, and limited resources faced by DP VA teachers in international schools; challenges that are exacerbated by the curriculum updates. The dissemination of information regarding the changes has been limited, and exemplars or detailed guidance on the updated components are not yet publicly available. These gaps in communication and support amplify the urgency of my research, as DP VA teachers face the dual pressures of adapting to a new curriculum while continuing to grapple with systemic issues of assessment relevance. I believe that it is crucial that to ensure the successful implementation of these updates and the realization of quality teaching within the DP VA programme that the voices of DP VA teachers are heard. This study is integral to this effort, as it provides a platform for DP VA teachers to share their experiences, challenges, and insights. By centering their perspectives, this research

not only addresses the existing gaps in communication but also empowers DP VA teachers by valuing their expertise and contributions. In doing so, I am advocating for more inclusive and informed decision-making processes within the IB framework, ensuring that the evolving DP VA program aligns with the realities of classroom practice.

International Baccalaureate 2030

The IB curriculum framework is also currently undergoing significant updates, with plans to revamp its full curricula by 2030. The rationale behind these changes is to better prepare students for future learning and careers by emphasizing an online focus and integrating themes of sustainability, environmental awareness, and life skills. These updates also include the introduction of emergent subjects, such as leadership skills, to align with evolving global priorities. Notably, by 2026, all World Exams within the DP programme will transition to fully digital formats, signalling a major shift in the way students engage with assessments and learning (IBO, n.d. b).

An area of concern in the early communications surrounding these updates is the noticeable absence of discussions about creative subjects, including DP VA. This omission raises questions about the potential marginalization, or increased marginalization, of these disciplines in favour of a greater emphasis on online, digital, and AI-focused modalities. The lack of explicit attention to creative subjects suggests a troubling trend, as it risks diminishing the role of arts education in fostering critical thinking, creativity, and cultural awareness; skills that are equally vital for future learning and careers.

These developments further underscore the urgency of advocating for the importance of creative subjects, such as DP VA, within the broader educational landscape. Without intentional efforts to integrate and prioritize the arts in these updates, there is a risk that creative disciplines will be sidelined in favour of more technical or utilitarian fields. This highlights the need for scholars within the field to ensure that art education remains a central component of a holistic education, advocating for its essential role in preparing students not just for careers, but for meaningful and reflective engagement with the world.

UNESCO 2030

In preparation for 2030, UNESCO introduced the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. (United Nations, 2015) to serve as a unified blueprint for fostering peace and prosperity among all United Nations Member States. Central to this agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which represent an urgent call to action for all nations through global collaboration. Of particular relevance to this study is SDG 4, which emphasizes quality education, which I explore in more detail in Chapter three.

Following the call for quality education, UNESCO issued a *Global Report on Teachers* (2024), impacting the earlier agenda and warning of a significant global teacher shortage by 2030, with an estimated 44 million additional primary and secondary educators needed worldwide. While

some regions benefit from well-resourced education systems, many areas face severe challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers, jeopardizing both the quality and equity of education on a global scale.

This challenge is further compounded by alarming attrition rates (UNESCO, 2024). A significant proportion of teachers leave the profession within their first five years, citing burnout, lack of support, and systemic pressures as key factors. These trends underscore the urgency of addressing the professional well-being of educators and ensuring that teaching remains a sustainable and attractive career path. The looming teacher shortage is not just a logistical issue but a critical threat to the future of education worldwide.

The report calls for reclaiming teachers' roles as collaborative, autonomous professionals who can leverage technology to enhance teaching and communication with students and parents. While there are limited studies specifically on VA teachers, examining broader research on teacher shortages, burnout, and retention offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by the teaching profession as a whole.

Questions unanswered

Feminism which Ahmed (2017) described as a “sensible reaction to the injustices of the world” (para. 1), offers an objective lens rooted in situated knowledge, which allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see (Haraway, 1988). Feminist pedagogies value personal experience, process over content, emotions, non-hierarchical classrooms, multiple perspectives, diversity in knowledge production, and social action (Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2002), while central to feminist pedagogy is the transformation of dominant power relations (Lather, 1991; hooks, 1994; Ellsworth, 1992; Manicom, 1992; Keifer-Boyd, 2003). My study is first and foremost a “situated” (Haraway, 1988, p. 581) exploration, “rooted in my own structural location, positioning, professional genealogy, past and recent experiences, and future hopes and envisionings” (Longman & DeGraeve, 2014, p. 33) in the field of VA education.

In undertaking this study, my aim was to explore ‘nagging feelings’ (Ahmed, 2017a) while arguing for “a doctrine and practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing” (Haraway, 1988, p. 585). By exploring the stories of other DP VA teachers through the lens of my own positionality, through an understanding of interpretation and translation, I felt that I could present the stories of DP VA teachers in a way that they could be seen and heard.

Early in my Ph.D. studies, I was drawn to 90’s feminism discussions when art educators Jillian Sandell (1991) and Georgia Collins (1981) examined the marginalization of art education and the diminished role of VA teacher within the U.S.A. educational system. I felt seen as I read art educator Karen Keifer-Boyd (2003) emphasizing the need to incorporate feminist principles of

shared leadership, valuing all voices, and attending to process while June King McFee (1998) reminded us that we are shaped by cultural norms, which underlie how VA teachers navigate their marginalized roles. When Sandell (1991) noted how art education's status within schools and its suppression by systems undermine VA teachers' artistic agency and silence students' creative voices, and how this perpetuates societal misconceptions that VA is less academic and that VA teachers are inferior (Okonkwo, 2014), I shouted 'yes!' I knew all too well that VA teachers are often tasked with 'servicing' (Collins, 1995; Keifer-Boyd & Smith-Shank, 2006) other school needs, such as scenery design or yearbook production. I know this because I have done (do) all of those things.

While reading through this research, I was frequently struck with "a sensation that begins at the back of your mind, an uneasy sense of something amiss, gradually comes forward, as things come up, then receding, as you try to get on with things; as you try to get on despite things" (Ahmed, 2017a, p. 27), as their arguments resonated deeply with my 20 years of experience teaching VA in K-12 public and international schools. The marginalization of VA teachers and the lack of resolution regarding the role of VA within the school system is a theme that is echoed by VA teachers that I have collaborated with and met at workshops and conferences across the globe. It irks me that the questions that were raised over thirty years ago have not been answered, and the critical observations of how the VA teacher was perceived within the general educational system have not been resolved.

Ahmed (2017a) observes that "to become accommodating, we take up less space" (p. 24). In my own experience and observations and discussion with DP VA teachers, I have observed this as a common phenomenon of DP VA teachers taking up 'less space'. The DP VA subject is offered as an option or as an art-integrated subject that supports core subjects. The DP VA teacher, since their course is not a core subject, is required to teach a plethora of classes ranging from K-12 as well as differing curricula while also squeezing in time to promote their subject within the school. DP VA teachers organize large-scale exhibitions into schedules that prioritize core subjects, literally squeezing their students' exhibitions into small spaces, classrooms, and limited time schedules, sometimes only being granted a few hours to display two years of their student's culminative work (Kotowich, 2021). Many DP VA teachers are stretched even thinner, teaching across grades, curricula, and subjects, while being shouldered with the decoration of schools' walls, posters, set designs, ad hoc displays, as well as other aesthetic promotional non-teaching responsibilities.

As Ahmed (2017a) writes, "feminist theory taught me that the universal is what needs to be exploded" (p. 28). By identifying patterns that have long been accepted as 'just the way it is', my study seeks to explore and uncover patterns that are normalized, but that need to be brought to the light, unpacking how DP VA teachers, often overlooked and undervalued, navigate their roles and sustain themselves in an educational system that continues to marginalize their discipline.

Impetus for exploring quality

Leaning into feminist theory, my comprehensive exam marked the beginning of my exploration of the DP VA course through a critical lens. For my theoretical question, I revisited Linda Nochlin's (1971) seminal question: "Why have there been no great women artists?" (p. 1). This question struck a deep chord with me, it felt immediate, relevant, and urgent. It's a question that surfaces often in my DP VA classes, particularly during the research-based comparative study (CS) component, where students grapple with the canon of 'great' artists. The issue becomes even more pronounced in the demographics of my own classrooms. Across my career, the majority of my VA students have identified as female, often overwhelmingly so. IB doesn't release information publicly on gender balances within their program, but as a for instance, over the past three years at Canadian International School Hong Kong (CDNIS), my DP VA classes have included ratios of 8:4, 14:1, and 14:2 (female to male). And yet, the dominance of male artists in the canon continues to pervade discussions of art history and conceptions of 'great'-ness.

Post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Sociology specialising in gender inequality and gender-based violence in artistic education at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munchen, Mathilde Provansal (2025) noted that women have constituted an increasingly large majority of VA students over the past thirty years with more than 60% of tertiary art school students being women (DEPS, 2023; Galodé, 1994; The Countess, 2019; Gromada et al., 2016; Robinson, 2021; Frenette et al., 2020). These recent statistics are clearly mirrored within this study, where 92% of the participating DP VA teachers are female. However, Provansal notes that as of 2019, only 41% of visual artists were noted as women, and they continue to be less visible within the contemporary art market and in institutions.

As I traced feminist literature in art education, I saw the question of marginalization expand beyond gender to encompass any identity falling outside the dominant hegemonic narrative. I also traced the intentional divide and devaluation of VA as a subject within school systems. It became clear that Nochlin's question could not be theorized away.

Through my research and linking these feminist critiques to broader educational theories of teacher identity (Foucault, 1977; Haraway, 1985; Britzman, 1992; Clandinin et al, 1999; Cohen-Evron, 2002; Blair & Fitch, 2015), motivations (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000; Manuel & Hughes, 2006; Thomson, Turner, & Nietfeld, 2012; Azman, 2013; Watt et al., 2012; Kim & Cho, 2014; Balyer & Özcan, 2014; Bergmark et al., 2018), teacher voice (Cajete, 1994; Coia & Taylor, 2009; Sinner, 2013; Grumet, 2014), as well as burnout and retention (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Pillay et al., 2005; Kara, 2020; Fundaro, 2025). I began to understand Nochlin's question from a structural perspective. The absence of 'great' women artists was not due to a lack of talent, training, or familial support. Rather, it reflects the workings of a hegemonic system that perpetuates what Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci (1971) named the myth of meritocracy. In this system, it's not that marginalized artists weren't good enough, it's that their work was

systematically excluded because it did not serve the interests of the dominant power structures. And through the myth of meritocracy, it is packaged as of less quality, as though the fault lay with the artists because their work was not ‘good enough’.

This mirrors the circumstances I see within the teaching of the DP VA. If students do not choose to take DP VA, the blame falls on the DP VA teacher for failing to inspire them, not on the system that marginalizes it as an optional course. If students do not achieve high grades, the blame is split between the DP VA teacher and the student themselves for not being ‘good enough’ at technical skills and conceptual narratives or correctly interpreting or predicting how the IB examiners will interpret their work. These narratives of failure obscure the systemic forces at play; forces that devalue DP VA education and marginalize both the DP VA teachers and students.

I argue that the critical question to take away within Nochlin’s work is not simply, ‘Why are there no great women artists?’ but rather to break down the components of the question. To consider, what is ‘great’ (or in this study, quality)? Who defines ‘great’ and how is ‘great’ conceptualized or understood? And to further unpack ‘what is art? who defines what is art? how is art defined?’

Within the field of art education, this is not a simple question, one that not even art education scholars can agree on (Siegmund, 1998). In the context of this study, these questions translate into: ‘How does the IB define quality within the DP VA curriculum?’ ‘How do DP VA teachers conceptualize and understand how IB defines quality?’ and ‘How do DP VA teachers then realize quality within the DP VA course? How do they structure their courses, organize their classrooms and teach their students to ensure they offer this understanding of quality’.

For me, this process is deeply personal. As I engage with Ahmed’s (2010) concept of the feminist killjoy to confront an uncomfortable truth: the system I am critiquing is the same system I have worked hard to be a part of, the same system that supports my livelihood, and the same system that gives me the opportunity to focus my teaching on the subject I love; Visual Arts. This tension fuels my inquiry. Feminism is not just theoretical; it is a way of re-inhabiting the past, of grappling with the inequities that shape our lives and our work. This study is my way of continuing Nochlin’s inquiry, interrogating quality within the context of DP VA within international schools.

Chapter 2 : On International Schools and the International Baccalaureate

This chapter examines international schools and the IB Diploma Programme (DP) through the lens of key international education scholars Paul Tarc, Mary Hayden, and Jeff Thompson, Philip Brown, Hugh Lauder, Lucy Bailey, Lucy Cooker, and the former Managing Director of the IB, Ian Hill. I also reference insights from ISC Research. Building on this foundation, I delve into the IB DP Visual Arts (VA) course, providing a comprehensive overview of its aims, framework, and three core components. Additionally, I discuss the significance of its assessment practices and the unique considerations required for teaching DP VA. For this I draw on the expertise of former chief examiners Tom Anderson, Doug Boughton, and Fiona Blaikie, as well as insights from past IB Group 6 coordinators and scholars Kenneth Elpus and Michael Bindon.

What are international schools?

Historically, international schools were established to serve the children of diplomats, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) workers, and multinational employees. ‘International’, as a former international school teacher, now researcher in Comparative and International Education at Western University, Paul Tarc (2007) describes, appears to be a modifier of education, marking international education as distinctive from other educational models. The term ‘international’ can refer to programs that are recognized or enacted across or between national jurisdictions; but on the other hand, the term ‘international’, in terms of education, invokes a set of “liberal-humanist visions and progressive pedagogical approaches hinged on modernist hopes that education can make a more peaceful and prosperous world” (p. 238).

International education researchers Mary Hayden and Jeff Thompson (2000) from the University of Bath posit that although originally inspired by ideals of fostering peace, cooperation, and mutual understanding, international schools were shaped by curricular programs like the IB, where tensions between the ideological dream of ‘international understanding’ came up against the practical demands of producing an internationally recognized and valued diploma to support expatriate students’ access to their home-country universities while providing a comprehensive and sophisticated education (Hayden et al., 2000; Tarc, 2007). However, Professor of Social Sciences at Cardiff University Philip Brown and Professor of Education and Political Economy at the University of Bath, Hugh Lauder (2011) share that globalization has further reframed these ideals, raising concerns about the role of international schools in promoting global positional competition for credentials and access to world-class universities, as well as potential involvement in forming a transnational ruling class (Lauder, 2006; Brown & Lauder, 2011) highlighting the privileged nature of international schools and raising questions about social class formation, particularly regarding how privileged students understand global challenges, their rights and duties, and their access to influential positions in society (MacDonald, 2006).

Within international school frameworks, core values such as peace, respect, and equality are emphasized; however, these systems are far from homogeneous in terms of curricula and student

demographics (Hayden et al., 2000). A unifying principle among international schools is the concept of being “international,” which is often tied to fostering an appreciation for and understanding of global cultures (Hayden et al., 2000). This performative cultivation of intercultural awareness and global mindsets influences not only students but also educators within these settings. Such dynamics align with environmental educator David A. Grunewald’s (2003) critical pedagogy of place, which seeks to achieve two interconnected goals: re-inhabitation; identifying, recovering, and creating material spaces and places that teach us how to live sustainably within our environments, and decolonization; challenging and transforming ways of thinking that perpetuate harm and exploitation toward people and places (Grunewald, 2003a, p. 9). Within this context, international school teachers must navigate the complexities of teaching in unfamiliar cultural and geographical settings with both sensitivity and critical engagement (Budrow & Tarc, 2018). At the same time, they are tasked with upholding the commitments of international schools to fostering globally-minded, multicultural learning environments that celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity (Kloosterman & Kloosterman, 2023).

International school growth

The rapid growth of the international school sector provides a critical context for this study. According to International School Conference (ISC) Research (Shaw, 2024), there are now 14,010 English-medium international schools enrolling over 6.9 million students (aged 3 to 18) and employing 664,645 teaching staff globally, generating \$60 billion annually, with the largest share in Asia (57%), followed by the Americas (15%), Europe (14%), Africa (12%), and Oceania (2%). The fast-growing sector continues to expand, already surpassing earlier projections, such as Chairman and Founder of The International School Consultancy Group (of which ISC Research is a part) Nicholas Brummitt’s (2007) estimate of 11,000 schools and 4.9 million students by 2020.

The expansion of international schools is considered to be driven by globalization and the growing global middle class, particularly in Asia, Europe, and Africa (Brummitt, 2007; ISC, 2020). Brown & Lauder (2011) note that two key factors fuelling this growth are the rise of transnational companies, NGOs, and the polarization of wealth, enabling emerging elites to enrol their children in international schools to secure credentials and networks for access to the global professional labour market. By 2030, it is estimated that 15% of the world’s population is expected to belong to the global middle class, projected at 1.2 billion people accessing international education and influencing global policies (World Bank, 2007). This growing demographic, with increased access to international travel and education, is expected to influence both national and global policies. Looking ahead, ISC Research (Shaw, 2024) predicts continued growth in the international school sector, as these schools offer globally recognized qualifications that support students aspiring to international higher education.

The IB framework is the only ‘international’ curriculum, but many international schools do not offer the IB DP program, a disparity particularly evident in Asia, which has the largest number of international schools but the smallest percentage offering the IB DP (IBO, 2024a). Many international schools choose Western country-centric curricula affiliated with specific national denominations. For example, American international schools will use the Advanced Placement (AP) frameworks while British international schools will use the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Many will also offer supplementary curricula connected to local education in host countries

While most internationals deliver curricula in English, increasingly more international schools are offering bilingual options, reflecting the linguistic and cultural diversity within this global service industry. According to ISC Research, demand for English-medium international education continues to be high in non-English-speaking countries (ISC, 2020, 2021, 2022).

International school educational environment

International school systems largely serve the wealthiest global strata. For context, in 2024, initial tuition fees per student attending international schools in Hong Kong ranged from \$200,000 HKD (\$35,000 CDN) to \$250,000 HKD (\$45,000 CDN). This does not include additional fees for meals, uniforms, transportation, external learning experiences as well as extra-curricular interests that students may have. Given the average annual salary in Hong Kong per year is noted as roughly \$550,000 HKD (\$95,000 CDN), (Census and Statistics Department, 2025) the cost of international schools can only be maintained yearly by those earning well above average.

This environment creates what are commonly referred to as third culture kids (TCKs) and transnational nomads. TCKs grow up in foreign countries where they are not fully integrated but also feel disconnected from their home countries. Instead, they often find belonging within the ‘third culture’ fostered within international schools (Brown & Lauder, 2011), creating for themselves a sense of well-being and an understanding of ‘home’ in the place where they are; in what Concordia Art Education professor and Research Chair in Art + Education for Sustainable and Just Futures, Kathleen Vaughan (2009) eloquently describes “as an ever-shifting standpoint from which to learn, grow, understand oneself” while contributing to the life around them (p. 6).

Neo-Marxist theories, such as Robinson’s (2004) perspective on the transnational ruling class, argue that international schools and elite universities contribute to a global elite by providing shared experiences and networks. Reich’s (1991) theory on global labour markets highlights a growing prioritization of technical, IT, and business skills, which aligns with the educational environment noted within international schools using the DP framework, where core subjects of math, sciences, and technical subjects are prioritized while creative subjects are marginalized with ‘optional status’ (Brown & Lauder, 2011). International school students are then easily

accepted into top universities, which in turn feed the top transnational corporations (OECD, 2023).

Through contemporary global communication, a rise in criticisms of international schools by graduates has arisen, critiquing the elite, Euro-centric nature of their education. While grateful for the opportunities and experiences they provided, past international school students David Xoai (2020) and Caitlyn Yao (2023) of Organisation to Decolonise International Schools (ODIS) describe international schools environments as shaped by Western ideals, with well-funded facilities, global curricula, and a student body drawn from the world's elite, with future CEOs, diplomats, and policymakers, who will have a place in influencing global decisions. These criticisms raise concerns about a democratic deficit (Brown, 2000), as international schools operate outside national education systems, allowing them to prioritize parental wealth and preferences over public educational goals or equity (Brown & Lauder, 2011; Bailey, 2015; Hayden & Thompson, 2015).

This rapidly expanding sector, shaped by globalization and socio-economic dynamics, presents challenges and opportunities for delivering high-quality arts education (IBO, 2014). Understanding the complexities of the international school environment is crucial to contextualizing the DP VA programme, which operates within this dynamic global landscape.

Evolution of the International Baccalaureate

The International Baccalaureate (IB) was first developed in the late 1960s, with the Diploma Programme (DP) being presented as an internationally recognized secondary school diploma and university entrance qualification for expatriate students in private international schools (Peterson, 2003; Tarc, 2009). With an emphasis on educating “the whole person” (Tarc, 2009, p. 239), former Managing Director of the IB, Ian Hill (2007) shared that the program aimed to foster international understanding, global citizenship, and critical thinking through a balanced curriculum in the humanities, sciences, and experiential learning. Former IB Arts researcher, now Music Professor at the University of Maryland, Kenneth Elpus (2019) shared that the DP also prioritized aesthetic learning, linking arts education with intercultural awareness and international mindedness.

First piloted at the International School of Geneva (ISG), the DP awarded its first diplomas in 1971 (Hill, 2007). While initially tied to ideals of promoting peace and equity, the IB has also faced criticism for being used by social elites to access top universities (Tarc, 2009). However, the IB curriculum remains rooted in its founding principles of constructivist, student-centered learning. A strong influence on Alec Peterson, the first Director General of the IB, was the British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, who advocated for an educational approach that encourages students to make ideas their own and understand the application of these ideas within their own lives and curriculum (IBO, 2019), emphasizing the real-world application of knowledge (IBO, 2014). With this interdisciplinary approach, IB contends it prepares students

for a globalized world. Chief Master of King Edward’s School Birmingham, John Cloughton (2017) praises the IB, calling it more intellectually demanding than other curricula.

The sequential IB continuum is comprised of four interconnected educational programmes: the Primary Years Programme (PYP), the Middle Years Programme (MYP), the Diploma Programme (DP), and the Career-related Programme (CP). Additionally, the IB has identified 10 learner profile attributes (IBO, 2013) that students will develop across the IB continuum: inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective (IBO, 2014).

The IB’s pedagogical philosophy is underpinned by six key principles: inquiry-based, conceptually focused, contextualized, collaborative, differentiated, and informed by assessment (both formative and summative). These principles are manifested through the IB’s Approaches to Teaching and Approaches to Learning (IBO, 2019) framework, which encourages teachers to consider andragogical approaches and to develop students’ thinking, social, communication, self-management, and research skills.

Within the DP programme, students choose six subjects to study during their last two years of secondary schooling, along with mandatory courses in Theory of Knowledge (TOK), Creativity, Action and Service (CAS), and the Extended Essay (EE). Visual Arts (VA) is categorized within Group 6: The Arts, which is the only optional group within the programme. Students can choose to forego studying a Group 6 subject in favour of an additional language or science course, a choice that marginalizes the creative subjects (Elpus, 2019; Bindon, 2023).

Figure 2. IB Diploma Programme info graph



Note: IB Diploma Programme Info graph sourced from <https://ibo.org/digital-toolkit/logos-and-programme-models/>

Research on the DP programme underscores its positive impact on student outcomes. Empirical studies indicate that DP students demonstrate stronger critical thinking skills compared to non-DP students (Hopfenbeck et al., 2018, 2020), and participation in CAS fosters perseverance, interpersonal competence, and adaptability (Hayden et al., 2017). Additionally, DP students outperform their peers academically, with higher SAT scores, grade point averages (GPAs), and college retention rates (Aldana, Mayer, & Ee, 2020), and are more likely to enrol in top universities, particularly in the UK (Duxbury et al., 2021). Alumni also credit the program with fostering global perspectives, communication skills, and collaboration, effectively preparing them for higher education (Lee et al., 2017). Nevertheless, potential biases must be acknowledged, given that a considerable body of DP research is affiliated with the IB organization itself (Hanover Research, 2010; Tarver, 2010; Tarc & Beatty, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2015). Thus, independent and rigorous research such as this study are essential for an objective and comprehensive understanding of the DP's impact and implementation.

Teaching IB in international schools

The IB's global reach is significant, with 7,232 programs offered in 5,402 schools across 158 countries, of which 3,487 schools offer the DP programme (IBO, 2025). The DP is further expanding into public education systems, including in the U.A.E., U.S.A., South Korea, and Turkey (IBO, 2021).

Lucy Bailey and Lucy Cooker (2019) from Bahrain Teachers College project that the international school teaching sector will employ up to 800,000 teachers by 2026 yet remains largely underrepresented in academic literature. The role of educators teaching within international schools often involves teaching their specialized academic or vocational subjects in a foreign-to them country, often in multicultural contexts (International Educator, 2025). Most international school teachers are native English speakers educated in Western countries like U.S.A., U.K., Australia, Canada and South Africa. That international school teachers are heavily recruited from western countries reflects the preference for English-mother-tongue educators, perpetuating the status of English within globalized markets (Hayden & Thompson, 2008; Canterford, 2009; Shaw, 2024).

Hayden and Thompson (2008) theorize that international school teachers are motivated by factors such as the opportunity for a portable career, travel, attractive employment packages, and connections to other countries. International school contracts typically last 2–3 years, enabling mobility, but decisions to teach abroad are also influenced by local employment laws and tax regulations (Sutcliffe, 1991; Garton, 2000). It is open to debate whether the values, behaviours, customs, attitudes, beliefs, and artifacts of this group of internationally mobile teachers can be considered a distinct “culture.”, but Bates (2008) notes that international school teachers share experiences of “impermanence, transience and constant readjustment to other cultures” (p. 127). As I discussed in the Introduction, I find teaching internationally inspiring due to the

opportunities for travel and immersion into different cultural locations, as well as for connections with like-minded educators.

The teaching population of international schools is more nuanced than a simple dichotomy of expatriate and local teachers. Through his research, Professor of Education at the University of Missouri Bryan Garton (2000) categorized international school teachers into host-country nationals, local hire expatriates, and overseas hires, with overseas hires generally receiving the most advantageous salaries and benefits. Hardman (2001) further classifies international school teachers into childless career professionals, mavericks, and career professionals with families, while Bailey & Cooker (2019) add accidental teachers (who had not intentionally sought to join the profession) and Third Culture teachers (TCT, adapted from the concept of TCK).

Within current international school systems, it is generally assumed that western recruited teachers will be trained in their country of origin before taking up a teaching position within international schools. While most international schools adopt Western liberal, student-centered pedagogies, the increasingly multilingual and multicultural student populations pose challenges for teachers, particularly those not trained in the Western recruitment countries but in more teacher-centered, didactic systems (Hayden & Thompson, 2011). For the most part, new teachers are expected to learn the skills required within the international school context “on the job”. Stirzaker (2004) highlights that new teachers often experience feelings of being ‘deskilled’ and many encounter further professional challenges as experienced international school teachers, as they are commonly burdened with supporting new teachers.

Considerations of the DP teacher

Teaching within the DP programme differs significantly from teaching in international schools (as one may teach DP within non-international schools and teach other curricula within international schools), but many educators navigate both roles simultaneously. This dual responsibility increases challenges, as teachers must balance the operational demands of the DP programme with the broader expectations of their international school communities. These added complexities often lead to heightened workloads and competing priorities for teachers.

Lee et al. (2022) share that DP teachers report higher job and work environment satisfaction compared to non-IB teachers, likely due to teaching academically able students in engaging, content-rich classes and access to PD opportunities. However, they also experience greater work-related stress, attributed to the administrative demands of program planning, assessment, and accreditation. DP teachers spend a significant amount of time on non-core activities, such as uploading submissions, reflecting the operational requirements of the program.

Educationally, DP teachers are considered advanced, often possessing master’s degrees, diverse educational backgrounds, and international experiences, such as studying abroad. Teaching within the DP program emphasizes inquiry-based, student-centered learning, requiring students to take initiative, propose and follow lines of inquiry, and construct their own understanding.

These characteristics align with the IB's Approaches to Teaching and their student-focused Approaches to Learning (IBO, 2019). Balancing the demands of DP teaching with the broader expectations of international schools requires significant effort, highlighting the need for robust support systems and professional development to ensure teachers can effectively implement the program while maintaining well-being (Zimmerman, 2002; Hayden & Thompson, 2011).

Hidden curriculums

Unlike corporate expatriates who receive cross-cultural training, international school teachers independently seek positions through recruitment services like Search⁴, and newly partnered Schrole⁵ and Times Educational Supplement (TES)⁶ (Hayden & Thompson, 2008). Many teachers often lack awareness of the specific context of their chosen international school before arriving to start their position. The teaching experiences within international schools can differ greatly, influenced by various factors such as the perspectives and views of stakeholders, the isolation of the school, administrative policies, and the prevailing school culture. These elements can sometimes create conditions that lead to political conflicts for teachers.

Blase and Anderson (1995) observed that international schools are neither static nor predictable but can be messy, conflict-laden environments masked by their public image and influenced by market competition and survival pressures. Powerful clientele, board influence, and school leadership, alongside globalization and neoliberal market trends, establish hegemonic influences on the international school educational environment, exerting considerable power to determine the school's direction, while leadership and staff relationships serve as the key agents of micro-politics (Ball, 1987; Sklair, 2001; Robertson, 2003).

Navigating cultural differences

International school educators must navigate teaching students alongside working with colleagues from diverse cultural backgrounds, often representing 40 or more nationalities, requiring intercultural sensitivity, English language teaching skills, and adaptability to concept-based education (Hayden & Thompson, 2011; Hayden et al., 2017; Stirzaker, 2004).

The ideological dimension for students aligns with the core principles of international schools, which emphasize fostering global peacemakers who promote respect and understanding across cultural and linguistic boundaries. These students are encouraged to challenge prejudice and ignorance, break down barriers, and take responsibility for addressing global issues that go beyond national borders. Consequently, international school teachers must not only possess the technical expertise to effectively teach their subject in a multicultural setting but also embody and model the values that international schools strive to instil in their students. These ideals are

⁴ <https://www.searchassociates.com/>

⁵ <https://www.schrole.com/>

⁶ <https://www.tes.com/>

embedded within each international school mission statements and are highlighted within their curriculum documents, such as those highlighted within the IB's Learner Profiles (IBO, 2013). These skills are critical for navigating a globalized world and fostering future global citizens (Hayden et al., 2015).

Culture, defined as shared behaviours and collective programming of the mind (Useem et al., 1963; Hofstede, 1997), shapes beliefs about teaching and learning. While teacher behaviour is rooted in theoretical frameworks like behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism (Skinner, 1969; Sternberg, 1999; Vygotsky, 1962) and curriculum content and pedagogy are influenced by cultural norms (Van Oord, 2005), international school environments can become confusing with teachers and students coming from different understandings. Teachers can feel challenged in international school educational environments to critically reflect on the values they teach, both explicitly and implicitly, to avoid perpetuating cultural imperialism (Fail, 2011; Brown, 2002). The increasing diversity of international schools necessitates rethinking teacher preparation, professional development, and intercultural competencies, creating a growing demand for specialized preparation and qualifications for international school teachers (Hayden & Thompson, 2011; Snowball, 2007).

On the IB DP Visual Arts framework

While the Diploma (DP) programme has experienced substantial global growth, the Visual Arts (VA) course has followed a more nuanced trajectory due to its status within Group 6 as an optional subject. Former Chief DP VA Examiner, now Art Education professor at Brock University, Fiona Blaikie (Blaikie & Hafeli, 2019) shares that pedagogically, DP VA is rooted in John Dewey's (1938) progressivism, emphasizing experiential learning and self-directed inquiry rather than rote memorization, being intentionally designed as a response to the marginalization of arts education for secondary-age students. As of 2023, DP VA enrolled 15,732 candidates globally. In the Americas, the U.S.A., U.K., and Canada have the highest concentration of VA candidates, while China, India, and Australia lead in the Asia-Pacific region (IBO, 2023).

In their literature, IB describes the DP VA course as a course that “encourages students to challenge their own creative and cultural expectations and boundaries.” (IBO, 2020, para. 2) It fosters analytical skills, problem-solving, divergent thinking, and technical proficiency while promoting exploration of diverse artistic perspectives and media. Students are encouraged to experiment, critically reflect, and engage with a wide range of contemporary practices.

Former DP VA chief examiner, now Art Education professor at Florida University, Tom Anderson (1994) highlights that the DP VA course benefits not only future artists but also future citizens by fostering “the power of general critical appreciation” (p. 21). He describes the DP VA as a model for content-based art education, integrating art history, criticism, skills-based visual studies, and culturally contextualized, personally driven creative work. Former DP VA Chief Examiner for DP VA, now Art Education professor at Northern Illinois University, Doug

Boughton (2005) observed that the DP VA embraces all forms of visual cultural production, allowing students to engage with both fine and popular arts. The program emphasizes the content and context of artistic expression, encouraging students to develop classroom experiences into independent explorations. Its open-ended structure enables students to take creative risks and move beyond traditional exercises. Elpus (2019) also praises the DP VA course for countering the homogenizing effects of globalization by “nurturing creative individuals with their own sense of identity” (p. 8). Additionally, feminist pedagogical approaches can be integrated into the DP VA, encouraging students to relate course content to their own lives, ensuring personal and meaningful engagement with art at various stages of development (Speirs, 1991).

DP VA current framework (2016)

The DP VA course, which has gone through several incarnations of its framework (a brief history of DP VA is outlined in Appendix C), encourages students to challenge their creative and cultural boundaries. The current DP VA framework (first released in 2014, implemented in 2016, and updated in 2017) was designed as a thought-provoking program that develops analytical skills in problem-solving and divergent thinking, while fostering technical proficiency and confidence as art-makers. Students are expected to engage with, experiment with, and critically reflect on a wide range of contemporary practices and media (IBO, 2014). It is structured around three core areas: Visual Arts in Context, Visual Arts Methods, and Communicating Visual Arts.

- Visual Arts in Context explores the perspectives, theories, and cultures that influence visual arts practice.
- Visual Arts Methods focus on developing skills, techniques, and processes through engaging with different media.
- Communicating Visual Arts involves understanding and applying the processes of selecting and exhibiting artworks.

These three areas are woven together through the three areas of practice: Theoretical, Art-Making, and Curatorial. The interconnected areas provide a holistic framework that allows teachers to tailor content and activities to their school context, while ensuring alignment with the program’s assessment objectives (IBO, 2014).

DP VA students can approach the course within two strands: Higher Level (HL) and Standard Level (SL), both working through the three integrated areas of practice, but with differentiated expectations for a number of outcomes.

Each area of practice is realized through a specific assessment component:

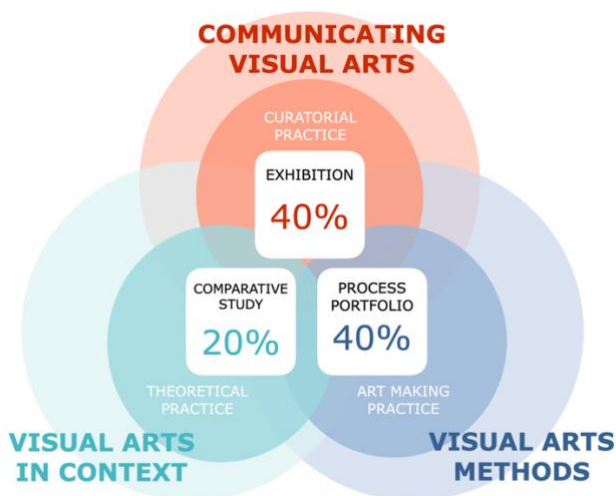
- Theoretical: Comparative Study (CS) (externally assessed, 20%)
- Art-Making: Process Portfolio (PP) (externally assessed, 40%)
- Curatorial: Exhibition (EX) (externally assessed, 40%)

The CS, worth 20% of the final grade, introduces students to analytical and interpretive practices within a culturally and historically situated scholarly framework. This component aims to provide students with opportunities to compare three artworks by two artists, analyzing elements such as media, style, concepts, and cultural contexts. HL students further connect this analysis to their own work, demonstrating how their art has been influenced by the studied artists.

The PP, contributing 40% of the final grade, emphasizes experimentation and documentation. Students explore various media and techniques, reflecting on their creative processes. At SL, students experiment within two media categories while HL students are required to include evidence of working within all three categories of 2 dimensional (2D), 3 dimensional (3D) and 4 dimensional (4D). This portfolio highlights the depth of their inquiry and their ability to develop ideas over time.

The EX, also worth 40% of the final grade, provides students with the opportunity to present their resolved artworks. This component emphasizes technical and conceptual achievement as well as students' ability to curate their work. SL students select four to seven pieces and provide a 400-word curatorial rationale, while HL students present eight to eleven pieces with a 700-word rationale that guides viewers through their artistic journey (IBO, 2014).

Figure 3. The Interconnected core areas, practices and assessment components within the DP VA



Note: Graphic created with Photoshop using information from IBO (2014), Amy Atkinson, 2025

Assessment in DP VA

Curriculum developers collaborate to define learning expectations and criteria for assessment, with detailed descriptors determining levels of achievement. (Boughton et al., 1996). Global standards for examination and grading in the DP VA program are established by principal examiners (PE) for each curricular component and level. Currently, there are six PEs for DP VA

in English, spanning both HL and SL, and the three curricular components. Including the additional languages offered (French and Spanish), there are 18 DP VA PEs globally (Blaikie, 2025).

For each curricular component, the respective PE selects exemplars representing a range of quality, from weak to excellent, as part of examiner training. During standardization, examiners are encouraged to grade as accurately as possible based on these exemplars, which are shaped by the PE's epistemological and aesthetic perspectives. Blaikie et al. (2003) share concerns that this structure can sometimes lead to inconsistencies in examination standards, as each PE's independently setting global benchmarks for their subject.

With the incantation of the current 2016 framework, DP VA operations underwent a significant shift as all processes, including curriculum resources, examiner training, and component submissions, moved entirely online. Blaikie (2025) considers this transition efficient for offering cost-effective access to curriculum resources, training, and standardization procedures, but shares concerns that viewing DP VA students' EX and PP submissions online by separate examiners limits the ability to fully appreciate scale, techniques, material use, and ascertain thematic connections of components in relation to one another. This change eliminates the previous option of DP VA students submitting supplementary videos or voices recordings to provide further insights into their submission.

Considering the DP VA teacher experience

According to the DP VA guide (IBO, 2014), DP VA teachers are encouraged to explore diverse artistic traditions and expose students to unfamiliar art forms, fostering risk-taking and innovation in their teaching. Rather than serving as sole sources of knowledge, the DP VA guide shares the expectations that DP VA teachers organize learning experiences that empower students to become “autonomous, informed, and skilled visual artists” (p. 55).

IB further sets the expectation that DP VA classes are to be designed by the DP VA teacher, based on their own experience, interests and VA skills, to fit into the DP VA framework. The resources for which are both expansive and limited at the same time, as a DP VA teacher is able to create any lesson and form any unit based on any theme, artist, or art movement, conceptual understandings that they choose. However, within the international school environment, it is also expected that the DP VA courses highlight specific locational or cultural aspects inherent within the region.

Within western curriculums, VA programs are well known for being “othered” by administration and core curriculum courses, as highlighted 40 years ago by Collins (1981). Specifically in the U.S.A. and Canada, due to government mandates, a stronger focus on arts integration, STEM, and in consequence to the othering, students attitudes, lead to a further diminishment of the VA program in schools which was well documented by Kiefer-Boyd & Smithshank (2006). Sullivan

(2005) notes that while there is little disagreement about the importance of VA education among the populace, VA is one of the first areas of content to be “questioned, reduced, if not eliminated” (p. 12) from the curriculum, when logistical concerns such as funding and scheduling are raised. Also, curriculum expectations, grading, and rigour are not consistent across school boards/states/countries.

And so, DP VA teachers within international schools do not have a common experience base. Most DP VA teachers in international schools are not graduates of the DP VA course, and most do not have experience teaching or knowledge of the DP VA program prior to their initial hiring by international schools. Training for DP VA courses is available from the IB explicitly through IB World Schools. This means that most teachers only attend DP VA training after they are hired by an IB World School. There are also limited teaching training programs in higher art education that discuss the DP VA curriculum. Compounding these challenges are the rigorous expectations of the DP VA course and the competitive nature of international schools, wherein DP VA teachers contend with both individual student and international school focus on numerical achievement for acceptance to top higher education institutions, as well as standing among the international school community.

Erickson (2007) theorizes that, especially when beginning, teachers tend to teach as they were taught. Teachers “teach with an emphasis on delivery of information rather than on thinking deeply with knowledge and are comfortable and familiar with teaching to objectives” (p. 188). The continued expansion of international schools and the adoption of the IB curriculum in public/state school systems and the fact that many current DP VA teachers did not themselves experience the DP VA course as students creates challenges for the “evolving directional behaviour among millennium teachers” (p.188) and the increasingly technological use required of teachers which has been highlighted (exacerbated) during the past few years of COVID.

As we move forward, it is important to also consider the differences in educational expectations, specifically from younger cohorts of teachers. Collins (2009) observed that millennials are different than previous generations of teachers, in that they are “inherently defined by complete immersion and fluid integration with technology” (p. 78), place strong emphasis on “connectedness” (p. 79), and collaboration. Within teacher training, the questions facing educators moving forward are not just how to (re)define the classroom experience for students but how to support a new “protected generation” (p. 92) as they enter the competitive realm of international school teaching profession and begin to deal with “constant constructive criticism of their work and their abilities” (p. 92).

While DP VA provides a standardized global curriculum and examination framework as encouraged by the IB, individual DP VA teachers design their own scheme of works and lessons based on their unique contexts. Rooted in feminist ontology and epistemology, teachers interpret

the DP VA curricula through their personal experiences, ways of knowing, and perspectives on art, artmaking, and assessment. These interpretations reflect the ethics, aesthetics, and politics shaping each teacher's approach. As a result, DP VA education varies not only between schools and classrooms but also across towns and countries. Blaikie (2025) shares that this individuality is the greatest strength of art education but also its biggest challenge when striving for standardized global curricula and assessments, as VA is inherently qualitative in nature.

In larger urban environments such as Hong Kong, Singapore, and Dubai, I have observed that the final exhibition serves as a significant point of pride for international schools. These annual exhibitions are often extravagant public events, showcasing the creativity and achievements of students. Within these large urban environments, there is an inherent sense of competition and ranking among international schools, with parents comparing the opportunities offered at each institution and prospective students vying for placements. As a result, the exhibitions come under scrutiny, with the outcomes presented each year reflecting on the school's reputation. DP VA teachers are deeply implicated in this structure, carefully planning engaging learning experiences each year to ensure their student's work and the final exhibitions are both unique and impressive standing out among other exhibition offerings. Teaching the DP VA curriculum is further complicated by the competitive international school nature, where both individual student success and the school's reputation are closely linked to high examination scores and prestigious university placements.

Considering professional development

The IBO offers subject-specific support via their Programme Resource Centre (found in 'My IB', which is an IB member platform. Here users can access resources, applications, and communities). Two supplemental guides exist: one published by Oxford, created by former DP VA teachers, now DP VA examiners and members of DP VA curriculum development group, Jayson Paterson, Simon Poppy and Andrew Vaughan (2017); the other published by Cambridge by Heather McReynolds (2017) a former DP VA teacher, now organizer for the DP VA section of the In-thinking website⁷. Many schools purchase an In-Thinking subscription, which includes a DP VA subject specific guide. Each resource must be purchased separately.

Professional development (PD) opportunities for DP VA teachers are crucial to support DP VA teachers. Access to PD, however, is often shaped by international school budgets and resources, which vary significantly across systems and regions. Teachers in less-funded international schools, particularly in areas with limited access to electricity, internet, studio space, and materials, face vastly different challenges compared to their counterparts in top-tier international schools equipped with specialized facilities (Blaikie, 2025).

⁷ <https://inthinking.net/>

IB recommends that DP VA teachers consider taking on DP VA examiner tasks as a form of professional development. Teachers can apply to become examiners when a vacancy is posted (on the My IB platform) with the support of their school's DP coordinator. According to the IB Examiner Recruitment Policy (2021b), in their application, teachers must show evidence of a degree or equivalent in the subject (or a related subject), as well as a minimum of one year's experience teaching the subject (or a related subject) for which they are applying. If they are no longer teaching, they must show evidence of having taught or examined within the last three years (para. 2). While the selection process is not public, once selected, examiners are assigned to a specific component and provided with training through the My IB examiners support site.

Before commencing examination duties, examiners must pass a sample marking process every examination session. During the examination session, examiners also must successfully assess planted seed exams (chosen by the PEs) within tolerance. Seeds are set once within every ten submissions. Examining duties usually last for three-four weeks, and examiners are expected to examine from 5-20 hours per week, marking 60-100 submissions. These duties are in addition to their regular DP VA teaching duties. Since DP VA submissions are submitted earlier than IB World Exams, DP VA examining sessions fall either during or directly after the final DP VA exhibitions and during the PP and EX submission uploading window, creating a bottleneck within the available time for many DP VA teacher examiners (IBO, 2021b).

Perceived difficulties of the DP VA course

The 'othering' (Collins, 1991) of VA is further exacerbated within the DP programme as Group 6 is an optional subject group. This optional status has led to a concerning trend shared in earlier research by Elpus (2019) and again furthered by former DP Arts Curriculum Manager, Michael Bindon (2023), where some international schools exclude Group 6 subjects altogether, often citing the costs of maintaining creative programs or prioritizing the academic goals of their student populations. A perception that the DP VA course is challenging to achieve high grades is prevalent among online forums, where students and teachers frequently express concerns about the difficulty of the course (screenshots sampled from online forums in Appendix D).

Relevance of assessment scores

In the DP, each subject includes both internally assessed (IA) and externally assessed (EA) components. For Groups 1-5 subjects, final grades are calculated by combining scores from these components with results from final exams, using a standardized formula to produce a grade out of 7.

In contrast, the DP VA course does not include a final exam. Instead, students submit digital copies of their PP, CS, and photographs of their EX for moderated assessment. These components are evaluated anonymously by IBO-selected examiners (as discussed above). Final assessment scores for DP VA are released to students and DP coordinators approximately two

months after the world exams (May exams for the Northern Hemisphere, November exams for the Southern Hemisphere).

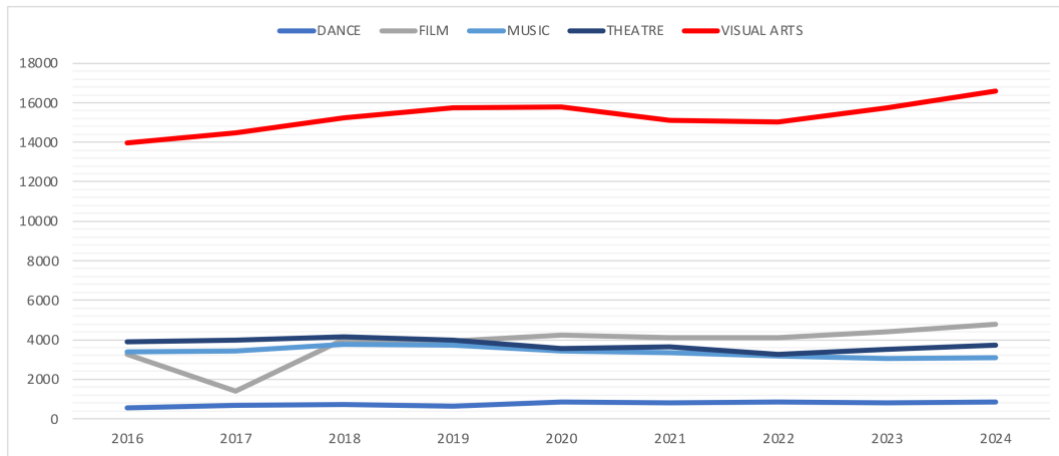
Final assessment scores hold weight within the DP structure. Combined with scores from TOK, CAS, and the EE, the highest possible DP score is 45. However, achieving this score is rare. In 2023, 179 DP students out of 116,248 worldwide attained the maximum score of 45. Since 2023, IB no longer releases data on the number of students achieving 45, stating that it values the importance of focusing on the achievements of all students and so will only release the achievements within a five mark scale (IBO, 2023). Yet still, rankings play a significant role in the international school community, with IB ranking websites both internationally⁸ and nationally perpetuating comparisons of IB and international schools (screen shot showing 2024 results of Global Top IB Schools shared in Appendix E). When results are posted it is common practice for international schools to share their results through media outlets (screenshot showing how international schools showcase DP results in the media in Appendix F and screenshot of a marketing pamphlet leveraging DP results in Appendix G). A simple Google search for ‘IB school rankings’ can easily reveal the impact of assessment scores as a key outward marker of perceived quality in IB programs, especially within the IB environment.

Highlighting inconsistencies: DP VA assessment scores

The DP VA course enrolls significantly more students than other Group 6 subjects, typically double that of Music and at least three times more than Drama and Film (Elpus, 2019). Despite its popularity, major inconsistencies exist between DP VA’s high enrolment and its assessment scores. To illustrate this disconnect, I collected publicly available statistical data from 2016 to 2024 and created graphs using Excel software (Microsoft, Redmond, Washington, U.S.A.). Figure 4 provides this enrolment context for Group 6 DP subjects from the Northern Hemisphere sessions (May Exams) highlighting DP VA shown in red for clarity.

⁸ <https://ib-schools.com/>

Figure 4. Enrolment of Group 6 DP subjects from Northern hemisphere sessions, 2016-2024



Note: Graphic created with Excel using information collected from 2016-2024 Statistical Bulletins (Appendix H), Amy Atkinson, 2025

Despite its larger enrolment, DP VA consistently records the lowest scores among Group 6 courses. For instance, Figure 5 shows the Group 6 Enrolment and Grade Distributions for the May 2024 Exam sessions where a combined (HL and SL) percentage of 3.6% of VA students score 7 (top marks) compared with 15.9% scoring 7 for Theatre, 12.5% for Music, 6.2% for Film, and 11.5% for Dance. This stark contrast raises questions about assessment consistency relative to student numbers.

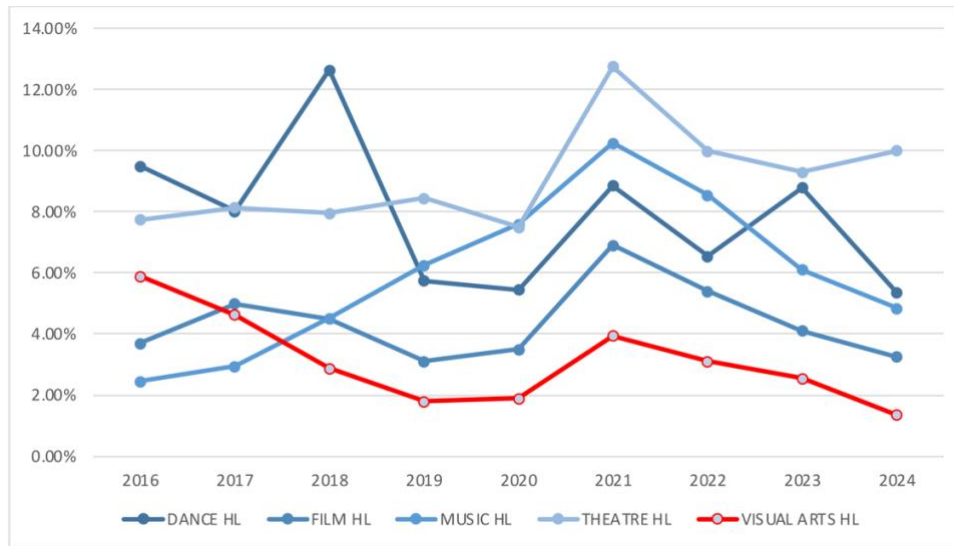
Figure 5. Grade Distribution for Group 6 (Arts) courses within the DP program for May 2024

Subject	The arts grade distribution									
	Students	Mean grade	%N	%1	%2	%3	%4	%5	%6	%7
DANCE HL	392	4.6	2.6		1.8	17.6	28.3	23.5	19.6	6.6
DANCE SL	461	4.2	9.8	0.2	8.2	23.0	20.4	19.7	14.5	4.1
FILM HL	2,822	4.5	6.6	0.4	3.8	14.2	30.7	25.4	15.3	3.6
FILM SL	1,947	4.1	10.2	1.3	6.6	21.0	29.7	17.8	10.5	2.9
MUSIC HL	1,377	4.8	3.1	0.1	1.7	9.4	24.5	34.2	20.9	6.2
MUSIC SL	1,697	4.3	7.5	0.1	4.0	20.0	32.0	22.5	10.5	3.5
THEATRE HL	2,400	5.0	3.9	0.3	2.5	9.9	19.4	27.4	24.1	12.5
THEATRE SL	1,312	4.6	4.5	0.6	4.0	16.5	24.5	26.4	15.9	7.5
VISUAL ARTS HL	10,468	4.3	2.7	0.2	3.2	23.6	31.5	24.7	12.2	2.0
VISUAL ARTS SL	6,109	3.9	4.6	0.4	7.3	23.8	41.1	16.3	5.8	0.7

Note: Screenshot from May 2024 Statistical Bulletin <https://resources.ibo.org/dp/topic/Statistical-bulletins/?lang=en> (further details in Appendix H)

To further illustrate the inconsistency between enrolment and achievement, I analyzed the Group 6 Grade Distribution Charts from IB DP Statistical Bulletins for the years 2016 to 2024 and graphed them as shown in Figure 6. These charts highlight a dramatic and widening gap in the percentage of 7s achieved by DP VA students (in red) compared with other Group 6 subjects (shown in blue). Grade Distribution Charts for Group 6 from IB DP Statistical Bulletins 2016-2024 are included in Appendix H.

Figure 6. Percentage of DP students scoring 7 within Group 6 subjects from 2016-2024



Note: Graphic created with Excel using data collected from 2016-2024 Statistical Bulletins (Appendix H). For purposes of visualising the data, HL and SL numbers have been averaged for each subject. Amy Atkinson, 2025

Chapter 3 : Considering Quality

In this chapter, I critically examine evolving conceptualizations of quality in art education, tracing its development through recent history. The exploration begins with contributions from Butler Laughlin and Earl W. Linderman. I also highlight more recent perspectives from Robert Dalton. Next, I focus on pivotal approaches to understanding quality in art education: UNESCO's report on quality learning and SDG4, led by Vivek Venkatesh, Anne Bamford's framework for measuring quality, and the Qualities of Quality study by Harvard's Project Zero team, led by Steven Seidel. Following this, I analyze how the concept of quality is implicitly embedded in the DP Visual Arts (VA) program. My analysis uses key IB documents, including the Approaches to Teaching, the DP VA Curriculum Guide, Grade Boundaries, and Subject Reports.

Conceptualizing quality

The International Baccalaureate (IB) (IBO, 2014) emphasizes the importance of quality in education. This emphasis suggests an assumption that the concept is universally understood. Given that my study focuses on the interpretation and understanding of quality, it is essential to critically examine how the notion of quality is articulated and represented within the context of art education.

In the study, the *Qualities of Quality*, Director of the Arts in Education Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Steven Seidel and the Project Zero team (2009) observe that the pursuit of quality is considered “as enigmatic as it is essential” (p. 5). Quality is often described as a “moving target” (p. 5), with what is considered high quality in one context appearing inadequate in another. Identifying signs of quality can be challenging, particularly in the “complex, context-specific” realm of teaching and learning (p. 5). Ideas about quality are deeply tied to values and fundamental questions of identity and meaning. The persistent and far-reaching drive for quality is central to education, with “continuous reflection and discussion about what constitutes quality” serving as “not only a catalyst for quality but also a sign of quality” (p. 3). In art education, defining quality inevitably raises the question of why we teach the arts at all. Given the rapid expansion of international schools, understanding the perception of quality in art education has become increasingly important (Naro, 2019).

Seidel et al (2009) highlight that to focus on quality in VA education can be problematic, as it often carries “connotations of competitive judgments” (p. 3). They emphasize the difficulty of identifying excellence in the “complex and context-specific” (p. 5) nature of teaching and learning.

In this study, it is important to consider that the concept of quality is often transferable across different terms, including excellence, greatness, success, effectiveness, and goodness. The IB

itself uses terms such as outstanding, advanced, leading, strong, high, effective, and engaging to emphasize this impression of quality (Evans, 2022).

Defining quality

In exploring the concept of quality in VA teaching, much of the literature focuses on defining what constitutes a high-quality (good, excellent, or effective) VA teacher. Discussions often center on the characteristics VA teachers should possess or develop and how these traits can be categorized.

Early contributions from High School Principal Butler Laughlin (1941) define an effective art teacher by outlining seven essential traits. Among these, Laughlin emphasized that “the teacher must be a real person” (p. 62), must understand “the direction in which the social order is moving” (p. 62), and must make a “careful study of the community” (p. 62). Laughlin also highlighted the importance of knowing the history and development of art across time and possessing the necessary skills for teaching art. Earl W. Linderman (1967), then chairman of the Department of Art at Arizona State University, added that VA teaching requires “individuals of superior all-around ability” (p. 22), who can inspire students and guide them toward their “own particular brand of greatness” (p. 22). Linderman further noted that excellent VA teachers must be proficient in at least one medium and possess a deep “grounding and sensitivity to the entire visual sphere” (p. 26).

In his Gaitskell Address, Canadian art educator and Professor Emeritus at the University of Victoria, Robert Dalton (2010) argued that effective VA teachers should maintain an active studio practice, allowing them to speak confidently from experience about the processes of “generating ideas, problem-solving, working through technical challenges, and critical reflection” (p. 9). Similarly, Linderman (1967) encouraged VA teachers to exhibit their work to foster personal growth in “aesthetic performance” (p. 22) and create a “challenging artistic climate” (p. 22) for their students.

In the groundbreaking study *Studio Thinking*, senior research affiliate at Harvard’s Project Zero and Art Education professor at Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Lois Hetland et al (2007) emphasized that VA teachers should also be practicing artists, as teaching VA is far more complex than it might initially appear. They recommended that this complexity be considered in teacher training, school planning, and teacher development.

Georgia Collins, as shared by Hoeptner-Poling (2005), believed that there is no single model of a good VA teacher. Instead, she stressed that teachers must find “the roots of yourself as a good teacher in your own personality” (p. 26). A study by Haanstra, Van Strien, and Wagenaar (2020) surveyed secondary VA students about the characteristics of a good VA teacher. Students identified traits such as being organized, “being the boss” (p. 10), explaining assignments

clearly, and having the ability to “do the assignment” themselves (p. 10). Students also valued teachers who could “keep up with current visual culture” (p. 11)

Strategic Director of Education, Culture and Skills for the City of London and former visual arts teacher and university lecturer, Anne Bamford (2006) defines quality specifically within VA as provisions that are of “recognized high value and worth” (p. 52) in terms of the skills, attitudes, and performance they foster. Educational philosopher and Columbia University Professor Emeritus, John Dewey (1934) characterized quality as a “heightened vitality” (p. 19), signifying “active and alert commerce with the world” and a “complete interpretation of self and the world of objects and events.” Under this framework, quality is not fixed but evolves within societal contexts, as Kissick (1993) notes: “quality is first and foremost an idea, its criteria are susceptible to influences from within a given society” (p. 27).

Quality in education is emphasized within UNESCO’s *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015), specifically within the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): Quality Education, which calls on countries to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education while promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.

Within the SDG 4 aims, quality education is discussed as

- Ensuring lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals, spanning from early childhood education to adult learning.
- Promoting equity, inclusion, and gender equality to eliminate disparities and ensure access to education for marginalized and vulnerable populations.
- Guaranteeing effective learning by fostering the acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies that prepare learners for meaningful participation in society.
- Aligning education with vocational and technical skills development to support decent work opportunities, while also fostering global citizenship in an interconnected and diverse world.

SDG 4 underscores that quality education extends beyond basic literacy and numeracy to include broader dimensions such as equity, inclusivity, relevance, and lifelong learning. This holistic approach ensures that quality education not only meets the needs of individuals but also contributes to sustainable development and global well-being.

Recognizing quality within Arts Education

In the report *Arts Education: An investment in quality learning*, Dean of Education at McGill University Vivek Venkatesh alongside International Coordinator of the UNESCO Associated Schools Network, Lydia Ruprecht and Project Officer in the section of Global Citizenship and Peace Education at UNESCO, Martha K. Ferede (2023) found that Arts Education is especially

relevant within Target 4.7 of SDG 4 which emphasizes quality education as education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

Venkatesh et al., (2023), building on Tawil et al. (2012), conceptualize quality education as education that is relevant to the current context, aligned with individual lived experiences, and grounded in equity, effectiveness, and efficiency. They highlight three pedagogical approaches central to quality in Arts Education:

- Learner-centered pedagogies which foster “sense-making through the arts” (p. 9) by connecting learners to their lived experiences and relationships with the human and non-human world.
- Competency-based education which promotes the development of interdisciplinary core competencies, enabling lifelong learning across various disciplines and contexts.
- Socio-communal Arts Education which integrates learning within “broader social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions” (p. 9), connecting learners to their communities and environments to achieve broader societal goals.

Venkatesh et al. (2023) further highlight that Arts Education offers both instrumental and humanistic benefits, contributing to quality education at personal, community, and societal levels. It fosters humanistic outcomes such as global peace, sustainability, justice, “cultural diversity, and the development of social-emotional skills” (p. 4) like empathy and perspective-taking, enhancing personal and collective well-being. Arts Education also aligns with broader societal happiness indicators, including “healthy life expectancy, freedom, and generosity” (p. 4). Arts Education positively impacts both academic and non-academic outcomes, improving mathematics, writing, reading, creativity, student engagement, attendance, perseverance, and classroom behaviour. It also fosters teacher innovation, collaboration, and a positive school culture, helping students achieve a sense of mastery and actively engage with their communities. By linking formal and non-formal learning settings, such as museums, festivals, and cultural centers, Arts Education expands opportunities for artists, cultural bearers, and pedagogical institutions. It supports the revitalization of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, historically marginalized in traditional education systems, fostering validation and revitalization of cultural practices. Additionally, Arts Education contributes to economic growth and employment by leveraging the potential of the arts and creative industries, highlighting its multifaceted value to society.

Measuring quality in VA

Bamford (2009) developed a diagnostic tool using Cronbach’s Alpha (Bogt, 1993) for measuring quality in arts education programs. This tool aimed to improve arts education by identifying a set of quality indicators, such as active partnerships between schools, emphasis on collaboration with shared responsibility for planning, implementation, assessment and evaluation, opportunities for presentation, provision for critical reflection and risk taking, flexible school

structures with permeable boundaries, accessibility, and ongoing professional learning that could function as “wellness indicators” (p. 53) for arts education, serving as a baseline prior to impact measurement.

For Bamford, the challenge in arts education lies in its deeply embedded cultural and national contexts, which shape both the subject and its teaching. More than any other academic discipline, the arts reflect cultural circumstances, making it essential for any quality indicators to respect and encourage this diversity (Bamford, 2006, 2010).

Seidel et al (2009) proposed that quality in VA teaching cannot be reduced to a checklist or a fixed set of conditions. Instead, they suggested that quality can be understood through four overlapping lenses: learning, pedagogy, community dynamics, and environment. The learning lens examines what students are actually doing in the classroom. The pedagogy lens focuses on how teachers conceptualize and practice their craft. The community dynamics lens highlights the social relationships in the classroom, while the environment lens emphasizes physical elements such as classroom space, available materials, and the time allocated for VA learning (p. 4). Foundational questions are integrated, playing a critical role in defining the identity of an arts program and setting the parameters within which quality is pursued, while decision-makers have a significant influence on the quality of students’ arts learning experiences. Their understanding of quality, alignment with the program’s vision, and the decisions they make about resources, priorities, and support all contribute to the effectiveness and success of arts education.

Contextualizing quality within IB DP Visual Arts

Quality is not frequently or explicitly referenced in the IB curriculum for DP VA beyond the initial mention of high-quality aims as discussed in the Introduction. To contextualize this study, I examined how quality might be implied within the curriculum for DP VA and further supported by official documents. This approach aims to clarify and specify how DP VA teachers might conceptualize quality.

IB literature describes the DP VA course as being “designed to reflect the dynamic nature of visual arts” (IBO, 2014, p. 16). The course encourages students to “challenge their own creative and cultural expectations and boundaries” (p. 6), develop “analytical skills in problem-solving and divergent thinking” (p. 6) and build “technical proficiency and confidence as art-makers” (p. 6). In addition to exploring and comparing VA from different perspectives and contexts, students are expected to engage with, experiment in, and “critically reflect upon a wide range of contemporary practices and media” (p. 6). The course is intended for students pursuing VA in higher education as well as for those seeking lifelong enrichment through the arts.

The DP VA course further encourages students to actively explore the VA within and across “local, regional, national, international, and intercultural contexts” (p. 6). Through inquiry, investigation, reflection, and creative application, the course seeks to inspire an “appreciation for

the expressive and aesthetic diversity in the world around them, becoming critically informed makers and consumers of visual culture” (p. 6).

The IB documents that I reference in this section are housed on the My IB site (detailed in chapter 5, p. 59). IB documents that discuss or have implications of quality for DP VA are Approaches to Teaching, DP VA Curriculum Guide, Grade Boundaries, and Subject Reports

Approaches to Teaching

Approaches to Teaching (ATT) (IBO, 2019) are presented as a framework for DP VA teachers, but “are not intended to be prescriptive nor restrictive” (IBO, 2014, p. 16). DP VA teachers are “encouraged to interpret the ATTs creatively according to their local circumstances and the context of the individual school” (p. 16).

DP VA curriculum guide

The current DP VA Guide (IBO, 2014) discusses the framework of the three equal interrelated areas: Communicating Visual Arts, Visual Arts in Context, and Visual Arts Methods (as shared in chapter 5). Three core areas were designed to fully interlink with the practices and assessment tasks. The DP VA guide instructs DP VA teachers that the three core areas “must be central to the planning of the taught course” (p. 18). The guide notes that students are “required to understand the relationship between [the three] areas and how each area informs and impacts their work” in DP VA (p. 18). Students are also “required to investigate the [three] areas through exploration of three practices: theoretical practice, art-making practice, curatorial practice” (p. 18). To fully prepare students for the demands of the assessment tasks, the DP VA guide encourages teachers to ensure that their planning addresses each of the core areas, the practices, and the assessment components, however the “content and focus of which is not prescribed” (p. 19).

The DP VA guide also outlines the three assessment components that align with the core syllabus areas, differentiating between requirements for HL and SL. Both are required to submit all three assessment components, but expectations and time allowed in the course differ between the levels. By ascertaining the expectations for each assessment component, it can be implied that the closer to the maximum number of screens and artworks denotes quality.

Table 1. Details of submission requirements for (HL/SL) assessment components

Assessment Component	HL	SL
Comparative Study (CS)	10-15 screens 3-5 additional screens	10-15 screens List of Sources
Process Portfolio (PP)	13-25 screens	9-18 screens

Exhibition (EX)	8-11 artworks Exhibition text for each artwork Curatorial Rationale 700 words	4-7 artworks Exhibition text for each artwork Curatorial Rationale 400 words
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Note: Information obtained from the Diploma Program Visual arts guide, First examinations 2017 (IBO, 2014 pp. 32-35)

The assessment rubrics also found within the DP VA guide (IBO, 2014), are probably the closest implication of measured quality within the curriculum documents in terms of specific assessment outcomes. By the words chosen within the top band of each assessment component, we can determine a more specific understanding of quality in terms of student outcomes.

Table 2. Summary of expectations for DP VA assessed components and implied quality of descriptors for top mark band of assessment rubrics.

Assessment Component	Expectations	Implied Quality through top mark band of related rubric
Comparative Study (CS)	Analyse and compare artworks, objects or artifacts by different artists. This independent critical and contextual investigation should explore artworks, objects and artifacts from differing cultural contexts.	Consistent, insightful, informed, demonstrates thorough understanding, critically analyzes, discusses connections, logical and coherent, clear and coherent, visually creative, legible, evaluation of outcomes, analyze and evaluates process, informed and meaningful connections.
Process Portfolio (PP)	Demonstrate experimentation, exploration, manipulation and refinement of a variety of visual arts activities during the two-year course. The work, which may be extracted from their visual arts journal and other sketch books, notebooks, folios etc. should have led to the creation of both resolved and unresolved works. Should show evidence of their technical accomplishment and an understanding of the use of materials, ideas and practices appropriate to visual communication.	Show in-depth, sustained, effectively communicated, consistent, meaningful, assured visual development, coherent, engaging work.

Exhibition (EX)	A selection of resolved artworks for their exhibition. The selected pieces should show evidence of their technical accomplishment during the visual arts course and an understanding of the use of materials, ideas and practices to realize their intentions. also evidence the decision-making process which underpins the selection of this connected and cohesive body of work for an audience in the form of a curatorial rationale.	Work shows effective communication, consistent and effective fulfilment of intentions, effective application/manipulation, assured level of technical competence, effective realization, subtle use of complex imagery, fully justifies selection/arrangement, and is presented and articulated clearly.
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Note: The expectations for each of the three components is outlined in the DP VA guide, First examinations 2017 (IBO, 2014 pp. 32-35) and the implications for quality achieved in assessment is detailed in the assessment rubrics.

Grade descriptors

Grades for all DP subjects are defined from 1 through to 7. The DP Grade Descriptors (IBO, 2017) outlines the general expectations for grades for all 6 Subject groups as well as EE and TOK (IBO, 2021) The IB explains grade descriptors as consisting of characteristics of performance at each grade. Principal and “senior examiners use these grade descriptors when determining grade boundaries for examination papers and coursework components” (p. 1). The grade descriptors are also “intended to help teachers explain the academic requirements to students, undertake formative assessment, report progress and predict candidates’ grades” (p. 1).

For Group 6 subjects, a seven is the highest grade and the qualifier “highly effective” (p. 19) is used and skills required are research and inquiry, use of subject-specific terminology, understanding of artistic ideas and intentions, subject-specific skills, techniques and competences and critical reflection. The lowest grade is one with the qualifier is noted as “irrelevant or inadequate” (p. 19).

Table 3. Grade Descriptor Qualifiers for Grades 1-7

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
irrelevant inadequate	superficial	undeveloped limited	basic	developed	effective	highly effective

Note: Information from Diploma Programme Grade Descriptors (IBO, 2017)

Grade Boundaries

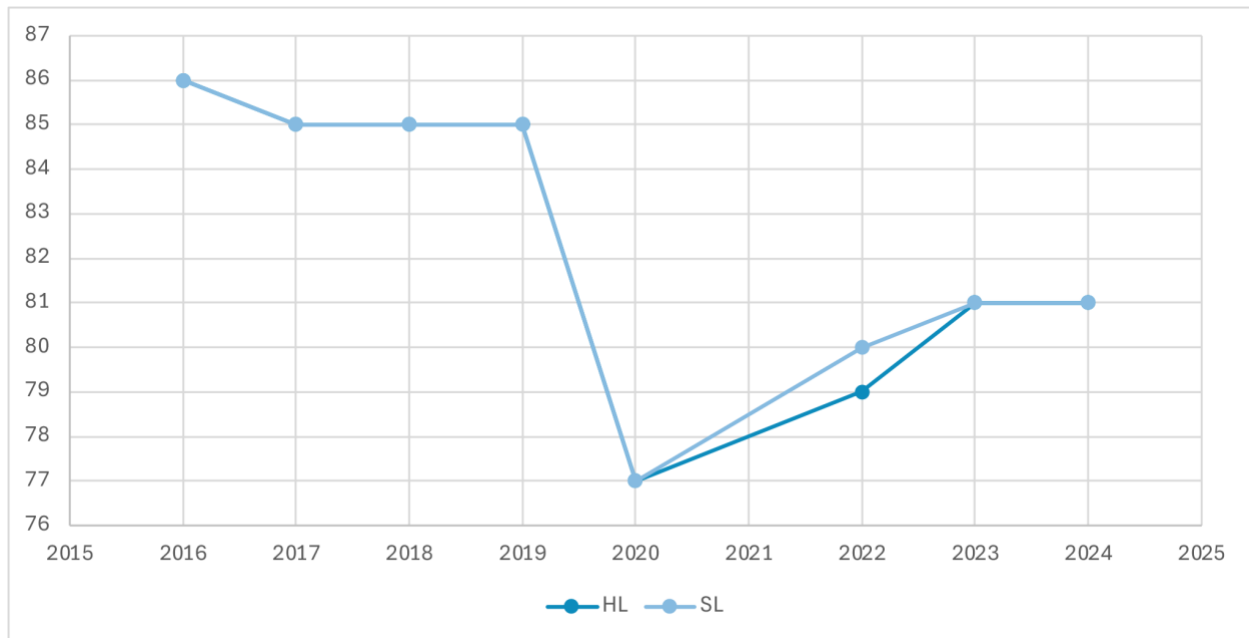
Every exam session, the IB carries out grade award processes to determine the final grade boundaries for each subject. The grade awarding process is a rigorous process that involves

analyzing various forms of evidence to ensure fair and consistent outcomes for students. AlphaPlus (2022) conducted a review of different statistical methods for determining recommended grade boundaries and evaluated their applicability in various scenarios within DP and MYP assessments. The review concluded that, although the current approach is effective in many cases, there are certain grade awarding contexts where alternative methods could be more appropriate.

For DP VA, the inconsistent annual grade boundaries pose a challenge. Boundaries are only released with yearly results, so when DP VA teachers assess student work, predict grades or submit internally assessed (IA) grades, they must depend on previous years' boundaries or estimate. Using Excel, I compiled the DP VA grade boundaries from 2016 to 2024 (see Figure 7), which highlights how this inconsistency can cause confusions.

When looking at grade boundary differentials (highlighted in Figure 7) in 2016, the grade boundary for a top score of 7 was set at 86-100 marks. However, by 2024, the grade boundary for a 7 had become more generous, shifting to 81-100 marks (DP VA grade boundaries for 2016-2024 shared in Appendix I). This shift suggests that the IB may have adjusted its implications towards understandings of quality in DP VA over time.

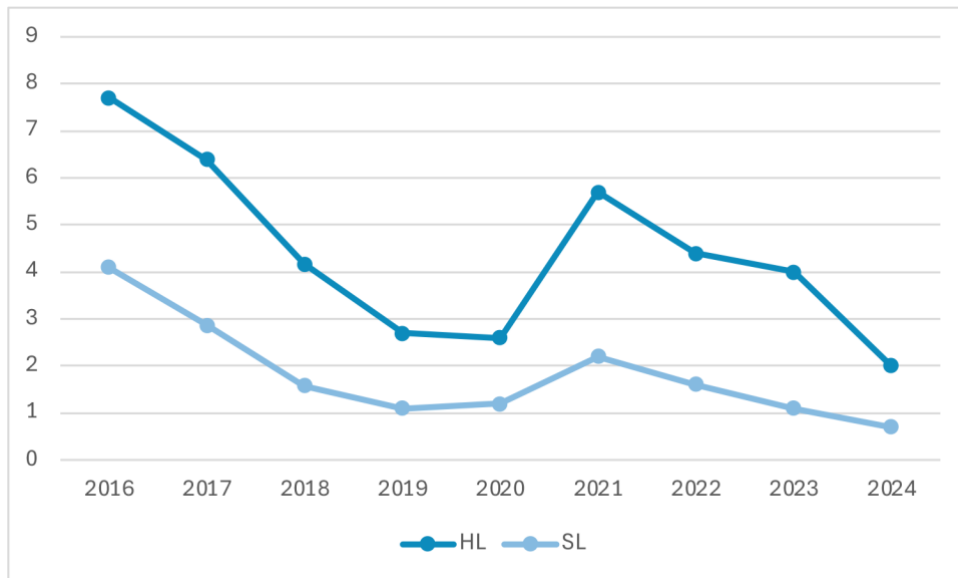
Figure 7. Grade boundaries showing overall achievement score of 7 for DP VA differential from DP VA subject reports 2016 through to 2024



Note: Graphic created with Excel using data collected from DP VA Grade Boundaries from 2016-2024 (Appendix I), Amy Atkinson, 2025

However, despite the more generous boundaries in 2024, the percentage of students achieving a 7 declined over those ten years - HL from 7.7% to 2.0% and SL from 4.15 to 0.7% (see Appendix H and Figure 8). This suggests that changes in grade boundaries did not lead to more top scores, raising further questions about whether standards and criteria have become stricter, and causing uncertainty for both students and teachers around what constitutes quality within DP VA.

Figure 8. Percentage of DP VA Students (HL and SL) scoring 7 from 2016-2024



Note: Graphic created with Excel using data collected from 2016-2024 Statistical Bulletins, (Appendix H), Amy Atkinson, 2025

Subject reports

IB releases a text-based subject report a few months after the examination period has been officially concluded (August/September for the Northern hemisphere, February/March for the Southern hemisphere). This report is developed from examiner comments from each of the three assessment components, detailing examiner observations and concerns with the submitted works during the examination session. Since only the final assessment of the three assessment components is used to determine the student’s final DP VA grade, the subject report suggests that quality focuses mainly on high achievement scores.

The documents provided by the IB can imply quality within the DP VA, but they can also be misleading. The ATTs (IBO, 2019) emphasize holistic and creative conceptions of teaching. However, the subject reports (IBO, 2026; IBO, 2024b), show that examiners lean heavily toward technical skills when assessing student work. With only the three components assessed to determine the final DP VA grade and with grade boundaries fluctuating annually (Appendix I), inconsistencies with conceptualizing and understanding quality are obvious. These fluctuations

leave DP VA teachers navigating a complex landscape where the emphasis on holistic teaching in the curriculum does not always align with the assessment practices or examiner feedback. This misalignment can create challenges for DP VA teachers attempting to balance the creative and technical aspects of the course while striving to develop quality within their teaching to meet student and institutional expectations of success.

Chapter 4 : Conflict Theory

In this chapter, I critically examine the tensions in my study between the ideological and the structural which underpins the DP Visual Arts (VA) course within international schools. I discuss how these influences affect the conceptualization of quality. I situate this analysis within contrasting philosophical and theoretical paradigms, juxtaposing the process philosophies and constructivist research of A. N. Whitehead and John Dewey with the hegemonic structural themes identified by Karl Marx and further developed by Marxist scholars Antonio Gramsci, Louis Pierre Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis. As I consider the notion of quality within these contrasting theoretical backgrounds, I introduce conflict theory as a critical framework to bridge these opposing paradigms. Using Cristóbal Villalobos's (2015) conceptual model, I explore the inherent conflicts and contradictions in the conceptualizations of quality identified in my study.

Exploring ideological underpinnings

Within the introduction of IB's document *Approaches to teaching and learning in the Diploma Programme* (IBO, 2019), it is shared that:

A strong influence on Alec Peterson, the first Director General of the IB, was the British philosopher AN Whitehead. In *The Aims of Education* (1916), Whitehead was highly critical of education that focused too much on the passive reception of disconnected ideas and inert knowledge. Instead, he urged that students be encouraged to make ideas their own and to understand the application of these ideas within their own curriculum and their own lives. From its beginnings, the DP has adopted a broadly constructivist and student-centred approach, has emphasized the importance of connectedness and concurrency of learning, and has recognized the importance of students linking their learning to their local and global contexts. These ideas are still at the heart of an IB education today (p.1).

Known for his process philosophy, Whitehead (1929) theorized that education should be “trans-disciplinary”, infused with values and general principles that provide students with a “bedrock of wisdom” and an “imaginative consideration of learning” (p. 146), where imagination illuminates facts and enables learners to envision new possibilities and new worlds. He called for teachers who are “lighted up with imagination” (Whitehead, 1967, p. 146) and urged them to remain open to learning from the young, as children are in “the most imaginative period of their lives” (p. 146). Whitehead argued that a teacher's task is to “elicit enthusiasm by resonance with his own personality, and to create an atmosphere of a longer and finer purpose” (p. 62). To fulfil this role effectively, Whitehead maintained that teachers must possess a distinctive genius of character, a clear understanding of the process of growth, and a strong intellectual command of their subject matter.

Building on Whitehead's theory that learning was a process of becoming, American education philosopher John Dewey (1934) heralded art-making as not merely an object or a final product but a dynamic process, a form of experience that integrates inquiry, perception, and meaning-making. In his framework, Dewey also theorised that art is intrinsically tied to moral purpose and education. Art serves as a medium for communicating values, provoking reflection, and inspiring transformation in thought and action. Through aesthetic experiences, individuals develop moral sensitivity, engage with diverse perspectives, and reimagine societal structures. Dewey suggests that art enables individuals to transcend their personal context, offering a vicarious understanding of the collective aspirations and values that unite societies.

Dewey regarded art as a moral and democratic force, a medium that calls upon the imagination to envision and work toward a better future. Dewey argued that art serves not only as a record of human experience but also as a catalyst for societal transformation. Through engagement with art, individuals and communities can cultivate richer, more meaningful lives rooted in care, kindness, and the pursuit of the common good. Dewey's (1934) philosophical concept of "doing and undergoing" (p. 104) is a continuous interaction between individuals and their environment. This dynamic process involves reflection, adaptation, and reorganization, making art an evolving and interactive experience.

However, the optional nature of Group 6 creative subjects within the IB curriculum appears at odds with Whitehead's insistence on imagination as central to education and Dewey's advocacy for art as essential to human development. This misalignment is further compounded by the IB's reliance on final examination components, a practice Whitehead (1929) dismissed as "educational waste" (p. 13). Instead, Whitehead championed educational approaches that prioritize creativity, exploration, and the organic integration of knowledge, principles that may be difficult to reconcile with the assessment-driven structure of the IB program.

Exploring structural underpinnings

German philosopher and political theorist Karl Marx (1983) conceptualized conflict as an inevitable tension arising from the clash between productive forces and the social relations of production (p. 4). This conflict, rooted in the struggle between dominant and subordinate classes, reflects broader disputes over socioeconomic control. Building on Marx's foundational ideas, German political economist Max Weber (2009) argued that education functions not as a neutral force but as a mechanism for reinforcing power hierarchies and cultivating a compliant workforce. Contemporary scholars similarly contend that education perpetuates class distinctions and societal inequalities. Dominant groups shape curricula and teaching methods to reflect their ideologies, thereby sustaining social hierarchies and maintaining their power and influence (Bindon, 2023; Bowles and Gintis, 1976) while further marginalizing others.

The IB's focus on externally assessed achievement markers and the competitive elite nature of international schools' contrast with their ideological focus, perpetuating what could be

considered a Marxist viewpoint of class consciousness. Both the IB and international schools play a critical role in transmitting dominant cultural values, norms, and aspirations, which are internalized as part of everyday, non-conscious routines (Marx & Engels, 1970, p. 64). As Marxist scholar Antonio Gramsci (1971) notes, the education system mirrors the economic base and ultimately serves to reproduce it creating the primary function of education, which according to Singer (2020), is to inculcate individuals into the prevailing cultural hegemony, rather than to transform it.

The current DP system could be considered to promote what social theorists Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis (1976) refer to as the meritocratic myth. This concept suggests that success is determined solely by individual effort while obscuring structural inequalities, such as disparities in access to resources, cultural capital, and clear assessment understandings and common conceptualisations of quality. By prioritizing traditional (core) academic subjects over creative disciplines, IB supports a hierarchy of knowledge that privileges fields aligned with capitalist priorities. This structured rigidity mirrors the bourgeois objective of reproducing societal norms and maintaining the economic system, rather than encouraging students to challenge systemic inequities or the status quo (Gramsci, 1971; Burke, 2000) by fostering imagination and critical thought.

Bowles and Gintis (2002) further suggest a correspondence between the values taught in schools and the structure of the workplace. These values are transmitted through what they term the ‘hidden curriculum’. These lessons are learned implicitly through the experience of attending school, rather than through the formal curriculum. Marxist scholar Louis Pierre Althusser (1971) considered education to be part of the “ideological state apparatus” (p. 134), functioning to inject students with ideas that obscure their exploitation and make them easier to control. This ideological process, he argued, produces a compliant and unquestioning workforce that passively accepts its role in the capitalist system.

Building on Althusser’s ideas, in his Cultural Capital Theory, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) theorized that education systems and cultural institutions indirectly serve the interests of the bourgeoisie by transmitting cultural capital. Bourdieu described cultural capital as the accumulation of knowledge, behaviours, and skills that individuals use to signal competence and social status, ultimately allowing them to wield influence and maintain their position within the social hierarchy.

This is inherent within international schools as families pay substantial fees to secure their children’s international education, as discussed in Chapter 2, framing education as a tool for reproducing class privilege (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Wealthy parents also leverage their economic and cultural capital through private tutoring, extracurricular activities, and influential networks to ensure their children excel academically and maintain their social class (Bourdieu, 1990). The IB curriculum’s emphasis on grades and hierarchical structures within international

schools further reinforces hidden curriculums. This alignment supports values with capitalist ideals and socializes students into norms that sustain the existing economic system.

Considering quality within teaching within the theoretical underpinnings

For Whitehead and Dewey, quality in teaching is rooted in teachers' ability to provide a holistic, experiential, and transformative learning process. Whitehead (1967) emphasized that quality teaching should engage the full spectrum of a learner's being: intellectual, physical, emotional, imaginative, and aesthetic, while fostering meaningful connections between knowledge and lived experiences. He championed an education grounded in imagination and creativity, where ideas are actively applied to real-world contexts, ensuring relevance and deeper understanding.

Similarly, Dewey (1933) viewed quality teaching as an inquiry-driven and experiential process that prioritizes critical thinking, moral development, and collaborative engagement. He argued that effective teaching should inspire students to connect with their environment, envision new possibilities, and contribute to societal progress. For both philosophers, quality teaching transcends rote memorization and passive learning and leans away from "educational waste" that focuses on standardized examinations (Whitehead, 1929, para. 33) to instead focus on cultivating curiosity, critical awareness, and the capacity for meaningful action. Ultimately, Whitehead and Dewey's approach strives to prepare students to lead reflective, purposeful, individualised lives of becoming while fostering their ability to engage with and improve the world around them.

However, from the standpoint of Marxist scholars, quality in teaching is defined by its capacity to challenge dominant ideologies. It should foster critical consciousness and empower students to question and transform societal structures. Marxist theorists such as Althusser (1971) and Gramsci (1971) argue that education often serves as an ideological state apparatus, perpetuating capitalist values and sustaining the existing social order.

From this perspective, quality teaching must resist its traditional role in reproducing the status quo by encouraging students to critically analyze the socio-economic systems that shape their lives. This process involves exposing the hidden curriculum, which normalizes hierarchy, competition, and compliance. It also requires dismantling the myth of meritocracy, which obscures structural inequalities (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Quality teaching, in this view, promotes a dialectical understanding of society, equipping students to recognize and challenge exploitation, injustice, and inequality. It seeks to empower learners as organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971) who can drive progressive social change and resist societal domestication, ultimately fostering liberation rather than conformity.

Theoretical framework - Conflict Theory

Conflict theory (Villalobos, 2015) offers a logical framework to further explore the tensions that emerged during this study between the ideological influences of Whitehead and Dewey and the structural critiques offered by Marxist theories, especially in relation to shared beliefs about quality (Ferrare & Phillippo, 2022).

Initially, my study was guided by the principles of grounded theory, which allowed for the emergence of themes directly from the data without being constrained by predefined theoretical frameworks. However, it was during the coding process of the in-depth interviews, following the completion of the initial three phases, that significant tensions began to surface. These tensions revealed a clear disjunction between the ideological perspectives held by DP VA teachers and the practical complexities they encountered, particularly in relation to the challenges of assessment complexities and the resulting negative reputation of the DP VA course.

In analyzing these tensions, it became evident that a broader theoretical framework was required to contextualize and interrogate the emerging conflicts. It was at this stage that conflict theory emerged as a key lens through which to examine the interplay between these ideological and structural forces.

My initial encounter with conflict theory came through the work of Bindon (2023), who built upon Elpus's (2019) research into the challenges and strategies surrounding the uptake of Group 6 subjects in the IB DP curriculum. In his dissertation, *Opting for the Arts in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP): Strategies for IB World Schools to Bypass Barriers to Uptake*, Bindon (2023) reflects on how conflict theory "accurately voiced the deep-seated tensions and pressures that [he] perceived surrounding the issues of the arts in education" (p. 161). He further explains that it "captured the sense of frustration, injustice and passion that [he] and others have felt when debating the positioning of the arts within the IB's framework" (p. 161).

Villalobos' Conflict Scale

To explore conflict theory, I lean on Cristobal Villalobos's (2015) conceptual model to examine and organise the conflicts that emerged with the way quality is conceptualized within the teaching of DP VA and what impacts its realization. In his conceptual model, Villalobos integrates Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of field and habitus, which provide a valuable framework for analyzing conflict within structured spaces of power relations. The field represents arenas where power struggles take place, while habitus captures how social realities shape individual actions; actions that are neither entirely rational nor purely unconscious (Bourdieu, 1986).

Villalobos' Conflict Scale is adapted from Bourdieu's field and refers to the level at which conflicts happen in education (visualized in Figure 9).

- School organization level: This includes conflicts that happen within schools and classrooms, such as disagreements between teachers, students, or school staff about how things are done.
- School system level: This involves larger-scale conflicts, like issues with educational policies or how schools are organized at a broader, institutional level.

Conflict Tool is adapted loosely from Bourdieu's habitus and describes the methods or strategies people use to handle conflicts.

- Internalist conflicts: These happen when the tools or methods used come from within the education system itself, such as debates over curriculum, exams, or teaching methods. The focus is on education-specific issues, like cultural capital or knowledge.
- Externalist conflicts: These involve tools or strategies from outside the education system, like political activism, social movements, or artistic protests. These conflicts often connect education issues to wider societal concerns.

Villalobos combines these two aspects (scale and tools) within his conceptual model along two axis. The horizontal axis represents the level of the conflict (school organization vs. school system) while the vertical axis represents the type of tools used (internalist vs. externalist). Within these elements, Villalobos identifies four types of educational conflicts as shown in Figure 9:

Conflicts of meaning

These conflicts are related to how knowledge and education are understood or valued. These conflicts are focused on the scale of school organization and internalist tools revolving around micro issues within the education system. Actors use tools specific to the educational field to challenge the meaning of schooling, teaching paradigms, or the role of schools in society. Examples could include conflicts between teachers or students about curriculum or pedagogy, disagreements about the meaning and purposes of education generated by informal education movements, or the pedagogical orientation that schools should follow (Villalobos, 2015).

Conflicts of function

These conflicts are focused on the scale of school organisation and externalist tools concerning macro issues such as how schools operate day-to-day. They occur at the school level and focus on practical issues such as the distribution of roles, resources, and benefits among actors like teachers and administrators. They often use political or economic tools rather than educational ones and aim to improve the effectiveness or efficiency of the educational system in the short to medium term. This conflict is concerned with efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of the system. An example could be teachers' struggles with administration to change their work conditions or struggles within the school or departments to change the allocation of funds for the development of school policies (Villalobos, 2015).

Conflicts of position

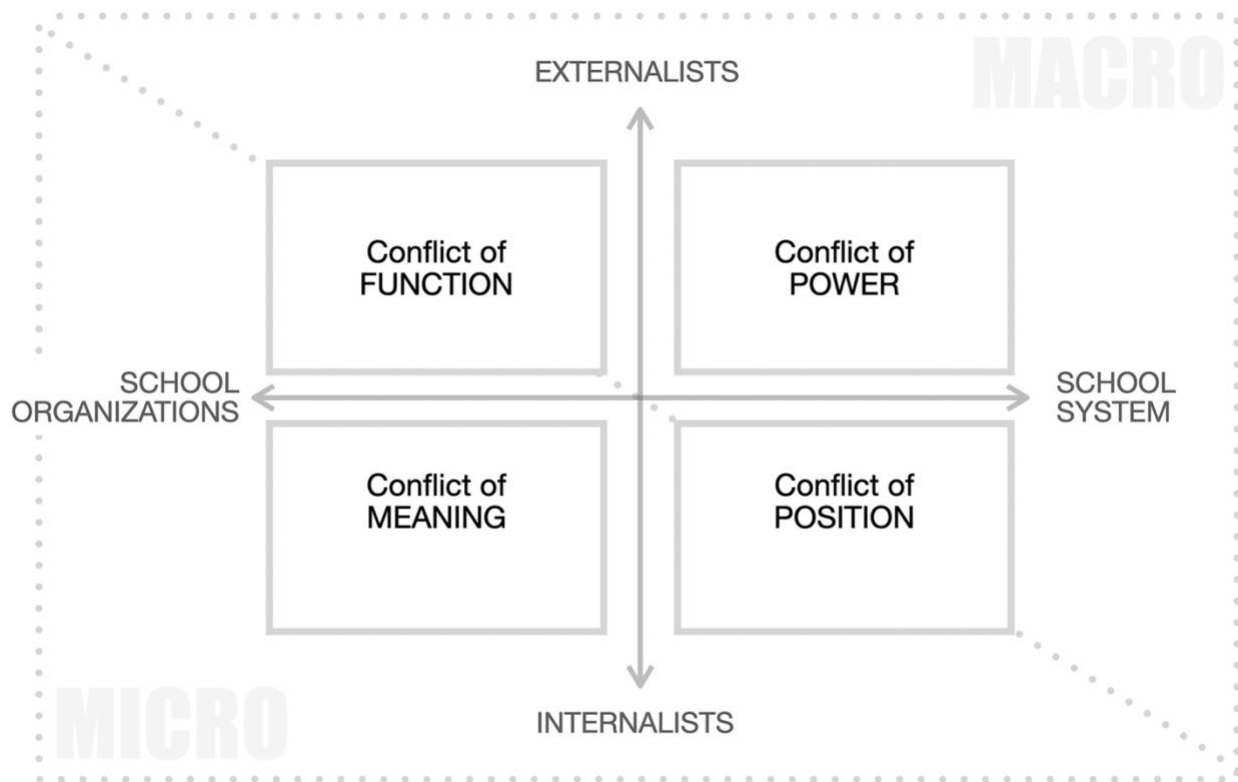
These conflicts are focused on the scale of the school system and internalist tools concerning power struggles within the educational system. Unlike the previous conflicts, conflicts of position are not concerned with issues within the classroom, specific school, or any school-related organization, but within the larger educational system levels. At the educational system

level, these conflicts focus on altering the positions and opportunities available to actors within the field, such as students, teachers, or intellectuals. Using educational tools like certifications or knowledge, these disputes aim to increase equity and reconfigure institutional structures that limit actors' development within the system. For instance, struggles for greater access to higher education or more inclusive policies illustrate these conflicts (Villalobos, 2015).

Conflicts of power

These conflicts focus on the scale of the school system and externalist tools involving broader societal power dynamics and their influence on education. Like conflicts of position, these system-level conflicts seek to transform educational institutions and their distribution of power by using political and economic tools external to the field. They often align with broader societal transformation projects and aim to challenge or restructure rules and dimensions that maintain social control. These conflicts involve the accumulation of various forms of capital to drive systemic change in education and society (Villalobos, 2015; Bourdieu, 1986).

Figure 9. Analytical model of Conflict Theory



Note: Graphic created with Keynote, adapted from Villalobos, 2015, p. 59, Amy Atkinson, 2025

Villalobos's (2015) model offers a valuable tool to enrich the comprehension of the findings of my study into quality within teaching in DP VA. By dissecting the findings through the

analytical lens of conflict theory, a deeper exploration of the wider ramifications of conceptualizations of quality reveals key impacts to the realization of quality within teaching of the DP VA course.

Acknowledging the limitations of applying conflict theory is important. Conflict theory centres predominately on over-arching structural dynamics and power interplays, overlooking nuances of individual agency and personal narratives (Chernoff, 2013). Conflict theory alone will not comprehensively explain all the conceptualizations and interpretations of quality within the teaching of DP VA and the challenges that impact quality, but I believe it is a relevant contribution to the discourse surrounding conceptions of quality within teaching the DP VA course.

Chapter 5 : Preliminary Studies

In this chapter, I provide a summary of the preliminary stages of my research. These stages encompass Phase 1, the Literature Review, grounded in the systematic literature review method of Daniel Mertens and Phase 2, the survey, grounded in survey methods of Floyd J. Fowler. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the adoption of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021) as methodological approach enabled a systematic literature review to be conducted in parallel with the survey. These preliminary phases provided a critical foundation for the research and offered essential context which informed the primary focus of the study: Phase 3, in-depth interviews. Furthermore, these initial stages facilitated participant recruitment. As a result, the study gained both depth and breadth. Together, they illuminated the broader themes and tensions that shaped the qualitative emphasis of the research ensuring a cohesive and comprehensive approach to the over-arching research question of the study.

Phase 1: systematic literature review

Given the lack of literature on my research topic, a systematic review (Mertens, 2018) of VA focused literature was a necessary first step when considering how to support DP VA teachers. My aim was to understand how quality was defined for VA teachers and how it was discussed within accessible VA teaching focused resources. I grounded this portion of the research with the question: How is quality defined and implied for secondary VA teachers within the selected VA teacher education journals (*Art Education* (U.S.A.), *AD Magazine* (U.K.), *Canadian Art Teacher / Enseigner les arts au Canada* (Canada)) from 2012 to 2023?

With the absence of a teaching journal focused specifically on DP VA teaching within international schools, I hypothesized that the national art education journals from the three most popular home countries of DP VA teachers recruited by international schools (Shaw, 2024) would likely be most accessed as resources and so would have a strong impact and influence on foundational learning. Further information about the three selected journals can be found in Appendix J.

Literature review method

I conducted the literature review during the years of 2021 to 2023, situating my positionality as a DP VA teacher to inform my approach. I looked for discussions within the literature of how quality in secondary VA teaching was considered. Aspects such as what would be helpful to know to be a quality teacher, to create a quality program, and encourage quality within DP VA teaching were my focus. Gaining this understanding led to a continual process of “rethinking or relinquishing cherished disciplinary concepts” (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021, p. 307). As my reading progressed, it became evident that there were only a limited number of articles explicitly addressing secondary VA education, and an even smaller subset directly engaged with the concept of quality. In total, I read 1300 articles, with only 139 articles having explicit references to secondary VA education, and with 207 articles containing implications to secondary VA

education. Three articles explicating discussed quality and two mentioned the DP VA course. No articles discussed both quality and DP VA teaching as shown in Table 4. This supported the relevance of my study, indicating that while the broader literature on arts education is substantial, targeted discussions of quality specifically within the context of secondary VA and DP VA are rare.

Table 4. Data collection overview from literature review

Journal	Art Education	AD Magazine	Canadian Art Teacher	Totals
Issues Read	65.1 -75.6	4 -38	11.1 -18.2	
Years	2012 -2023	2012 -2023	2012 -2022	
First Reading	656	532	112	1300
Second Reading	530	218	53	801
Third Reading	157	143	49	349
Secondary Explicit	45	80	14	139
Secondary Implications	110	62	35	207
Quality Explicit	2	0	1	3
IB DP VA Explicit	2	0	0	2

Positionality of authors

As I read the articles, a pattern emerged regarding the positionality of authors as shown in Table 5. I began to notice that a large number of authors were related to positions within higher education, specifically assistant professors.

Table 5. Author positionality overview from literature review

Journal	Art Education	AD Magazine	Canadian Art Teacher	Totals
Issues Read	65.1-75.6	4-38	11.1-18.2	
Years	2012-2023	2012-2023	2012-2022	
University Professors	134	17	19	170
University Instructors	28	6	15	49

Grad/Phd Students				
Museum Gallery Educators	5	8	0	13
Government/Educational Organizations	3	20	0	23
Artists/Designers	2	5	0	7
Community Organizations	1	6	0	7
K-12 VA teachers (non-specified)	19	7	3	29
Secondary Specific VA Teachers	27	57	2	86

Reflections on positionality of authors

The *Canadian Art Teacher / Enseigner les arts au Canada* and *Art Education* journals are predominantly oriented towards academic discourse, with a significant majority of contributions from professors, instructors, and graduate students, and comparatively fewer from secondary teachers. While both journals include articles by K-12 and secondary teachers, their focus leans heavily towards higher education. In contrast, the *AD Magazine* demonstrates greater relevance and accessibility for DP VA teachers, with a higher representation of secondary teachers contributing articles. This indicates that *AD Magazine* may be a more relevant resource for DP VA teachers looking to connect with relevant, classroom-based perspectives and strategies. Overall, the combined focus of all three journals remains skewed towards higher education, with the *AD Magazine* standing out as the publication most reflective of secondary VA classroom experiences.

Emergent themes within the literature

To determine key themes within the literature, I read and coded the 139 articles I identified as secondary explicit as well as the 207 identified with implications to secondary VA teaching simultaneously to maintain an iterative and reflective approach (Charmaz, 2017). The journals were reviewed sequentially: *CAT*, *Art Education*, and *AD Magazine*.

The most prominent theme across the three journals was ‘inclusive and accessible practices’, which focused on adopting critical, intersectional, and culturally responsive approaches to art education. Articles identified within this theme emphasized integrating socially conscious art,

fostering diverse perspectives, addressing bias and inequity, and promoting social justice. They also explored strategies for enhancing accessibility, developing empathy, encouraging emotional and critical visual literacy, and reimagining art education as a tool for freedom and social transformation.

The second most discussed theme was ‘fostering student agency’, which centered on empowering students through risk-taking, choice-based learning, and nurturing growth mindsets. Discussions within this theme highlighted the importance of autonomy, personal engagement, self-expression, and transformative learning experiences, as well as fostering critical reflection, positive identity, and sociocultural awareness.

‘Curriculum and pedagogy’ emerged as the third key theme, exploring what and how art is taught. Articles addressed changes in the VA curriculum, the role of teachers, balancing professional tasks, and implementing reflexive practices, professional development, pedagogical theories, and methods for cultivating visual literacy, metacognition, and holistic learning.

‘Advocacy for art education’ focused on defending the subject by highlighting its transformative power, career benefits, and the need for specialized teacher education. ‘Community engagement’ explored connections with local artists, galleries, and institutions, while ‘technology’ examined the integration of virtual tools, social media, and STEAM practices. Relatedly, ‘interdisciplinary’ approaches promoted cross-disciplinary learning to create meaningful connections.

Other notable themes included ‘creativity’ which focuses on self-expression and innovative teaching, ‘art-making process’ which emphasizes experiential and reflective practices, ‘skills and techniques’ which considers balancing traditional and digital methods, and ‘assessment and feedback’ which addresses collaborative and non-traditional methods. Additional discussions highlighted ‘environment (sustainability)’, ‘global connections’, ‘mindfulness’, and ‘new materiality’. A detailed chart of themes revealed from the thematic coding sorted in order of prevalence across all three journals from 2012-2023 can be found in Appendix K

Phase 2: survey

The purpose of Phase 2: survey was to bridge Phase 1 and 3, assessing the current environment for DP VA teachers in international schools providing “statistical estimates of the characteristics of the target population” (Fowler, 2009) and to recruit participants to add depth and breadth to Phase 3: in-depth interviews. I grounded this phase with questions about how quality is conceived by DP VA teachers, what do DP VA teachers feel contributes to and impacts quality in regards to teaching within the DP VA programme in international schools, and where do DP VA teachers source resources to create a quality program within the DP VA programme in international schools.

Due to limitations in the survey sample size, the dataset was insufficient for robust quantitative analysis. Since the survey had produced rich data, I analysed the short-answer responses from selected survey questions, treating the responses as narrative data, akin to interview transcripts to inform the in-depth interviews. Charmaz (2006) highlights that even brief narrative responses can serve as a valuable resource for understanding participants' subjective experiences, especially when analyzed through a grounded and interpretive lens. Furthermore, the open-ended responses from the survey provided preliminary insights into participants' perspectives, experiences, and areas of interest which were helpful in constructing interview questions that were relevant and contextually grounded.

Survey method

The survey was created on May 1, 2023, and data from the survey was collected in a single method through the third-party application Survey Monkey (SM) (SurveyMonkey, Ottawa, Canada). The survey was a digital questionnaire (Nardi, 2003) arranged into 14 pages with 144 questions (shared in Appendix L). The questions were largely informed by the DP VA guide (IBO, 2014), as well as emerging themes revealed through concurrent findings in the systemic literature review. Data was exported into Microsoft Excel (Redwood, California, U.S.A.) for validation, analysis, and generation of charts. Mindful of the impending end of school year (northern hemisphere) and subsequent summer holidays, the survey was shared in early August 2023. A Call for Participation (shared in Appendix M) was posted on DP VA focused Facebook groups: IB Visual Arts Teachers, IB Visual Arts Teachers group, IB Visual Art Warrior Teachers, and ChineseTEA: Hong Kong Art Teachers. A subsequent post was sent out in a newsletter to DP VA teachers who were members of my IB DP VA support site. The site consists of DP VA teachers who had joined the site of their own volition and opted into receiving correspondence from the site. Participants were encouraged to complete the survey in their own time from August 10 to September 23, 2023.

The survey respondents were predominantly female, aged 35 to 54, with an underrepresentation of male and younger DP VA teachers. Most were from English-speaking countries, including the U.S.A., U.K., Canada, and Australia, though participants also came from nations such as China, India, France, and Colombia. English was the primary language for delivering the DP VA course. A significant proportion taught in international schools, primarily in Asia and Europe, often outside their home countries, motivated by financial and travel opportunities. Notably, respondents from the Americas were underrepresented despite the region's size within the IB network.

Explicit conceptualizations of quality

A strong majority of respondents believe that high quality is an important attribute of the DP VA course and most respondents shared that they understood how high quality was defined and realized within the DP VA course. That both responses were positive show that the majority of

respondents feel that quality is an important attribute relevant to the DP VA course and that most respondents are confident in their understanding of how quality is defined and realized within the DP VA course.

When analyzing and coding responses about how respondents explicitly conceptualised quality in regards to teaching in the DP VA - three overarching dimensions of quality were identified: ‘artistic advancement’, ‘intellectual rigour and inquiry’, and ‘holistic education enhancement’.

‘Artistic advancement’ discusses the dual role of DP VA teachers in nurturing students’ artistic talent and preparing them for future opportunities in VA with discussions focused on ‘professional preparation’ and ‘technical skill development’. Respondents defined quality as fostering technical mastery, creative exploration, and a deep understanding of artistic practices, enabling students to grow into skilled, reflective, and innovative artists who can excel in higher education and professional contexts.

‘Intellectual rigour and inquiry’ highlighted the importance of cultivating a challenging and inquiry-driven learning environment that promotes critical thinking, deep analysis, and academic growth with discussions focused on ‘research and critical thinking’ and ‘academic rigour’. Respondents emphasized the rigour of the DP VA program, noting its role in pushing students beyond their comfort zones and fostering intellectual curiosity, resilience, and the ability to conduct meaningful research and creative exploration.

‘Holistic education enhancement’ underscored the integration of comprehensive arts education with strong support systems to promote both personal and academic development with focus on ‘student support systems’ and ‘comprehensive art education’. Quality was seen as addressing diverse student needs, fostering creativity, critical thinking, and self-expression while ensuring exposure to diverse artistic practices, media, and cultural contexts. Personalized attention and supportive teacher-student relationships were identified as essential in creating an environment that encourages risk-taking and lifelong learning.

Contributors of and impacts to quality

Contributors of quality

Four key themes were revealed by survey respondents as contributors of quality in regard to teaching within the DP VA programme in international schools; ‘harmonizing creativity and compliance’, ‘art space and resource accessibility’, ‘educational engagement’ and ‘assessment engagement’.

‘Harmonizing creativity and compliance’ emphasized the need for teachers to balance fostering students’ creative expression with meeting the DP VA program’s formal requirements. This involves integrating artistic freedom with academic structure, ensuring students develop technical skills while exploring creativity in a supportive environment. Respondents highlighted

the importance of encouraging experimentation and treating students as artists while maintaining alignment with assessment criteria.

‘Art space and resource accessibility’ underscored the importance of physical spaces, resources, and funding in supporting artistic learning. Dedicated and flexible art spaces, high-quality materials, and sufficient funding were identified as essential for fostering meaningful artistic exploration. Respondents emphasized that providing students with the necessary tools, time, and resources enables them to meet course goals and develop their potential.

‘Educational engagement’ focused on the role of passionate and knowledgeable teachers, personalized support, and strong student-teacher relationships in creating a high-quality learning environment. Effective teaching involved diverse pedagogical strategies, professional development, and collaboration among educators. Individualized guidance, tailored scaffolding, and constructive feedback were seen as vital for fostering student success, alongside enriching activities like field trips to sustain engagement and inspiration.

‘Assessment engagement’ highlighted the importance of students’ understanding of assessment criteria and active participation in feedback processes to support growth. Quality teaching involved clear communication of DP VA assessment frameworks, targeted skill-building activities, and regular feedback sessions. Constructive and criteria-linked feedback enabled students to refine their artistic and technical skills while fostering critical self-reflection and continuous improvement.

Impacts to quality

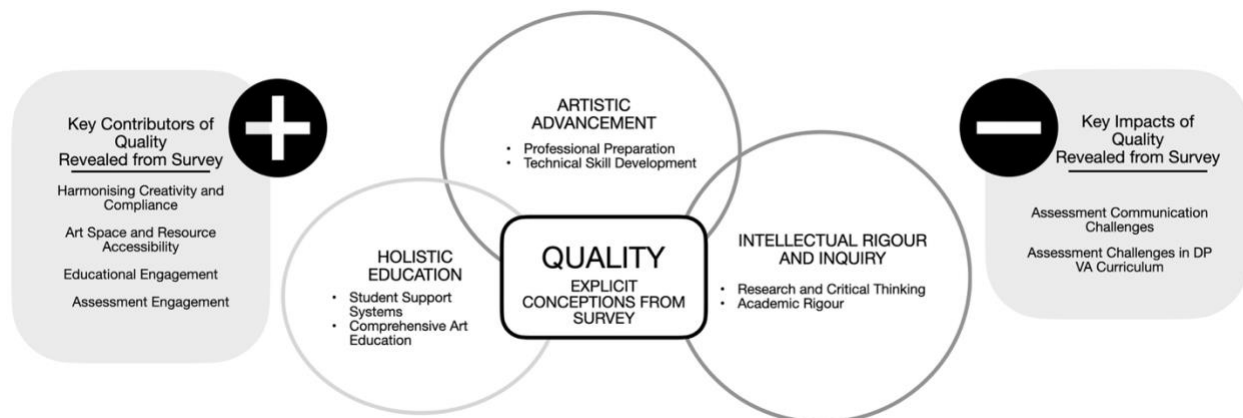
Discussions of impacts to quality produced emotional responses from respondents within two key themes of: ‘assessment communication challenges’ and ‘assessment challenges in the DP VA curriculum’.

‘Assessment communication challenges’ emphasized the importance of students’ understanding of DP VA assessment criteria and active engagement with feedback to support growth. Clear communication of assessment frameworks, targeted skill development, and constructive, criteria-linked feedback were identified as essential for aligning student work with program standards. Regular lessons, peer feedback, and detailed formative feedback were seen as key strategies for fostering reflective practices, enabling students to refine both their artistic and technical skills and achieve quality learning outcomes.

‘Assessment challenges in the DP VA curriculum’ highlighted complexities and perceived inequities in the assessment framework. Respondents expressed concerns about inconsistent grading, unpredictable outcomes, and disparities between Standard Level (SL) and Higher Level (HL) courses. Instances of discrepancies between predicted and final grades, conflicting feedback from examiners, and difficulty achieving top grades were frequently mentioned, with

concerns that even excellent work often failed to meet the highest standards despite external recognition. Additionally, respondents noted unclear differentiation and perceived harsher grading for SL students compared to HL, raising questions about fairness. These issues underscore the need for greater transparency, consistency, and equity in the assessment process to build confidence and ensure fair outcomes for all students.

Figure 10. Visual showing explicit conceptions of quality and contributors of and impacts to quality as revealed through Phase 2:survey.



Note: Graphic created with Excel using data collected from survey responses, Amy Atkinson, 2025

Concerning resources for DP VA

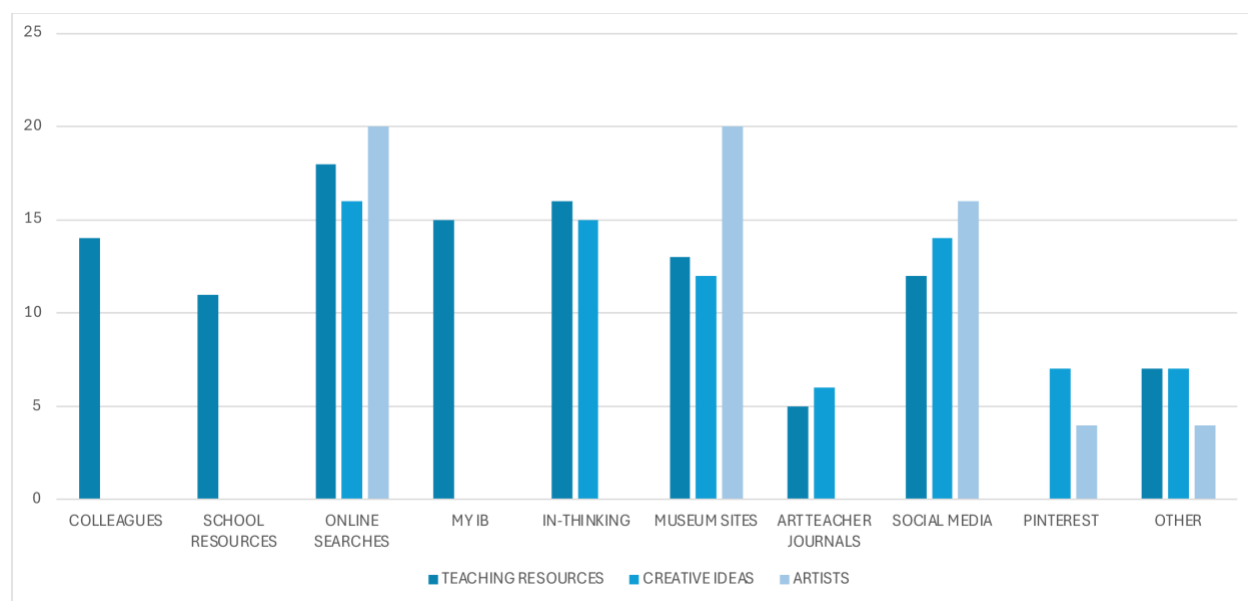
Given that there are resources available from the IBO to support the DP VA, as shared previously in Chapter three, the responses from the survey revealed surprising perspectives. A visual of survey responses concerning resources is shown in Figure 11 while numerical details of survey responses concerning resources are shared in Appendix N.

Survey respondents shared that they sourced resources for teaching mostly from online searches (e.g. Google), the In-Thinking website, My IB and from colleagues. Also noted was museum websites, social media and school resources. Other responses shared were Art of Education Online (AOEU), IBPDVAwithMissA.com, and Art21. Art teacher journals were noted as the least popular choice.

For creative ideas, respondents shared resources for creative ideas were sourced mostly from online searches (e.g. Google), In-Thinking website and social media. Also noted were museum websites and Pinterest (San Francisco, California U.S.A). Other sources shared were visiting local artist exhibitions, visiting museums, reading (actual!) books about Art, AOEU, IBPDVAwithMissA.com, and Art21. Again, art teacher journals were noted as the least popular choice.

Survey respondents shared artists were sourced to share in the DP VA classroom mostly via online searches, museum websites, and social media. Also noted was Pinterest. Others shared were local artist exhibitions, theartyteacher.com, visiting museums, and reading books about art.

Figure 11. Visual of sources for resources ranked by survey respondents: teaching, creative ideas, artists



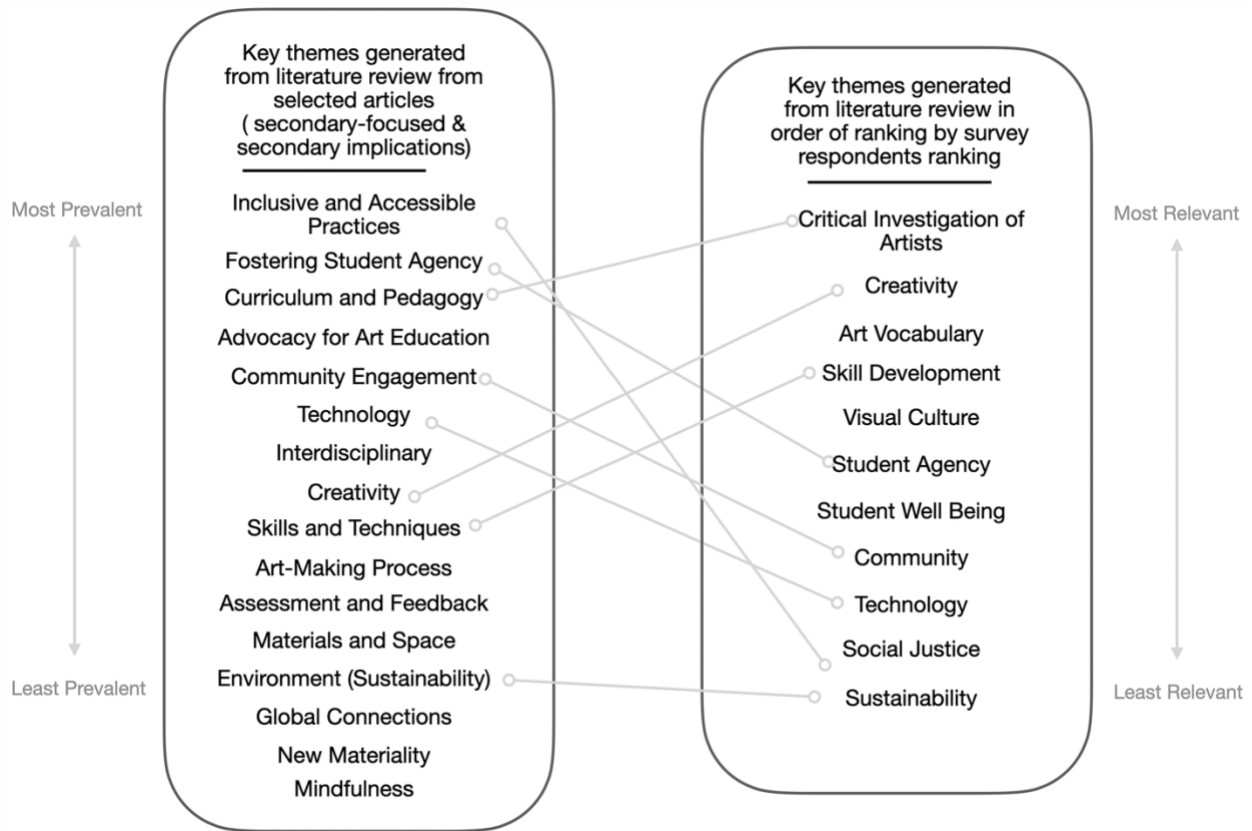
Note: Graphic created with Excel using data collected from survey responses, Amy Atkinson, 2025

Survey relevance to literature review

The results of the survey directly challenge my initial hypothesis for the literature review. I had theorized that art education journals would have a formative influence on the teaching practices of DP VA teachers and thus be a key resource in their professional development and classroom application. However, survey results revealed that the popular choice for resources is collective intelligence in the form of online searches. Further supplementary resources such as museum websites, IB-specific platforms, and social media were noted as useful while the art education journals were identified as the least accessed resource across all categories.

A clear divergence also emerged between the priorities of practicing DP VA teachers and the focus of the key themes generated from the literature review. While the literature review consolidated some themes into broader categories, resulting in minor discrepancies, the gap underscores a misalignment between the theoretical discourse of art education journals and the practical needs of DP VA teachers striving to build quality programs within the DP VA framework as shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Visual of Art Education topics generated in Phase 1 compared with those of Phase 2.



Note: Graphic created with Keynote from survey responses and literature review, Amy Atkinson, 2025

Survey results indicate that DP VA teachers prioritize ‘critical investigation of artists’ and ‘creativity’, followed by ‘art vocabulary’, ‘skill development’, and ‘visual culture’, emphasizing critical thinking, artistic exploration, and technical skill development. In contrast, the literature review showed that in art education journals, greater emphasis was placed on ‘inclusive and accessible practices’, ‘fostering student agency’, ‘curriculum and pedagogy’, and ‘advocacy for Art Education’; broader considerations that do not align directly with teachers’ day-to-day instructional concerns.

Topics like ‘community engagement’ and ‘technology’ showed moderate alignment between practical and academic perspectives. However, a significant divergence emerged in areas like ‘creativity’, ‘skills and techniques’, and the ‘art-making process’, which were ranked highly relevant by survey respondents but received minimal attention in the art education journals. This highlights the literature’s undervaluation of hands-on, process-oriented aspects of art education central to teachers’ practices.

Overall, the findings reveal a disconnect between academic literature and DP VA teachers' practical priorities. This disconnect highlights areas of further study and opportunities where the art education journals literature could expand their reach to better address the practical needs of DP VA teachers and provide more relevant support for fostering high-quality teaching.

Summary of Preliminary Studies

Despite the limitations, it is important to note that the primary purpose of the preliminary studies of Phase 1: literature review and Phase 2: survey was twofold: to assess current understandings of quality within VA teaching and more specifically the current environment of DP VA teaching and to recruit participants for the subsequent phase 3: detailed in-depth interviews. In this regard, the literature review and survey were immensely helpful in guiding my research providing a foundational understanding of the current landscape of DP VA teaching and facilitating the recruitment of sixteen interview participants from a wide range of international school locales significantly enhancing the breadth and depth of the interviews.

These preliminary studies highlighted the critical absence of classroom teachers' voices within academic discourse, particularly in the context of DP VA teachers in international schools. Academic journals predominantly reflect a top-down flow of information; originating from universities and disseminated to teachers, while the lived experiences, challenges, and insights of classroom practitioners are largely excluded. By reversing this traditional hierarchy, my study actively provides space for DP VA teachers to articulate their concerns and directly address the issues they face.

The literature review and survey revealed a significant gap in the representation of DP VA teachers' perspectives, particularly within the unique context of international schools. For instance, issues specific to international schools, such as budget management, administrative responsibilities, and the multifaceted roles teachers must navigate, are scarcely addressed in academic journals. This raises a critical question: who equips teachers to handle these challenges? The survey data, though preliminary, offered rich qualitative insights, underscoring the depth of experience and the eagerness of participants to share their perspectives. It became apparent that those who completed the survey had much to say, and their responses provided valuable context for the subsequent phase of the study.

These findings were instrumental in refining the focus of the in-depth interviews, guiding the development of lines of questioning and identifying key areas for further exploration. Thus, the preliminary phases not only informed but also enriched the qualitative focus of Phase 3, ensuring that the research remained grounded in the lived realities of the DP VA teachers it seeks to represent.

Chapter 6 : In-depth Interviews

In this chapter, I outline the method employed for Phase 3: in-depth interviews, which is grounded in Kathy Charmaz's grounded theory, drawing upon Robert K. Yin's framework for in-depth interviews within case studies, as well as Irving Seidman's three-part thematic qualitative interview series. Next, I detail the organization and structure of the interview process, situate the interview participants within the context of the study, and address the research questions specific to the in-depth interviews. Also, I describe the three-step coding process used to analyze the data, and I present the initial key findings emerging from the interviews, aligned with the research questions.

In-depth interviews method

For the individual in-depth interviews (Yin, 2014), I recruited DP VA teachers currently teaching within international schools to deliberately “study contextual conditions” (p.13). My aim with the in-depth interviews was to conduct “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13), exploring DP VA teacher's perspectives and personal opinions of quality teaching within the DP VA focusing on their experiences, how they portray the experiences and what impacts quality within their teaching practice. The “contemporary phenomenon” (p.13) discussed is DP VA teaching with international schools.

The interview protocol was further inspired by Seidman's (1998) three-part thematic qualitative interview series affording three consecutively scheduled interviews. The three-interview framework was chosen deliberately to accentuate the participants experiences with teaching the DP VA course at three key segments during the DP VA course year enabling a holistic and authentic documentation. (Interview Question Plan shared in Appendix O)

The design of the in-depth interviews resembled guided conversations rather than rigidly structured question-and-answer sessions. Although a consistent line of inquiry was initially planned, the actual flow of questions became more “fluid rather than rigid” (Yin, 2014, p. 110), adapting to the natural progression of the discussion. This approach was intentionally designed to satisfy the needs of the inquiry while simultaneously fostering a “friendly” and “nonthreatening” collegial conversational atmosphere (p. 110). By framing the interviews as conversations, I created a safe and open space for participants to share their experiences while also reflecting on and making sense of those experiences. This conversational approach allowed participants to explore their thoughts narratively, offering a framework to better illuminate and understand the complexity of teaching and the lived realities of DP VA teachers (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In this sense, the dialogue became an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing, creating a collaborative space for co-constructed understanding (Freire, 2000).

A major inspiration for developing the in-depth interview process was my research on storytelling in academic contexts. Ahmed (2017a) reminds us that “theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin” (p. 10), emphasizing the importance of theory grounded in lived experiences. Storytelling embodies this principle, serving as a fundamental practice in human learning (Cajete, 1994) and is deeply rooted in Indigenous cultures, where it sustains communities and validates knowledge systems (Iseke, 2013). Stories help us make sense of experiences and connect with others (Webster & Mertova, 2007). As “people think narratively rather than argumentatively” (Weick, 1995, p. 127), storytelling is a powerful framework to capture the complexity of teaching and the realities of VA teachers. Listening to teachers’ narratives is long overdue (Goodson, 2005) and given that this is the first study to focus on teacher voice for DP VA teachers within international schools, it is crucial to amplify these voices and address their underrepresentation in professional literature (Fleischer, 1994; Hubbard & Miller, 1999).

I was also guided in my research by other connected thematic underpinnings of teacher identity, burnout, and retention. For VA teachers, identity is a dynamic process of becoming (Atkinson, 2011), negotiating who they are, who they are not, and who they wish to become (Britzman, 1992). Their identity is shaped by their experiences in art communities where art and artists are valued, yet marginalized by their roles within educational systems (Clandinin et al., 1999). This creates tensions between teachers’ artistic ideals and institutional expectations (Cohen-Evron, 2002), particularly as motivations for teaching are often tied to subject knowledge and passion for the arts (Bergmark et al., 2018).

Feminist theory further highlights the systemic undervaluing of VA, tied to its feminine identification and perceived lack of academic rigour, which forces VA teachers to negotiate their professional and personal identities within institutions that often fail to recognize their value. Understanding these conflicts is essential to addressing retention and empowerment, as VA teachers continuously reconstruct their identities in response to lived experiences and systemic challenges (Cohen-Evron, 2002). These negotiations shape how VA teachers sustain their roles and navigate marginalization in education.

As a researcher with a deep understanding of the DP VA teaching context, my positionality allowed me to foster a collegial, conversational setting that encouraged authentic sharing. This approach was critical to eliciting meaningful insights from participants. Recognizing the transformative potential of teacher narratives, I intentionally gave space within this study to share the in-depth interviews at length. Teacher stories hold the capacity to challenge and reshape learning structures (Sinner, 2013). By honouring and sharing the perspectives of DP VA educators, this study not only contributes a much-needed perspective to the field of art education but also validates the voices of DP VA teachers who have long been overlooked.

Research questions specific to the in-depth interviews

The in-depth interviews were guided by the research questions:

1. How do DP VA teachers in international schools conceive of 'quality'?
2. What are the contributors of and impacts to 'quality' in regard to teaching within the IB DP VA programme in international schools?

Recruitment of participants

I was honoured that sixteen DP VA teachers chose to participate in the in-depth interview process. Most participants were recruited directly from their interest expressed at the end of the preliminary study: Phase 2, the survey portion. This was a crucial step as it garnered interest from a wider global area, giving the interview process more breadth and depth. At the end of the survey, initially two options for interviews were offered; focus groups and in-depth (individual) interviews; all respondents volunteered specifically for the in-depth interviews citing concerns with confidentiality.

Logistics and relevance the in-depth interview session timing

The three distinct interview sessions were scheduled to coincide with key stages during the Northern hemisphere school year; in September/October 2023, January/February 2024 and May/June 2024. The timing was decided based on the DP VA Year 2 submission deadlines and informed by my positionally as a DP VA teacher. I am keenly aware that DP VA teachers have limited time and so during the interview process I considered how this research can be explored with DP VA teachers in a non-obtrusive or invasive way, taking care not to create further demands on their time; the schedule of the In-depth Interviews is shared in Appendix P. The choice to schedule 3 short interviews rather than one long interview was strategic to capture authentic responses at key stages during the course: to capture teacher's lived experiences during the proverbial emotional roller coaster that teaching the DP VA course can elicit, as was noted by one of the participants:

I think you've asked some really good questions, and the reason I say that is that you've asked them at different junctures of the year.....And you saw me in different lights, you know, now you're seeing me more relaxed. I'm on summer holiday, I'm in a reflective mood. I'm thinking about the year that's been but also talking about what worked well and what could have been improved from last year. And then in February, you saw me quite stressed and anxious and, on my knees, metaphorically speaking....So it was good the way in which you approached that, and you obviously knew when to interview the candidates (P 1_5 i3).

Interviews platform

I conducted the recorded interviews over the Zoom online meeting platform (zoom.com, San Jose, California, U.S.A.). The recordings were digitally transcribed using Happy Scribe (happyscribe.com, Barcelona) The initial transcriptions of the interviews were emailed to the

interview participants within a month after each interview session to allow them to read over and omit any areas that they did not wish to include in the study. Sections flagged from participants at that stage were deleted and not included within the study. As I analyzed the interviews in a continual reflective process, the theoretical direction of the study continued to emerge (Charmaz, 2014).

Interviews timing

Individual interviews lasted for approximately 30 minutes each time but were dependent on the flow of the conversation. The first round of 14 interviews totalled 394.88 minutes, second round of 16 interviews (in total) took 543.69 minutes, and the third round of 16 interviews (in total) took 676.16 minutes as captured from the zoom recordings. Altogether, I conducted 44 interviews spanning over 1,614.73 minutes or 26.91 hours. I observed that interviews gradually lengthened in time, possibly as the participants became more comfortable with the process and the congenial atmosphere garnering more commonalities as discussions progressed with further issues to discuss and unpack. The bulk of the interviews were scheduled at ideal times for the interview participants, usually just before the school day from 8-10AM or just after school from 3-5PM which required some logistical manoeuvring, early morning and late nights for myself as I navigated the unyielding time zones (timing of interviews shared in Appendix P).

Interviews organization

I loosely framed the interview questions around expectations and components outlined in the DP VA curriculum guide (IBO, 2014). I created a list of initial questions in advance, sharing it with participants which served as starting points for fluid open-ended conversations (Yin, 2014), aligning with the principles of guided conversations (Charmaz, 2014). In this approach, I viewed the interview process as an emergent, interactive process, where mutual exploration of the participant's experiences and perspectives takes center stage and so I was mindful throughout the interviews that the way questions were posed, how I listened, and the manner in which I followed up were all critical to the co-construction of meaningful data (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

I designed the interview sessions as guided conversations rather than rigid, structured question-and-answer sessions. The emphasis was placed on creating a space where participants could speak freely while I encouraged, listened, and learned (Charmaz, 2014). As the interviews progressed, my approach evolved, taking into account emerging findings from the survey data and concurrent literature review (Charmaz, 2014). This iterative process allowed me to develop refined, pointed questions, which facilitated deeper clarification and the introduction of new themes as necessary (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

That my aim was successfully accomplished was evident as, through the interview process, the discussions became dynamic, inspiring, and mutually enriching experiences. Participants not only shared their insights but also engaged in meaningful exchanges about new and interesting

artwork, artists, and teaching strategies. Many participants shared their personal artistic directions, showing how their creative practices intersected with their teaching. These moments brought a deeper dimension to the interviews, as participants frequently shared their screens to display unit plans, assignment structures, and organizational strategies. Some even offered virtual tours of their DP VA classrooms and studios, holding up student artworks in various stages of development while discussing the processes and ideas their students were exploring. These visual and interactive moments added a layer of richness to the interviews that could not be fully captured in the transcripts.

The interviews also became opportunities for participants to seek support, feedback, and guidance, highlighting the professional and collegial nature of these conversations. Many participants requested that the interviews extend beyond the prescribed time limit, using the additional time to discuss strategies, share ideas, and seek advice on course development and teaching approaches. These extended discussions, while not included in the recorded timing or transcripts, underscored the value of creating a space where DP VA teachers could connect, reflect, and collaborate. They revealed a need for more opportunities for professional support and community among DP VA teachers, particularly in the oft isolated context of international schools.

My positionality as both a researcher and an experienced practitioner in DP VA allowed me to serve not only as an interviewer but also as a resource for participants. Teachers frequently tapped into my knowledge of the curriculum, assessment practices, and broader art education strategies, seeking advice on everything from integrating contemporary art practices to supporting students in developing their technical skills and conceptual depth. This dual role of researcher and mentor enriched the interviews, creating a reciprocal exchange of ideas and insights. In this sense, the interviews became more than data collection tools; they were moments of professional growth and connection for both the participants and me.

The feedback from participants further highlighted the significance of these interactions. One participant described the experience as “cathartic” (P 1_5 i3), suggesting that the interview provided a rare opportunity for reflection and release. Another participant shared; “I was thrilled to get an email again from you because it really helped me reflect the first time....being towards the end of the year, I was eager to think through how things had gone. So thank you for your questions” (P 5_8 i3).

These comments reflect the reflective and supportive nature of the process, as well as the importance of creating spaces for DP VA teachers to articulate their experiences, challenges, and successes.

Ultimately, the interviews transcended their initial purpose as a means of gathering data. They became a platform for fostering community, collaboration, and professional dialogue. This

dynamic exchange not only enriched the research process but also reinforced the need for more structured opportunities for DP VA teachers to connect, share, and support one another in their practice. The experience highlighted the importance of building professional networks and creating spaces where educators can engage in reflective practice, share resources, and collectively address the complexities of teaching DP VA in diverse educational contexts.

Interviews questions

I framed questions for each session loosely around the key focus of quality intended to draw out participants conceptualizations, definitions and realizations of quality as well as determine what participants felt were contributors of and impacts to quality in regard to teaching within the DP VA programme in international schools. Designing questions to also be reflective of the specific timing of activities and expectations within the DP VA school year.

Essentially the main focus of the three interviews were:

- Interview 1: Situating Participants at Key point 1 (Beginning of DP VA Year)
- Interview 2: Mid point: Reflections on progress at Key point 2 (Mid DP VA Year)
- Interview 3: End of year Reflections on progress at Key point 3 (End of DP VA Year)

Coding process

The data from the transcriptions of the interviews were coded both manually and using Quirkos software (Quirkos.com, Edinburgh, U.K.) and then Intellectus Statistics software (www.intellectusstatistics.com, Clearwater, FL, U.S.A.). Using focused coding helped to expedite the analysis and streamline subsequent data collection to gather targeted data informing the continuing interview process and simultaneous literature review (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

First phase of coding

After transcripts were approved by participants, I read through the transcribed interviews writing memos and extracting fragments of data (words, lines, segments, and incidents) closely for “analytic import” (Charmaz, 2017, p.109), organizing responses to align with key themes that emerged from the questions during the interview process. This phase was conducted shortly after each interview and before the next interview to systematically interrogate the data as it was gathered. In accordance with grounded theory (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021), the process moved back and forth between interviews and coding in an iterative process, leading to rethinking questions that were originally hypothesized and adding new questions. (Examples of First Phase of Coding in Appendix Q)

Second phase of coding

The second phase of coding was conducted after all interviews were completed. Since there was an interweaving of discussions through the interviews, I chose to combine all into a master coding to ascertain the full picture revealed through the conversations. This stage was assisted

first with Quirko's Software, allowing me to organize the flow of conversation into large groupings of thematic codes. Then I used Intellectus software, enacting a detailed coding "line by line" (Charmaz, 2015, p. 161) extracting the most significant or frequent codes to sort, synthesize, integrate and organize the data. (List of codes from three combined interviews shared in Appendix R) Guided by the codes ascertained by Intellectus Software, I was able to complete a further manual line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2015) using PDF Expert (Readdle, Berlin, Germany) on my iPad (Apple, Cupertino, California, U.S.A.). (Examples of Second Phase of Coding in Appendix S) I found this strategy particularly useful as I could colour code sections as well as add written notes to highlight relevant text. This approach supported the fluid make-up of the interviews and allowed for responses from the combined interviews to be equally analyzed within "deeper and more analytical readings" (p. 1615).

Coding identification

For the purposes of identification, numerical codes were delineated to interview participants to preserve anonymity. Each participant was assigned an identifier consisting of a number and letter combination eg (P 5_3 i3). P denotes that it is an interview participant. The first number denotes their years of experience: 1 for DP VA teachers with one to four years' experience and 5 for DP VA teachers with more than five years' experience. The second number was randomly assigned. Finally, the interview Key point was added with i1, i2 and i3.

Memos

Throughout the research process, memos were used extensively for both reflective and analytic purposes. Written in informal, unofficial language for personal use rather than public consumption (Charmaz, 2014), these memos served as a crucial tool for documenting my evolving thoughts, questions, and interpretations. The consistent practice of writing memos proved invaluable, filling more than two notebooks with scrawled reflections, observations, and ideas. This process allowed me to pause and critically analyze various components of the study, encouraging reflexivity about the coding process and interview responses (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

Revisiting these memos frequently throughout the study not only helped to ground my thoughts but also acted as a bridge between the raw data and emerging themes. By engaging in this iterative process, I was able to refine my interpretations, identify patterns, and remain attuned to the nuances of participants' experiences. The memos also became a space for questioning my own assumptions and positionality, ensuring that I approached the data with an open and analytical mindset. This practice was instrumental in maintaining a clear and evolving focus on the study's objectives, as the memos served as a dynamic record of my thought process and an ongoing dialogue with the research itself.

Situating participants of in-depth interviews

Of the sixteen interview participants, the majority (87%) identified as female, which indicates those identifying as male gendered DP VA teachers (13%) were underrepresented in this survey. This is indicative of a larger issue within the field (Coles, 2019). The majority of participants were aged between 35-54, which indicates that new (young) teachers and older teachers were also underrepresented in this study. The majority of participants countries of origin were U.S.A. and U.K.. Other countries noted were Hong Kong, Canada, Finland, and Kenya. The language in which all the participants deliver the DP VA course was in English, demographically aligning with data from ISC Research (Shaw, 2024).

At the time of the study, most participants were living in a ‘foreign to them’ country and teaching in international schools. Most interview participants were currently located in Asia and Oceania and Europe, Middle East, Africa, although a few participants noted that they had earlier experiences teaching within international schools in the Americas. According to the regional distribution of candidates (IBO, 2024a), interview participants from international schools in the Americas were underrepresented in this study.

Education levels of participants

All of the interview participants held at least a bachelor’s degree with additional teaching certification or a concurrent education degree in Art Education, roughly half of the participants held a master’s degree and one was a current Ph.D. candidate. Interview participants honed their skills to teach VA within their post-secondary education with majors of Fine Art, Graphic Design, Art History and Art Education. Undergraduate schooling was completed mostly in the U.K. and U.S.A. with a few hailing from Hong Kong and Canada. Teacher certification education was completed in institutions mostly in the U.K. and U.S.A. also with a few from Canada and Finland. Those who completed their master’s also did so in the U.K. and U.S.A. It is clear that the interview respondents were highly educated within the field of study.

DP VA specific professional development

All participants had participated in at least one DP VA training course provided by the IB before the interviews. Many had participated in numerous training workshops to support their teaching of the DP VA course, with over half of the interview participants attending DP VA Category (CAT) 2 courses and many attending DP VA CAT 3 courses. 60% of the participants noted they also attended other courses offered from IBO in addition to the DP VA focused workshops such as workshops to support Theory of Knowledge (TOK), Extended Essay (EE), Middle Years Program (MYP), Workshop Leaders, and DP Leadership and Inquiry in the IB. It is clear that the interview participants have acquired extensive training in DP VA from the IB which is beneficial for this study.

A few participants also shared that they had chosen to partake in examination duties on top of their teaching duties. Marking and moderating duties are done using IB's online system RM Assessor and usually take place starting within two weeks after the component submission (uploads) deadlines and are completed three weeks later. Since the Comparative Study (CS) and Extended Essay (EE) are early submissions, examiners in the Northern Hemisphere find their examining duties usually fall in late March, causing DP VA teachers to balance final exhibition work loads, final submission upload duties along with examination duties. For those selected for Process Portfolio (PP) and Exhibition (EX), their examination times fall at a less intense time for DP VA teachers; in late April after all components have been submitted. It must be noted that DP VA teachers are assigned components to examine from IBO and so do not have an option to choose a more suitable component in terms of timing. There are two marking periods during the year; for the northern hemisphere examining happens from March-June and in the southern hemisphere from October-December. DP VA teachers who served as CS Examiners, PP Examiners, EX examiners and EE examiners were noted among the interview participants.

DP VA specific teaching experience

The majority of the DP VA teachers taking part in the interviews were currently teaching the DP VA course, while one was focused on teaching Middle Years and one working as a DP VA workshop leader. Of the participants, one third had 1-5 years' experience and two thirds had between 5-16 years' experience. In total, the interview participants possessed 147 years of experience teaching DP VA.

Transiency of the DP VA teaching position in international schools

Over 35% of the participants had been in their current position for one to two years, 30% had been in their position for three to four years and 30% held their current position for more than four years. Over 30% of the participants held leadership responsibilities within their international schools serving in roles such as Head of a Creative or Fine Arts Department. During the interview process, two of the participants accepted leadership roles within their international schools and three participants did not renew their contract at their post but took on new positions in different schools, relocating over the summer.

Considering in-depth interview research question 1: Explicit discussion of quality

In consideration of the first part of the research question for the in-depth interviews, how do DP VA teachers in international schools conceive of quality, interview participants were directly asked to define their understanding within the context of DP VA. No qualifiers or guiding definitions were provided, as the aim was to uncover how each participant independently interpreted the concept of quality and how this interpretation shaped their teaching practice. Responses among interview participants revealed a tension between understandings of quality with two main themes emerging: 'evolving quality definition' and 'quality in DP VA teaching'.

Further explanation of participants responses discussing explicit discussion of quality in Chapter 7.

Table 6. Key themes from explicit discussions of quality

Key Themes	Coding Excerpts
Evolving quality definition	21
Quality in DP VA teaching	31

Note: Key Themes revealed through coding of combined in-depth interviews

Considering in-depth interview research question 2: Implicit discussions of quality

For the second research question; what are the contributors of and impacts to ‘quality’ in regards to DP VA teaching within international schools, the coding of the three combined interviews revealed seven key themes of: ‘DP VA curriculum dynamics’, ‘DP VA assessment complexities’, ‘DP VA management complexities’, ‘holistic art education practices’, ‘educational and institutional art challenges’, ‘professional growth’, and ‘international art education dynamics’. Further explanation of participants responses discussing implicit discussions of quality are discussed in Chapters 8-11.

For the purposes of this study, I have focused on an in-depth exploration of three key themes: ‘DP VA curriculum dynamics’, ‘DP VA assessment complexities’, and ‘DP VA management complexities’. These themes emerged as the most relevant to participants, encompassing the majority of the interview discussions and providing significant insights into the factors that influence the quality of teaching within the DP VA program. These areas were central to participants’ experiences, challenges, and perspectives, making them critical for a deeper understanding of the research question.

The remaining four themes, ‘holistic art education practices’, ‘educational and institutional art challenges’, ‘professional growth’, and ‘international school dynamics’ are summarized within Chapter 11. While these themes also reveal contributors of and impacts to the concept of quality, they were less prominent in participant discussions and were not as directly relevant to the core findings of this study. However, their inclusion provides valuable context and highlights additional elements that influence the teaching and learning environment within teaching of the DP VA course.

Table 7. Key themes revealed that are contributors of and impacts to quality in regards to teaching within the DP VA

Key Themes	Coding Excerpts
DP VA curriculum dynamics	235
DP VA assessment complexities	134
DP VA management complexities	110

Holistic art education practices	100
Educational and institutional art challenges	99
Professional growth	82
International school dynamics	65

Note: Key Themes revealed through coding of combined in-depth interviews

Chapter 7 : Explicit Conceptualizations of Quality

In this chapter, I share how participants of the Phase 3: in-depth interviews explicitly define quality, exploring the two main themes of ‘evolving quality definition’ and ‘quality in DP VA teaching’.

Evolving quality definition

Interview participants revealed the inherent challenges in defining and evaluating quality within the DP VA consistently across diverse cultural, pedagogical, and institutional contexts. As one participant noted: “It is like, how long is a piece of string? It’s one of those words; how much is quality?” (P 5_7 i2)

Key discussions coded within the ‘evolving quality definition’ included discussions surrounding ‘consistency in quality: technical vs conceptual’, ‘perceptions of quality shifting over time/experience’, and ‘subjective understandings of quality as assessed’.

Table 8. Codes identified within ‘evolving quality definition’

Code	Coding Excerpts
Consistency in quality: technical vs conceptual	9
Perceptions of quality shifting over time/experience	7
Subjective understandings of quality as assessed	5

Note: Codes identified within ‘evolving quality definition’ revealed through coding of combined in-depth interviews

Consistency in quality: technical vs conceptual

When discussing consistency in quality, one participant shared:

We’re all human, and we all have our own identities and we build up our knowledge on that, and our environment and our cultural background... So how do we determine the quality in a consistent way? And especially when you’re assessing students work and giving them feedback, how do you ensure that the quality, or what you mean by quality, is consistent compared to somebody else in a different school? (P 1_6 i1).

This underscores the inconsistencies in understanding and applying standards of artistic quality, especially when assessing student work in open-ended curricula, where projects can range from traditional painting to virtual reality installations.

A shift away from technical skill as the sole measure of quality is evident, with interviewees highlighting the importance of thoughtfulness, purpose, and conceptual depth. Participants emphasized the value of engaging students intellectually, analytically, and creatively, describing quality as fostering lifelong learning for both students and teachers.

This evolving definition of quality prioritizes intellectual growth, self-directed exploration, and cultural awareness. However, diverse cultural perspectives and mediums complicate assessments of quality, as participants noted challenges in understanding cultural connotations or comparing sculpture to photography. This underscores the need for a broader, more inclusive approach to evaluating artistic quality that respects specificity and avoids privileging certain frameworks.

Perceptions of quality shifting over time/experience

Further discussions among participants revealed that their own understandings of quality evolved significantly as they progressed through their educational and professional journeys, underscoring how perceptions of quality are deeply tied to personal growth, knowledge acquisition, and increased exposure to diverse practices and perspectives as one participant elaborated on how their understanding of quality evolved specifically in relation to experience with different mediums, emphasizing the role of practice and exposure over time:

[Quality] only comes with the practice and years of teaching it and understanding the medium. For me, photography is easy because I understand I've had my training with that. Whereas I'm less knowledgeable with sculpture. But through the years, I've gained that understanding of quality. So, it's easier for me now to explain it compared to what it was eight years ago (P 1_6 i1).

This comment highlights the interplay between technical knowledge and lived experience, suggesting that quality becomes easier to articulate and evaluate as DP VA teachers develop confidence and expertise in specific artistic domains.

Similarly, another participant reflected on how their perception of quality shifted over time in relation to their international teaching experience and exposure to diverse school contexts:

When I first started teaching IB and I would visit other schools internationally, I'd be like, Whoa! I would visit so many schools just to look at the artworks that they had up and be so impressed. But now when I go back to those same schools [after teaching the DP VA internationally for over 10 years] I'm like, Oh, they're doing that, but in my mind, the level of quality is not as strong as it was when I first saw it. I went to just at ARWAE⁹ at SSIS¹⁰. I hadn't been there for like five years or something. My experience level has gone up. When I first went to SSIS, I was blown away by the artworks, how they set up their studio, I copied all their ideas. I thought their artwork was just stunning. But now I was like, Oh, it's good. It's strong, but it doesn't get me the same way as it did before because I've seen better, because my understanding [has evolved] (P 5_11 i1).

⁹ Asia Regional Workshops for Art Educators, <https://www.arwae.org/>

¹⁰ Saigon South International School, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, <https://www.ssis.edu.vn/>

This reflection provides a powerful example of how exposure to a broader range of artistic practices and teaching environments can recalibrate what educators perceive as high quality. What may once have been awe-inspiring can, over time, shift to being viewed as competent but less exceptional, as one's own experiences and benchmarks evolve. This growth reflects a natural process of professional maturation, where educators refine their sense of quality through continuous learning, comparison, and reflection.

Subjective understandings of quality as assessed

Further discussions explored the evolving nature of quality in terms of the inherent challenges of assessing artwork in the context of the DP VA. One participant acknowledges that grading art is a particularly difficult task within the IB framework:

I think teachers really struggle with [understanding quality] because it's very hard, as you know, to get a seven¹¹ in this subject. It's one of the most difficult subjects to get a seven in, actually. The assessment process for IB Art is a sticky one. Art is still the most difficult subject to assess because what are we assessing? It's not easy. There's subjectivity. No matter what charts and rubrics and criteria we use, there's still going to be an element of subjectivity, I believe. Because it's qualitative, you're still saying it's successful or partial...it's still you're making a judgment. But I think that the median level of quality, the median mark is a four worldwide, which is not a very strong mark. I'm not sure if I'm answering your question correctly, but I do think the quality worldwide is not very high (P 5_10 i1).

In DP VA where creativity, expression, and interpretation are central, defining and quantifying quality can be elusive. Unlike more standardized subjects, where objective measures such as correct answers or formulas can be applied, DP VA assessment relies heavily on subjective judgment, even when guided by criteria or rubrics. This is a crucial point, as it reflects the reality that even the most rigorous assessment frameworks cannot fully eliminate personal interpretation when evaluating art. Teachers and examiners are ultimately tasked with making judgments about a work's success or partial success, which introduces variability into the grading process.

These insights collectively illustrate that for DP VA teachers, quality is not a fixed or universally agreed-upon concept but rather a dynamic, evolving understanding shaped by ongoing experience, knowledge, and exposure. As DP VA teachers engage with new ideas, contexts, and practices, their criteria for evaluating quality adapt and expand. This evolution is particularly significant in the context of teaching DP VA, where the open-ended nature of the curriculum and

¹¹ A seven refers to the highest grade level within IB's Diploma Programme, as detailed in Chapter three

the diversity of artistic approaches require teachers to remain flexible and reflective in their judgments.

Quality in DP VA teaching

When discussing ideas of quality in DP VA teaching, interviewees expressed diverse perspectives, revealing the complexities of defining quality. Participants noted that while formal definitions of high-quality teaching and learning exist, they often feel overly wordy, subjective, and vague, questioning how terms like “21st-century skills”(P 5_6 i1) are practically defined. They added that simply putting such definitions into school plans doesn’t make them actionable or meaningful in practice. Participant’s scepticisms highlight a recurring tension: while formal definitions of quality may exist on paper, they often lack clarity, measurability, or practical relevance for educators working in real-world classroom settings.

‘Quality in DP VA teaching’ was further discussed as ‘fostering student autonomy and encouraging independent exploration’, ‘development of critical thinking’, and ‘consideration of technical skills’.

Table 9. Codes identified within ‘Quality in DP VA teaching’

Code	Coding Excerpts
Foster student autonomy and encourage independent exploration	15
Development of critical thinking	9
Consideration of technical skills	7

Note: Codes identified within ‘Quality in DP VA teaching’ revealed through coding of combined in-depth interviews

Fostering student autonomy and encouraging independent exploration

‘Fostering student autonomy and encouraging independent exploration’ was discussed as requiring a deep understanding of the DP VA subject matter. One participant emphasized the importance of guiding students through the assessment criteria, explaining, “Working through the rubrics, working through the language, pulling it apart so that the students understand what’s being asked for. That is, I feel, like my job” (P 5_8 i2).

Participants also highlighted the need for knowledge of contemporary and historical art to help students connect their work to broader artistic contexts. As one participant pointed out, “Being relatively abreast of what is new, what is contemporary, what artists are doing and trying to do... you need to know what’s going on currently for you to actually make commentary about the past or relate the past as well” (P 1_4 i2).

Quality teaching was also tied to fostering autonomy by trusting students and stepping back to encourage independent exploration. One participant reflected, “I think quality teaching in the DP level is... that ability to let go a little, to know that you've taught them enough that you can step

back and not micromanage... I think that is good teaching. Not stepping in so much, whereas I'm making the decisions for them" (P 5_5 i1). They stressed the importance of building confidence in students to make their own artistic decisions without relying entirely on teacher suggestions.

Additionally, teaching with empathy was seen as vital, particularly given the developmental stages of DP VA students. One participant shared, "I try to look at everything through a lens of compassion and nurturing. I see myself as hopefully a good mentor for them, someone who helps ease their way through a difficult patch in their life" (P 1_3 i). This approach underscores the importance of understanding students' unique needs and providing support during a transformative period in their lives.

Development of critical thinking

Discussions around 'development of critical thinking' extended beyond producing polished final outcomes, focusing on fostering critical thinking, self-reflection, and navigating the iterative art-making process. One participant highlighted the importance of prompting deeper thought, explaining, "Ask inquiring questions, getting them to think... Why are you using these symbols? What do these mean? How does everything fit together? Being able to see the bigger picture... that's quality" (P 5_5 i1).

This process-oriented approach frames quality as a journey of intellectual and creative growth, where students are encouraged to reflect on their progress and engage authentically with their work. Reflective practices, such as regular conferencing and critiquing, were seen as vital for helping students deepen their understanding of their artistic development. One participant described this as providing students with opportunities to "reflect regularly on their own progress... rehearse those conversations about how they're developing as an artist and how their skills are changing" (P 5_9 i1).

Breaking the course into manageable parts was also identified as crucial for quality teaching, ensuring students clearly understand expectations. As one participant shared, "Quality... is about breaking the course down into manageable bite-size chunks... by the end of that six-week cycle, every student will know criteria B inside out" (P 1_5 i1). This structured approach allows students to master specific criteria step-by-step.

Quality teaching was further described as designing challenging yet flexible activities that encourage students to stretch themselves while pursuing their own interests. One participant emphasized, "It's really important... to make sure that the activity... is challenging enough that students do need to stretch themselves, but also flexible enough that they can follow their own interests" (P 5_9 i1).

Relevance was also highlighted as key, with participants stressing the importance of connecting activities to meaningful learning outcomes. One participant admitted, "If I can understand why I'm doing something and why I'm teaching it to them, that would be quality. If I'm just giving

them something to do to fill the process portfolio... I wouldn't say that's quality" (P 5_4 i1). Instead, quality teaching involves ensuring students understand the purpose behind their work.

Ultimately, participants emphasized the value of encouraging critical and independent thought through thought-provoking questions, which help students explore their motivations and connect their ideas. As one participant explained, "Ask inquiring questions... Why are you using these symbols? What do these mean? How does everything fit together? Being able to see the bigger picture... that's quality" (P 5_5 i1).

Consideration of technical skills

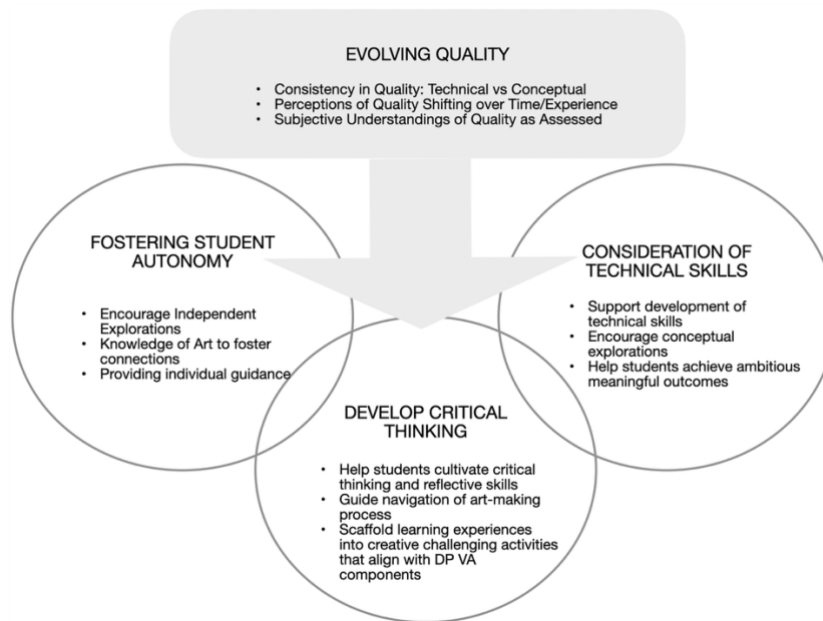
Participants emphasized that while fostering creativity is crucial, technical mastery remains a fundamental aspect of quality teaching in DP VA. Within discussions of 'consideration of technical skills', participants shared how they prioritized helping students achieve technical proficiency across a number of mediums while encouraging conceptual and experimental exploration. One participant highlighted the importance of producing strong, high-quality works to achieve quality results, sharing, "It's better that you have eight that are quality pieces than fluff of 11" (P 5_4 i1).

Another participant underscored the balance between technical skill and conceptual work, explaining, "I want to see technical ability in at least four to five works... and the rest of the pieces can be more conceptual or experimental" (P 5_2 i1). This perspective reflects the necessity for students to demonstrate technical competence in multiple mediums while also exploring creative and innovative approaches to their work.

Summary of explicit conceptualizations of quality

When reflecting on the first research question for the in-depth interviews, it was particularly striking that participants viewed quality as an evolving concept rather than something fixed or clearly defined with many participants noting that their understanding of quality in DP VA teaching developed over time and through reflection. Interestingly, in defining quality, participants often began by considering how quality manifests for students within the DP VA program. Through thinking out loud their thoughts and visions for students within their classes, they were able to articulate and refine their understanding, leading them to explicitly define quality in DP VA teaching as fostering student autonomy, developing critical thinking and consideration of technical skills as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Visual showing conceptualizations of explicit conceptualizations of quality as revealed through Phase 3: In-depth Interviews



Note: Graphic created with Keynote using data collected from coded in-depth interview responses, Amy Atkinson, 2025.

What stood out in these discussions was the degree to which participants conceived of quality in teaching as being intrinsically tied to student learning experiences and outcomes. Quality teaching was described as facilitating a delicate balance between rigour and flexibility, where DP VA teachers design challenging activities that stretch students’ abilities while allowing them the freedom to explore their own interests and ideas. Central to this vision of quality is a strong emphasis on process and reflection, ensuring that students grow holistically as artists, thinkers, and individuals.

Participants were clear that quality teaching in DP VA is not solely about producing polished final artworks or achieving high assessment scores. Instead, they discussed quality in teaching as being deeply rooted in encouraging student’s development of critical thinking, self-reflection, and the ability to navigate the iterative, often non-linear process of art-making. This emphasis on fostering meaningful student experiences and artistic growth suggests that DP VA teachers explicitly define quality as a dynamic and multifaceted concept, mindful of numerical metrics of success but also grounded in the holistic development of their students as creative and critical individuals.

Chapter 8 : Implicit Conceptualizations of Quality: DP VA Curriculum Dynamics

In this chapter, I share key findings from Phase 3: in-depth interviews surrounding implicit conceptualizations of quality through DP VA curriculum dynamics within coded discussions of ‘curriculum structure’, ‘component focus’, ‘assessment strategies’ and ‘DP VA course benefits’.

While the DP VA curriculum (IBO, 2014) provides a framework with a philosophy outlining the intentions of the course and the three components for submission, DP VA teachers are encouraged to interpret the framework and design their units and lessons to support the framework as is most effective within their own VA teaching vision and that of their school and location, while ensuring a focus on the 3 practices and 3 assessment components. Discussions within this theme explore the complexities the participants found in interpreting this expectation and supporting the DP VA curriculum framework. Codes that emerged from discussions focused on ‘DP VA curriculum dynamics’ were: ‘curriculum structure’, ‘component (EX, CS, PP and Visual Arts Journal) focus’, ‘assessment strategies’, and ‘DP VA course benefits’.

Table 10. Codes identified within ‘DP VA curriculum dynamics’

Codes	Coding Excerpts
Curriculum structure	135
Component focus	61
• Exhibition focus	
• Comparative study focus	
• Process Portfolio focus	
• Visual Arts Journal	
Assessment strategies	25
DP VA course benefits	21

Note: Codes from ‘DP VA curriculum dynamics’ revealed through coding of combined in-depth interviews

Curriculum structure

Within discussions on ‘curriculum structure’, interview participants reflected on the challenges and strategies involved in designing a cohesive curriculum that balances skill development, conceptual exploration, and the expectations of the DP VA program. Participants highlighted the importance of creating a structured progression of skills and knowledge across the two years of DP VA, scaffolding learning to help students transition to the increased demands of their second year. While approaches to structuring the program varied; especially regarding mediums explored and artistic inspirations shared, there was a shared emphasis on balancing teacher-driven instruction in the first year of the DP VA course (DP1) with a more student-driven, independent focus in the second year of the DP VA course (DP2).

Some participants preferred a more intuitive and flexible approach, allowing students' readiness and interests to shape the pace of learning. One participant explained, "I see a lot of teachers who do things in a really planning way... and I don't, because I find that whenever I try to really, really plan, it goes right out the window because the students [have either] surpassed it or they're not ready... So in the first year, I try to just get them excited about making things" (P 5_7 i2). This approach involved introducing open-ended projects, such as those exploring self-identity, to engage students in the creative process early on.

In contrast, other participants adopted a more methodical and structured approach, emphasizing the need for clear planning and consistent progress. One participant stressed the importance of mapping out the course from the beginning, noting, "You've got to be able to map it out really effectively. That's from day one. You've got to stress to the students that they... Well, you've got to be careful how you frame this... But I do feel that you can't have a bad week in the IB visual arts program because there's so much to do over the course of 18 months" (P 1_5 i1). This structured approach aimed to keep students on track while maintaining a manageable balance of expectations.

Ultimately, both approaches reflect a commitment to preparing students for the demands of DP2, whether through flexible exploration or careful planning, ensuring they develop the skills and independence necessary for their artistic and academic growth.

Despite these differences, all participants described a similar overall structure for the two-year program¹²:

- DP1 was consistently described as being more teacher driven with thematic units focusing on medium experimentation, skill development, artist explorations and learning how to develop their PP screens. All participants used the second half of DP1, in varying times and levels of attention to introduce the CS.
- In DP2 , all interview participants shifted the focus onto a student-driven teacher-facilitated art-making time, where students secure key themes and directions for their EX works and work semi-independently until their final EX deadlines and component submissions One participant shared:

It's hard with IB Art. I mean, it really depends on the [students], but generally it's like [introduce the] process portfolio as soon as they can. Comparative study towards the end

¹² It is important to note, that for all participants in this study their DP VA course was scheduled into two school years with the majority following the northern hemisphere school year and one participant working within the southern hemisphere school year timings. In my experience, I have observed that there are other ways to schedule the DP VA course, for example, some teachers report that their Standard Level (SL) DP VA course can be scheduled within only one school year.

of the first year and then their exhibition is all of the second year. And then the last thing they hand in for me is their process portfolio (P 5_4 i1)

Across all interviews, participants emphasized the importance of scaffolding knowledge and skills between the DP1 and DP2 with a consensus that DP1 is teacher-driven, focusing on skill-building, medium experimentation, and thematic projects, with process portfolio development starting early and the comparative study introduced gradually and DP2 is student-driven, with a focus on refining themes, creating exhibition pieces, and independently showcasing technical and conceptual mastery. This progression allows students to build a strong foundation in their first year and confidently pursue their artistic vision in their second year, preparing them for the rigorous demands of the DP VA program.

*Scaffolded learning*¹³

Participants emphasized the importance of cohesive curriculum design to address both programmatic and student needs, highlighting the benefits of vertically and horizontally aligned planning across VA from early years to prepare students for DP VA. Many noted that DP VA relies on technical and conceptual skills built progressively, starting in earlier grades and culminating in the program. One participant explained that scaffolding is key, ensuring students are not “entering the IB program completely uncomfortable with writing about art, talking about art, [or] analyzing images” (P 5_9 i2). Regular department collaboration helps align skills and expectations across grades, ensuring continuity.

Participants described how introducing skills early, such as journaling and presenting artwork in slides was advantageous, so students are already familiar with DP VA requirements: “We scaffold what they need to do in grade 9 and 10... So even in the way that they present their artwork... they’re used to that format” (P 5_4 i2). Analytical skills, such as using art language and examining works, are also introduced in earlier grades to prepare students for the conceptual demands of the program.

The progression from technical skill-building to creative expression was a recurring theme, with participants discussing how scaffolded learning not only builds technical skills but also fosters independence and self-discovery. As one participant explained:

¹³ Scaffolded learning refers to the instructional approach where teachers design activities and lessons that build students’ knowledge and skills incrementally over the two years within the DP VA course. This method involves breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps, providing the necessary support at each stage to help students progress towards autonomy. In the DP VA course this also means linking projects and art mediums so students can refine ideas and concepts as they progress, as opposed to one-off art projects. By carefully scaffolding activities, DP VA teachers ensure that their students learning supports connection within artworks and encourages students to gradually develop the confidence and ability to tackle more challenging concepts or projects.

Because I think especially in time for high school, they need to realize that people don't just make art because the teacher tells them to. And you have got an audience beyond me and your mom. So what we do.... in grade six, it's an introduction to a range of media and what the standards are. Grade seven is kind of building on those foundational skills. Grade eight, we get a bit more sophisticated because there's a focus on the idea that there's an audience for your work and actually communicating with an audience(P 5_9 i2)

This process of exploration helps students develop a sense of ownership over their artistic practice while the analytical approach enriches students' understanding of their own work and prepares them for the critical engagement required in DP VA.

Scaffolding from differing curriculums

Some participants highlighted the benefits of an IB continuum (PYP-MYP-DP) school structure noting how the MYP transitions smoothly into DP VA. One participant shared, "The middle school year program... lends itself nicely into the diploma program because the criteria is pretty much the same." However, others identified challenges when scaffolding across the IB continuum. As one participant explained, the shift from an 8-point grading scale to a 7-point scale and the focus on final external submissions in DP VA can leave students unprepared: "They're definitely seeing students going into DP1 without particularly the ability to formulate a plan, experiment meaningfully, and reflect on and refine their work" (P 5_9 i1).

Some participants found that scaffolding from the Cambridge IGCSE curriculum provided strong technical preparation for DP VA. One participant noted, "They've been drawing trees for two years or it's still life... But they are very good at being technically able. By the end of [IGCSE], all of my [students] are... really good at that because they've just been basically honed into being good at it" (P 5_2 i1). While IGCSE students often excel in technical mastery, this pathway also incorporates some elements of DP VA, such as reflections and artist studies, which help bridge the transition.

Modelling and sharing space through grades

Another benefit of scaffolding discussed by participants was the opportunity to observe VA students' development across grade levels. Many participants noted that teaching different grades within the same space allowed younger students to watch and learn from their senior peers, which served as both a source of motivation and a way to set clear expectations. One participant explained, "My year 13s and year 12s are always in here making things... They're always inspired, and it sets an expectation as well. When you come and do art at GCSE or IB, this is the expectation" (P 5_2 i2). Creating a shared environment where students of all levels work together fosters inspiration and helps younger students visualize their future progress.

Another participant described how their classroom doubles as an exhibition space, which further motivates students: “During that whole time, my students still have class in there, so they can see the students setting up, and they get ideas, and they get really excited about it. I think that motivates them a lot because they’re already like, oh, we can do this... So that’s good” (P 5_4 i3). Observing the creative process and final exhibitions of senior students helps younger students engage with the program and envision their own artistic journey.

Navigating differing prior VA experience and ability

Many participants observed that students entered DP VA with varying levels of artistic experience, ranging from strong foundational skills to no prior exposure to VA. This presented significant challenges for both instruction and curriculum design. As one participant explained, “Some students come into DP VA with a strong background in art, while others have never done it before... this requires a one-on-one mentoring process to address the diverse skill levels within the same class” (P 1_1 i1).

To address these gaps, participants implemented targeted strategies at the start of DP VA. One teacher explained, “I dedicate the first month to teaching essential skills, like art analysis and understanding assessments. It’s not directly tied to [DP VA] but provides a crucial foundation” (P 1_2 i2). For students with limited exposure, structured assignments ensured they developed fundamental skills before tackling more complex projects. This systematic approach helped bridge the gap for students entering the program without prior experience.

The wide range of student abilities also posed challenges in fostering autonomy and planning the curriculum. Participants emphasized the importance of encouraging students to take ownership of their learning while providing appropriate structure. One participant shared, “I have students create their own timelines for completing work, but they rarely stick to them. Autonomy is a skill they need to learn gradually” (P 1_1 i2). Differentiating instruction was essential to meet the needs of both high-achieving and less confident students. As one participant noted, “Some students are natural artists who self-direct easily, while others need more structured, teacher-directed assignments to build their confidence” (P 5_7 i2).

Teacher directed units in DP1 often started with foundational techniques and gradually introduced more complex, conceptual elements. For example, one teacher shared:

..if I start them fresh in [the first year of DP VA] in the fall, I start with a very specific look at photography, both digital and analog, and we take a look at composition, different photographers, we go through all different ways to print photography, and we do that really to get them in the making, in the concept of making. During that time, I'm scaffolding the process portfolio pages and we're building our understanding of that alongside. Likely, those pages will not be the ones the students choose to put in their final portfolio. But we're talking about, you know, how do we, how do we attract our

audience's eye? How do we explain our process, all those basics that are not necessarily intrinsic in an [DP1 student] mind when they're making art. So we get right into the making, we get right into the process pages (P 5_8 i2).

Balancing conceptual and technical skills

Participants highlighted the challenges of balancing skill-building with conceptual development, particularly as some students struggled with the abstract aspects of the DP VA course. One participant observed, "They love making things and they love being creative. But when it comes to that conceptual side... IB is asking our students to work at the level of university, nearly, like in a postgrad level, basically creating a body of work, exhibiting it, curating it" (P 1_3 i1). This high level of expectation often proved difficult for students who were less comfortable with conceptual tasks.

Some students required more structure to effectively engage with conceptual work. One teacher shared their experience during an experimental art project: "They weren't really engaging the way that I was used to students engaging... So I asked them... and they said, 'We need guidelines. We didn't understand what you wanted us to do. We don't understand this idea of just experimenting. We need more guidelines'" (P 5_11 i2). This response highlighted the importance of providing clear frameworks, even for open-ended, exploratory tasks.

Ultimately, participants emphasized the importance of finding a balance between technical skill and conceptual depth in their teaching. One participant reflected on a student who achieved remarkable success despite not being the most technically skilled, noting, "He couldn't paint as well as others, he couldn't draw as well as others. But it was just that combination of how thoughtful he was, how it was curated together... I tell a lot of my students, you can be really, really, really technically good. But if you don't have that balanced approach to all of the other areas, you can't do well in the IB" (P 1_4 i2). This perspective underscores how conceptual understanding, thoughtful planning, and technical skill must work together to meet the demands of the program.

Quality and time

A recurring challenge identified by participants was balancing quality with the time constraints of the DP VA program, ensuring students created meaningful work that met the requirements of the external examination. To address this, participants emphasized streamlining processes and prioritizing quality over quantity. One participant reflected, "I'm a big advocate for being time smart. I just think I don't want them to produce loads of rubbish slides that they're going to have to work really hard on making better" (P 5_2 i1). This approach aimed to reduce unnecessary workload by focusing on efficient and purposeful production for portfolios and exhibitions.

Time management within the two-year program was another significant concern, as teachers sought to balance three components while maintaining high standards. One participant remarked,

“They’re trying to fit too much into two years... balancing three components is quite difficult, especially when you want students to produce high-quality work” (P 5_2 i3). These pressures often required strategic adjustments to lesson plans and project timelines to ensure students could meet expectations without feeling overwhelmed.

Participants also noted that, given the limited time available, students were encouraged to work with mediums they were already familiar with rather than exploring new ones. As one participant explained, “It’s really because of time. They just don’t have time to pick up new skills and to be good at it unless you’re very talented” (P 1_1 i1). This strategy helped students focus on refining their existing skills to create stronger final pieces.

The timing of the EX component was another critical aspect of planning, especially given students’ other academic commitments. One participant shared, “Grade 12 is a very stressful time with university applications and extended essays, so I aim to have the CS completely done by mid-September [in DP2] to give students more time for their exhibition” (P 1_5 i1). This strategic scheduling alleviated pressure during the second year, allowing students to dedicate more time and energy to their creative work.

Feedback

Participants highlighted the importance of providing ongoing feedback to address both the practical challenges of students’ art-making and the requirements of IB assessment. One participant described their department’s efforts to balance these priorities, stating, “We’re trying to figure out how to give feedback in a way that’s in line with DP VA expectations while ensuring students are doing it for the learning, not just the grade” (P 5_3 i2).

Regular checkpoints were a common strategy for delivering feedback and guiding students through the program’s criteria. One participant explained, “Every time they make evidence for process, step by step, I go through the different criteria... I have constant checkpoints of the process, like, do you understand this criteria? What does it mean? How does it look on your slide when you put this information in?” (P 1_6 i1). This method ensured students understood and applied the criteria incrementally, using examples and samples to clarify expectations.

Setting deadlines was also emphasized as a critical tool for helping students manage their time effectively. As one participant noted, “I do the portfolio as milestone checks. By this date, you have to have two slides. By this day, you have to have one critical analysis... Because I find, especially some of our students, you don’t put down some of those boundaries and some of those deadlines, they will push it to the very, very end” (P 1_4 i1). This structured approach was particularly important in DP1, where teachers provided more guidance and time management support. By DP2, students were granted more freedom as they developed a better understanding of the program’s demands.

Considering summer in planning

Many participants used the summer months to help students maintain momentum and prepare for the demands of their second year, encouraging engagement in light, meaningful activities rather than intensive assignments. One participant explained their approach: “I will expect them to make something over the summer, and I am also expecting them to finish their comparative study... There’s so many things that you can do that don’t take hours and hours of your time. You need to be smart and think about what you can do that’s going to be easy for you to do and make a piece from it on light return” (P 5_2 i3). This strategy emphasized achievable goals, such as collecting materials, reflecting on their work, and completing manageable tasks like pressing flowers or drawing inspiration from their surroundings.

To support students, some teachers provided materials and loose guidelines to encourage engagement without overwhelming them. One participant noted, “At the end of the year, I also give them supplies and stuff to take home... If you’re not going to do anything over the summer, take some reference pictures wherever you go. Take some reference photos, get some ideas, because it’s the summer” (P 5_4 i3). These strategies helped students stay connected to their art-making in a manageable way while allowing space for rest and reflection.

Component focus

Next to the planning and structuring of the DP VA curriculum, much of the discussions centered on how to effectively implement and assess the three core components: the Comparative Study (CS), the Process Portfolio (PP), and the Exhibition (EX) as well as the Visual Arts Journal. Participants emphasized the importance of aligning these components to scaffold students’ learning throughout the two-year course, ensuring that each component builds on the other to support skill development, conceptual growth, and creative exploration. While all participants agreed that the course revolves entirely around these three components, the key challenge they highlighted was managing the distinct demands, mindsets, and teaching approaches required for each.

Participants observed that the components differ not only in focus but also in the type of guidance students need to succeed. For example, the CS, with its emphasis on art analysis and contextual understanding, requires teaching students how to critically evaluate artworks and articulate their ideas in writing. In contrast, the PP emphasizes documenting creative processes and experimentation, which calls for fostering students’ ability to reflect on their artistic journey. Finally, the EX component, which showcases finalized works, demands a focus on curation, presentation, and the communication of personal artistic intentions. The varying nature of these components often requires teachers to adopt multiple roles, ranging from academic mentor to creative facilitator and technical advisor, depending on the task at hand.

Participants also noted that the timing and sequencing of the components throughout the course play a critical role in shaping student learning. Different components take precedence at different stages of the program, with some participants prioritizing the PP early on to encourage exploration, while others focus on building research and analytical skills for the CS before shifting attention to the EX in the final stages of the course. This strategic alignment ensures that students are not overwhelmed by the demands of all three components simultaneously but instead progress through the curriculum in a structured and manageable way.

Overall, the discussions revealed that while the three assessed components provide a comprehensive framework for assessing students' artistic and academic development, they also require careful planning and adaptability from educators to address the unique challenges and opportunities each component presents.

Exhibition focus

Discussions specifically related to the Exhibition (EX) component surrounded the logistical, pedagogical, and collaborative challenges involved in guiding students toward a successful final EX emphasizing the importance of planning and developing the student's creation of exhibition works, encouraging connections within the student's artwork choices for their exhibition and mastering the timing of the exhibition to ensure students were able to showcase their best resolved works.

Developing the Exhibition

Participants stressed the critical role of teachers in guiding students through the EX process, from the early stages of conceptual development to the final presentation. One educator described the weeks leading up to the exhibition as "arguably the most intense period of the year," emphasizing the importance of forward planning and delegation to manage the workload effectively (P 1_5 i3). Teachers often undertook a wide range of responsibilities, including reviewing curatorial rationales, assisting with layout and design, and managing the technical aspects of installation.

Striking a balance between providing structure and fostering independence was also a key focus. One participant explained their approach, noting, "I let students manage tasks like sending their work to print, but I step in if they encounter difficulties. This helps them develop resourcefulness while ensuring the work meets required standards" (P 1_1 i3). This approach allowed students to take ownership of their exhibitions while ensuring a baseline of quality and professionalism.

Another common discussion point was the importance of technical mastery and encouraging students to showcase their strengths during the exhibition. One educator advised students to focus on mediums they were confident in, explaining, "It's not really the time to experiment with something new... If you can make something look nice in a painting, just do a painting." They shared examples of students who succeeded by playing to their strengths, such as one who

created technically proficient photographs: “They weren’t just snapshots on their phone. And they did well” (P 5_4 i2). While experimentation was encouraged during earlier stages of the course, participants emphasized that the exhibition was an opportunity to highlight polished skills and mastery in familiar mediums.

Encouraging connections

A central focus of discussions around the EX component was how educators supported students in creating a cohesive and unified presentation of their artworks. One participant highlighted the challenge of guiding students with diverse and scattered ideas, asking, “How do you get students who have all these random ideas to think in terms of creating a holistic, more focused body of work?” (P 5_10 i2).

Another participant shared their approach to helping students connect their work conceptually and stylistically. They explained, “I tell them they need to show where their ideas are coming from and how they’ve developed. Even though each piece might not be identical, there should be some connection.” They emphasized the importance of creating bridging pieces to transition between ideas, ensuring the work doesn’t feel disjointed: “You don’t go from bright animal characters to traditional portraits without something linking the two.” Additionally, they encouraged students to think of their body of work as telling a story with a clear beginning, middle, and end. The participant explained that this approach helps when curating the exhibition, allowing students to articulate how their ideas evolved: “When you put all your work together, it should look like the same person made it, even if the themes differ slightly. There should be a stylistic and thematic coherence between the pieces” (P 5_2 i2). This guidance helps students craft a more intentional and cohesive presentation for their exhibition.

Deadlines for Exhibition

Managing deadlines was a critical part of the EX process, particularly as students juggled competing academic priorities. One educator noted that “the first term of grade 12 is often consumed by extended essays and college applications, leaving little time for art” (P 1_6 i3). To address this, teachers strategically timed the EX to align with students’ workloads. For instance, one participant explained, “We hold the exhibition right after mock exams, giving students a clear focus and deadline to work toward” (P 5_4 i3).

Participants observed that students’ motivation and productivity often increased as the exhibition dates approached. Some students began reevaluating their work, doubting their earlier pieces, and expressing a desire to refine or even create new artworks. One educator shared, “From January to February, they’ll suddenly realize, ‘Oh, we’re going to have an exhibition. I want to do something good for this.’” While students were encouraged to improve their work, the educator stressed the importance of time management, telling students, “You can do it if you can do it in time... By that point, I’ve got the minimum. If you want to do more, great, but if you don’t have time, at least you’ve got enough to pass” (P 5_2 i2).

A recurring theme among participants was students' tendency to underestimate the time required to complete their EX work. One participant observed, "They're not really focused on art until maybe after Chinese New Year. Then they panic and start getting everything done." The participant described how students would often rush to finish their pieces in January and February, revisiting work from grade 11 to see if it could fit their exhibition theme. "It always seems like they underestimate how long it takes... The exhibition work is often on the back burner until it gets really close to the time," they explained (P 5_4 i3). This pattern of last-minute work highlighted the need for teachers to balance flexibility with firm deadlines to help students manage their workload effectively.

Comparative Study focus

Through the interviews, participants emphasized the benefits of the Comparative Study (CS) in fostering critical thinking, research skills, and a deeper understanding of artistic contexts. However, they also highlighted the complexities of teaching art history in an international school context, managing timelines, and addressing the challenges students encounter in completing this rigorous task.

Comparative Study benefits

The CS is one of the more debated components of the DP VA curriculum. Many participants celebrated it as an invaluable tool for developing students' academic and research skills while deepening their understanding of visual arts and its cultural contexts. One educator expressed their enthusiasm, stating, "I enjoy teaching the comparative study the most... I believe they come from that experience as stronger academic writers, which then stands them in good stead when they go back into their process portfolio." They elaborated on the transformative nature of the CS, explaining how it allows students to connect their research to meaningful questions and explore the artist's world through structured frameworks: "They're learning on a much deeper level... If you can do the comparative study well, students develop a really good, deep understanding of the themes that run through the artist's life" (P 1_5 i1).

The CS was also praised for its potential to help students understand their place within the broader art world. One participant highlighted how the component fosters critical reflection and interdisciplinary connections: "Students, especially the high-achieving ones, leave the course with a strong understanding of where they fit in the schema of the art world. They get, who are their influences? Who could they influence? They see their place" (P 1_2 i1). Through in-depth research and analysis, students not only gain a broader awareness of global artistic traditions but also develop a stronger sense of their own artistic identity.

Additionally, participants noted how the CS encourages students to make meaningful connections between research and practice. One educator observed, "I feel like they're more reflective now... they're thinking more deeply about the work they're going to make compared to when they were just creating for deadlines" (P 1_1 i2). This reflective process strengthens the

connection between their conceptual exploration and their artistic output, enriching their overall learning experience.

However, not all participants viewed the CS positively. Some criticized it for taking valuable time away from art-making. One participant bluntly stated, “I hate it,” explaining that students often spend weeks sitting in front of computers rather than engaging in hands-on creative work (P 5_4 i2). This critique highlights a tension within the curriculum, as some educators feel the emphasis on research detracts from the practical, studio-based aspects of VA education.

Research skills in DP VA

One recurring issue with the CS discussed among participants was the difficulty of integrating research skills into the DP VA curriculum. As one participant expressed, “It feels like I have to teach them how to cite, use journals, and find reliable sources, things that don’t feel like they should be part of the art curriculum” (P 1_6 i3). This additional responsibility often requires educators to step outside the traditional scope of art teaching, creating a steep learning curve for some students.

Another concern was students’ frequent reliance on superficial or unreliable sources, which often leads to shallow analysis. One educator explained their approach to addressing this issue: “They still struggle with sources all the time. Good sources. And so what I say to them is, okay, you’ve got one artwork. Now you need to find five to six sources online about that artwork. It’s not going to be somebody’s Tumblr. It needs to be something from art museums... archives, scholarly articles, you know, stuff like that, JSTOR” (P 5_8 i3). This emphasis on academic rigour underscores the importance of teaching students how to identify credible resources, though it can add to the overall complexity of the CS.

Participants also highlighted the growing difficulty students face in selecting appropriate artists for their CS submissions, exacerbated by the overwhelming amount of choice available online and on social media. One participant noted how poor artist selection can directly impact the quality of a submission: “If they can’t find the information on it, then they end up with a poor grade.” They elaborated on the challenge of guiding students through this process: “Over the first couple of lessons, there was a lot of chopping and changing. As much as you give them feedback, ‘This is a good artist, this isn’t a good artist’, they still don’t believe you.” Reflecting on their experience as an examiner, the participant shared, “You can literally tell the minute you open up the comparative study to grade, you can tell from that first page whether it’s going to be a strong or a weak comparative study” (P 5_3 i3). This highlights the critical role of careful artist selection and research in determining the success of a CS submission, as well as the ongoing challenges educators face in supporting students through this process.

Navigating art history within international schools

Teaching art history in international schools also presents challenges for many participants, particularly due to many students' limited exposure to the subject before joining the DP VA course. This lack of prior knowledge often leaves students struggling to identify key artistic movements or influences. As one participant reflected, "I feel like I need to do a better job of teaching art history for them to succeed in the comparative study. Right now, they don't even recognize key movements or influences" (P 1_6 i3). This knowledge gap makes it difficult for students to contextualize their analyses within broader artistic frameworks, which is a critical aspect of the CS component.

Participants also discussed the tension between teaching the traditional Western canon and incorporating more inclusive and local perspectives. One educator noted, "We try to include diverse and local artists, but we also have to prepare the students for universities they are applying to in Canada or the U.S., where they'll encounter Western art history" (P 5_4 i3). Balancing these priorities requires careful consideration to ensure students are both academically prepared and exposed to a diverse range of artistic voices.

Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of addressing systemic biases within art history. One participant shared their approach, explaining, "I want my students to understand why there's so little female representation in art history and how that shapes the narratives we study" (P 5_1 i3). These discussions encouraged students to think critically about the historical and cultural contexts of the art they study, challenging them to consider the broader implications of their research and the inherent biases in the narratives they encounter.

Strategies for teaching Comparative Study

To address the challenges of teaching the CS, participants shared that they adopted structured and scaffolded approaches to guide students through the process. Many emphasized the importance of breaking the work into manageable steps to ensure clarity and progress. One participant outlined their timeline, stating, "We spend one week per artwork, three lessons for analysis, then homework to complete it. After three weeks, they compare and contrast, and then we focus on their written response" (P 1_5 i3). This systematic approach provided students with clear milestones and sufficient time to develop their analysis and written components.

Time management and careful planning were frequently emphasized as critical to the successful completion of the CS. Many participants allocated specific periods of the academic year to focus exclusively on the component. One educator explained, "We haven't done any artwork this term because I won't let them move on until they finish the comparative study" (P 5_3 i3). Others extended the timeline beyond the classroom, assigning summer work to ensure students met deadlines. One participant shared, "I expect them to finish their comparative study over the summer and create a piece inspired by it. These are achievable goals, and I make them clear from the start" (P 5_2 i2).

A recurring theme in the discussions was the perceived imbalance between the time and effort required to produce a high-quality CS and its relatively low weight within the overall assessment structure. One participant observed, “The comparative study is only worth 20%, but we spend so much time on it to produce something of quality... it doesn’t feel proportionate to the weight it carries” (P 5_1 i1). Another participant echoed this sentiment more emphatically, stating, “A high-scoring comparative study takes an insane amount of time for a student to create, and it’s only worth 20%. But at the same time, if you don’t invest all that time, the work ends up surface-level and shallow” (P 1_2 i1). These reflections underscored the tension between the demands of the CS and its contribution to the final grade, prompting ongoing discussions about how to balance the component’s value and workload.

Process Portfolio focus

The Process Portfolio (PP) was widely regarded as an essential tool for capturing students’ artistic development, highlighting experimentation, reflection, and refinement. Participants emphasized the importance of using the PP to document not only successes but also failures, encouraging students to embrace the iterative nature of creative work. As one participant advised, “The process portfolio is for you to fail, but the exhibition is where you thrive” (P 1_1 i1). This distinction empowered students to take creative risks and explore new ideas during the early stages of their work, fostering both artistic growth and self-discovery.

Participants also stressed the importance of aligning the PP with other components of the DP VA curriculum. One educator explained, “We take the work from the end of grade 11 and the beginning of grade 12, refine it, and pull pieces for the process portfolio” (P 5_2 i3). This integration ensured that the PP complemented the overall body of work, creating a cohesive and well-rounded submission for final assessment. Refinement was a recurring theme, particularly in the second year of the program, as students revisited and improved earlier work. One participant noted, “Students refine their ideas during the exhibition, when they have to explain their work to others. It’s helpful to go back to the process portfolio afterward and retouch it” (P 5_11 i3). This reflective process deepened students’ understanding of their artistic journey and strengthened the overall quality of their portfolio.

Collaboration was another key aspect of the PP process, with many educators fostering peer feedback and group discussions to support student development. One teacher shared, “Students often refine their work after discussing it with peers or mentors, gaining new insights into their ideas and techniques” (P 5_3 i3). This collaborative environment not only enhanced students’ skills and confidence but also cultivated a sense of community and shared learning, reinforcing the value of feedback and dialogue in the creative process.

Visual Arts Journal

The growing reliance on digital tools for documenting artistic processes was a key focus in discussions about the Visual Arts Journal. Many participants noted that students were increasingly drawn to digital methods due to their convenience, efficiency, and alignment with submission requirements. One educator explained this trend, sharing, “My students all receive a manual sketchbook at the beginning of the year, but they gravitate to digital because they always have their iPad and they love it.” They observed that while students were less inclined to use traditional sketchbooks for idea development, their digital platforms, such as Procreate, were often full of sketches: “They’re sketching all the time on things they think aren’t related to school.” This shift has led educators to bridge the gap between traditional and digital documentation, encouraging students to bring all their creative explorations together: “Ten years ago, everything would be in one sketchbook, but now it’s spread across multiple platforms” (P 1_3 i2).

Participants also highlighted the impact of digital tools on students’ priorities, particularly regarding aesthetics. One educator expressed concern that students often prioritized the visual appeal of their digital slides over the depth of their creative exploration. They shared, “I find it sad... It would be really nice to have your sketchbooks out during exhibitions, so people can actually look through them. But now the sketchbooks aren’t really beautiful. There are some nice sketches, but they’re scattered across random pages” (P 5_1 i2). This shift reflected a tension between the traditional value of physical sketchbooks and the increasing emphasis on polished digital presentations.

The transition to digital documentation also introduced challenges, particularly the additional workload for students who attempted to maintain both digital and traditional journals. One participant noted, “It’s not a course requirement to keep a sketchbook, so it’s unfair to ask them to do both. But some students still sketch their ideas anyway.” To manage this, the participant encouraged students to keep track of all their creative work, explaining, “Don’t throw anything away. Keep every piece of practice, every experiment, so we have evidence if you ever need to show it” (P 5_2 i2). This approach aimed to reduce the pressure on students while preserving the integrity of their creative process.

Despite the challenges, participants recognized the innovative potential of digital documentation. While it requires careful navigation to balance traditional and digital practices, the shift offers new opportunities for creative expression and flexibility in how students document and present their artistic journeys.

Assessment strategies

Discussions within ‘assessment strategies’ revolve around strategies participants shared that they use to manage, grade, and evaluate student work while guiding their progress through the DP VA framework. Discussions also addressed the varying levels of student performance and

engagement, emphasizing the role of assessment in motivating and supporting individual growth. Noted during the discussions was that the majority of strategies discussed were focused on guiding students to complete the required number of artworks for their EX submissions.

Structure and consistency

Many participants emphasized the challenge of balancing the subjective nature of DP VA assessments with the IB program's rigorous expectations. With three major components submitted externally in the final two months of DP2, structuring the course to support students' artistic processes was essential. Teachers worked to ensure students had enough time to complete, reflect on, and refine their work while also gathering sufficient formative data for accurate grade predictions and progress reports. One participant highlighted the importance of collaboratively setting deadlines with students: "At the beginning of the year... we'll make deadlines together... They make the schedule, and they feel like, it should be done this time. Never, never do they stick on it. Never" (P 5_4 i2).

Maintaining these deadlines, however, often required significant effort. One teacher detailed their strict approach: "If they miss a weekly deadline, I contact their parents... If they still haven't done it by the following morning, then I contact their parents again... They have to commit to coming for an in-school session every week for the rest of the term. It's pretty strict, but... none of them are missing deadlines" (P 5_2 i3). This structured system of accountability helped ensure students met deadlines and stayed on track.

Given the non-linear and subjective nature of DP VA, participants noted that traditional methods like grading unfinished work or pop quizzes were not practical. Instead, grades were developed over time within a predictive framework. One teacher described their approach as "more impression marking" (P 1_4 i3), which allowed for flexibility in assessing creative work while ensuring alignment with DP VA criteria. This method provided a balance between supporting students' artistic growth and meeting program requirements.

Mock assessments

A commonly used and successful strategy among participants was implementing mock assessments. These were particularly effective in motivating students to meet deadlines and providing opportunities to refine their ideas. One participant explained, "We have a mock internal assessment, and we talk about it in terms of the rubrics. They have to write a draft to a rationale. From that, they get a ton of feedback about which pieces are really strong, which pieces should be reworked... or which pieces could be jumping-off pieces for your actual exhibition" (P 1_2 i1).

Other participants used exam time as an opportunity for mock exhibitions, where students curated their work and received feedback from external sources. One teacher shared, "So this is like their exam... I'm asking for them to come for the whole day and then giving them each an

hour... even the MYP teachers... I would invite because... it doesn't matter if you're an art teacher or whoever, it needs to be a general audience. It'll be pretty much like a critique, but they actually have to curate [their mock exhibition]... This is their final grade for the term" (P 5_6 i3). These mock exhibitions allowed students to practice presenting and curating their work while gaining valuable feedback for improvement.

Peer assessment

Peer assessment was recognized as an effective strategy for managing workloads and promoting student accountability. One participant explained, "We do peer critiques, students read each other's work and provide feedback based on rubrics" (P 5_4 i1). This approach not only lightened the teacher's workload but also encouraged students to critically evaluate their peers' work, deepening their understanding of assessment criteria.

Reflective discussions were also emphasized as a valuable tool for supporting student progress. Participants noted that while some students thrive when given opportunities to revisit and refine their work, others require regular prompting to stay engaged. As one participant shared, "Some students excel when encouraged to revisit and refine their work, while others need consistent prompting to stay engaged" (P 5_3 i1). This tailored approach helped address the diverse needs and commitment levels of students within the classroom.

Transparency

Participants stressed the importance of transparency in grading and ensuring students understood the assessment procedures for the three components of DP VA. Many acknowledged that the IB rubrics could be difficult for students to fully grasp and connect to their own work. One participant shared their approach: "What we tried to do this time is take the assessment sheet... and just [pull out] keywords and try to do it that way... so they can see the data for each one." They explained that while students initially struggled with the rubric, repeated exposure and simplification helped: "By the end of year 12, it's embedded... I've printed out the main points, the key points, large, and put them on the wall as well in the classroom so we can see it all the time" (P 5_3 i2).

By making assessment criteria accessible and visible, participants enabled students to take ownership of their progress. One teacher explained, "If they're ahead with their exhibition, then they can focus more on their process portfolio. If they're ahead with their process portfolio, it gives them more room to refine the comparative study." They emphasized setting clear expectations: "I always tell them, my line in the sand is, if you haven't hit the attainment grades in one of those three areas, then I can't give you past a certain mark. That's a signal... that over this break, you have to finish that... if you want to achieve the grades you're hoping for" (P 1_4 i3). This structured guidance helped students stay on track and prioritize their efforts effectively.

Encouraging mastery

Some participants noted a realistic bias in DP VA assessments, emphasizing the need for students to achieve a high technical standard in their work. One participant explained, “It must be technically good. It must be excellent... If it’s not as technically excellent as everything that you’ve produced before... I’m not going to be able to use it in your coursework, so don’t bother” (P 5_2 i1). Mastery in specific mediums was a priority, with educators ensuring students demonstrated technical excellence across multiple pieces. Another participant stated, “Students must demonstrate technical ability across at least four or five pieces. This ensures that no one can question their ability to paint, draw, or sculpt” (P 5_3 i1). This focus on technical rigour helps students produce work that aligns with DP VA assessment standards.

Participants also stressed the importance of encouraging students to refine their strengths in familiar mediums rather than experimenting too broadly. One participant shared, “They can mix media, but they’re not allowed to try anything new if they haven’t developed the skills beforehand. For example, if a student wants to explore embroidery or fabric, I ask them to prove they have the skills first” (P 1_4 i1). This approach ensures students concentrate on honing their abilities without diluting their efforts in unfamiliar practices.

Participants also discussed adapting techniques to align with students’ existing strengths while still encouraging growth. One participant described their strategy: “If a student is strong in drawing, they might explore scratchboard or scraffito into clay, which still aligns with their technical skills while expanding their repertoire” (P 5_3 i1). This tailored guidance allows students to deepen their expertise while exploring new applications of their skills, maintaining both focus and creativity.

To address the challenge of tracking progress and maintaining accountability, many participants implemented regular check-ins and documentation systems. One teacher shared their method: “I have students upload their work every Friday so I can track their progress and ensure they’re not just looking busy without producing anything” (P 5_5 i2). Additionally, maintaining authenticity was a priority, especially with the rise of technologies like AI. As one participant noted, “I told my students that tracking their work protects them from challenges to their authenticity. It ensures their progress is genuine and aligns with academic integrity” (P 5_11 i2).

Mobilizing motivation and procrastination

Sustaining motivation and engagement was described as an ongoing challenge, particularly as students juggled multiple academic demands. One participant noted, “Students prioritize other subjects over art, even when deadlines are set collaboratively” (P 5_5 i3). To address this, educators emphasized fostering a growth mindset, encouraging students to embrace experimentation and learn from mistakes. As one participant shared, “Those willing to try something different often excel in the program” (P 1_5 i2). Framing assignments as collaborative problem-solving exercises also helped engage students by fostering shared responsibility. One

teacher explained, “When students struggle with ideas, I work with them to brainstorm solutions. I tell them, ‘Come up with some ideas, and I’ll help you refine them’” (P 5_1 i2).

To motivate students and ensure consistency, participants often shared both current and predicted attainment levels. One teacher described releasing grades to DP2 students early on to provide realistic feedback: “their current attainment grade... [reflects] what we think they’re working at. We’re usually quite harsh at this stage... it’s kind of a kick up the butt to be like, no, you can’t just sit and dither. You have to have a very concise plan moving forward” (P 1_4 i3). They also shared a success story to inspire students: “One of my alumni came to visit... When they got their reports this time last year, I’d given her a four, and she ended up getting the second highest mark in the class, all the way up to a high six” (P 1_4 i3). These strategies helped students stay accountable, motivated, and focused on achieving their potential.

Procrastination was another common issue, particularly given the heavy workload of IB students balancing six courses alongside EE, TOK, and CAS. With DP VA submissions not due until the end of DP2, some students delayed their efforts. As one participant observed, “Some students only realize the importance of their work in the final months and have to scramble to deliver” (P 1_1 i2). This delay often created additional pressure for teachers, who had to manage grade predictions and ensure all components were completed on time. Reflecting on the impact of loosening deadlines, one participant shared, “I gave [students] an extra week... and I knew at the time it was the wrong thing to do. None of them had finished... It just affected everything else” (P 5_3 i3).

To combat procrastination, participants implemented strategies to encourage consistent effort and accountability. One teacher organized extra work sessions, stating, “Extra sessions after school, actually withholding [students] to make them sit in front of us and work... Mostly, it’s just getting them to finalize the comparative study” (P 5_6 i2). However, some students exploited these sessions by appearing busy without producing meaningful work. As one participant noted, “[Students] look like they’re doing stuff, but they’re not... My boss suggested... everyone should do a live word document so you can see what they’re working on... But it’s tricky because a lot of my students use Canva... It’s like they’re a hamster on a wheel. They’re doing stuff, but where’s the stuff?” (P 5_5 i3). These observations highlighted the importance of vigilance and innovative strategies to ensure students remained productive and authentic in their efforts.

Authentication

The growing prevalence of digital media and the easy accessibility of online images have made authenticating student work an increasing challenge, particularly with work completed at home during critical periods, such as just before exhibitions. One participant recounted a colleague’s experience: “[A student brought in] two new paintings, like, last minute, which happens all the time. And they were, like, from Pinterest, pretty much. So the school said, you cheated... They

made a big deal about it. And I was like, it should be the learning process because this is the first time she's ever had an exhibition..." (P 5_6 i3).

Another participant shared an instance where an artwork created during DP VA class time was later recognized as resembling a piece from a neighbouring school's exhibition. They reflected, "...it happens, and more so, I think IB really needs to be cognizant of it... A few exhibitions ago, a student did a work... they painted it... the idea [they] developed it. And yeah, the ideas that our students have are at times very cliché and very overdone because, you know, that's where they're getting their ideas from." (P 5_11 i3).

To address authentication concerns, participants highlighted the importance of consistent documentation through the PP. One teacher explained their approach: "Usually, they will be working with me for at least the beginning and parts of the process. I do allow work to go home, especially, like, over the holidays... That bigger project [the student] started at school, and I just said, look, the main thing for me is that you document this as part of your process portfolio so that I can see how you've been developing and how you're going through the thought process... The ones where I'm a little bit more suspect is like if I've never seen it started at school and then suddenly they have a finished work... Some of the students will go to tutorial centers, things like that, but that's a little bit harder to validate sometimes" (P 1_4 i3).

Another challenge participants discussed was navigating the rapid advancements in digital art tools, such as Procreate and AI-assisted software like Photoshop's generative fill and discerning the balance between the students' original ideas and their technical skill versus digital enhancements. Participants emphasized the necessity of open communication and requiring students to submit detailed screenshots of their digital process. However, maintaining this standard can be difficult. As one participant shared, "Unless you can prove to me, say, for example, you're really good at Procreate, prove it to me. I want to see stuff that you've been doing at home... Because they come back with these things that they've made on Procreate, and they've just basically taken a picture and traced over the top" (P 5_3 i2). These strategies reflect efforts to ensure authenticity while adapting to the evolving landscape of digital art-making

DP VA course benefits

Within the interview discussions surrounding 'DP VA course benefits' all participants discussed aspects of the DP VA course that they found to be useful and generative, reflecting on DP VA's non-prescriptive open-ended structure, its celebration of growth and creativity, and the opportunities it provides for critical thinking and personal expression.

One of the most frequently highlighted benefits of the DP VA program was its flexibility, which allows both teachers and students to explore diverse approaches to art-making. Participants valued the freedom to tailor their teaching to students' interests and needs. One participant shared:

I think, is that it's quite free. I really like the fact that they celebrate learning. I feel that that's the main thing that I really enjoy about that. They don't penalize the kids for not being the end perfect result all the way through. They want to see growth and I feel that they do reward that. (P: 5_2 i1)

This flexibility extends to students, encouraging them to follow their passions and develop their artistic voices. The program fosters autonomy and engagement, allowing students to connect deeply with their creative work. Another participant appreciated the variety it offers: "You're not confined with just painting or drawing. You can explore different mediums, and the students can piggyback ideas from each other" (P 1_6 i1). While this openness makes teaching rewarding, it also presents challenges in balancing diverse projects and planning a curriculum that supports all learners.

The non-prescriptive nature of the DP VA curriculum is especially valuable in international school contexts, as it allows for individualized learning journeys. One participant remarked that the program helps students "uncover what it is they're interested in," while also ensuring that assessment is not entirely skill-based, providing opportunities for success regardless of traditional technical abilities (P 5_10 i1). However, the program's openness also requires students to be self-directed, which can be both its strength and its challenge.

This adaptability ensures the curriculum remains relevant across varied learning environments. Another participant shared their enthusiasm for the freedom within the program, both for students and teachers:

why I love it and why I continue teaching it, is the amount of freedom that students have within the program. I love that they can be really creative. Also, teachers have a lot of freedom in how they choose to teach that program. I think so many teachers teach it in very different ways, but at least for me, it's just so satisfying to me by the time they get to grade 11 and 12, I can really talk to them like working artists and talk to them about their ideas and all that stuff. I love that. I love the conceptual side of things, like coming up with ideas and having meaning and what is it that you really want to say through your work and how can you say it deeper. (P: 5_1 i1)

Another notable strength that participants discussed was the DP VA program's emphasis on both conceptual depth and critical thinking. One participant highlighted the program's balanced approach, noting that it values both technical skill and conceptual ideas, which enables students to express themselves in diverse ways. This approach contrasts with other programs, where strong conceptual ideas may not compensate for technical limitations (P 5_6 i1).

The program also fosters continuous learning for both students and teachers. As one participant shared, "As a teacher, I've learned a lot, and I feel like my students do learn a lot during those

two years” (P 1_6 i1). Furthermore, the rigour of the DP VA course is highly beneficial in preparing students for higher education. Participants emphasized how the program supports the development of strong portfolios, which are crucial for acceptance into university art programs. One teacher explained that the program’s structure, which includes building portfolios and managing exhibitions, equips students with valuable skills: “It trains you very well for university... Alumni often excel in their courses because of how rigorous the IB program is” (P 1_4 i1). This foundation provides students with a significant advantage when pursuing creative careers.

Summary of DP VA curriculum dynamics

Interviews reveal that planning the DP VA course involves navigating a host of challenges, including the integration of 3 key components, assessment strategies, and scaffolding learning. These factors, compounded by the program’s rigorous external submission process, create a multifaceted educational landscape that requires strategic planning and innovative approaches.

Participants emphasized the importance of structured curriculum planning as a foundation for successful program delivery, further scaffolding across DP1 and DP2, was described as vital for managing the program’s rigorous demands and helping students gradually develop their artistic and analytical skills while avoiding overwhelming workloads. While discussions on planning of the 3 key components were prominent, they were in response to strategic questions. What emerged from the coding of the conversations which was not directly addressed through questioning was participant’s concern with technical mastery and how it was perceived to play a critical role in student’s externally assessed results.

Chapter 9 : Implicit Conceptualizations of Quality: Assessment Complexities

In this chapter, I share key findings from Phase 3: in-depth interviews surrounding implicit conceptualizations of quality through assessment complexities within coded discussions of ‘assessment uncertainty’, ‘program reputation issues’ and ‘professional impact’.

Discussions around the ‘assessment complexities’ of DP VA were emotionally charged, focusing on the multifaceted challenges and strategies involved in navigating the assessment process. Participants unanimously expressed that the stakes for assessment felt extremely high, compounded by a pervasive sense of uncertainty surrounding the course expectations. Notably, across the three interview sessions, concerns about the overwhelming expectations and unclear assessment procedures were raised consistently. There was not a single discussion in which these issues did not emerge. This theme delves into the significant concerns shared by participants, particularly regarding the lack of clarity surrounding DP VA grading standards, the rigorous expectations placed on both students and teachers, and how these factors impact educators’ ability to feel successful in delivering the course. The codes that were revealed within discussions on this theme were ‘assessment uncertainty’, ‘program reputation issues’ and ‘professional impact’.

Table 11. Codes identified within ‘DP VA assessment complexities’

Codes	Coding Excerpts
Assessment uncertainty	51
Program reputation issues	42
Professional impact	41

Note: Codes identified within ‘DP VA assessment complexities’ revealed through coding of combined in-depth interviews

Assessment uncertainty

Within discussions of ‘assessment uncertainty’, participants voiced shared frustrations with the unpredictability and subjectivity of assessment outcomes, which often left both teachers and students feeling uncertain and demoralized. Participants frequently expressed frustration over the unpredictable nature of DP VA assessment results. One participant shared their experience of being surprised by student outcomes, despite their efforts to anticipate results:

I don’t know. I was just talking with my DP coordinator yesterday... and I said, this year, I expect to be completely surprised again. And she said, I do, too. And that’s just the way it is. And some students who last year I thought were really, really excellent, they only got fives, and I thought they were going to get a high six... And then one student who did all his work in the last two weeks before the exhibition, it was pretty poor. And he ended up getting a five as well. And it’s the same grade as these students who had really

interesting concepts and were really well iterated. And we just threw up our hands and said, ‘Well, we don’t know’ (P: 5_7 i2).

Another participant reflected on the inherent uncertainty in how effort translates to outcomes:

But that’s the thing about DP Visual Art, it’s no guarantee. It’s like one plus one equals three. It’s not like whatever I put in, it’s going to generate the same output as I’d expect. So, I’m just hoping for the first one of talking, I’m hoping that would help them. So that’s the challenge, it’s not knowing how much is necessary and enough (P: 1_1 i1).

These inconsistencies left even experienced teachers questioning their ability to effectively assess student work. As one participant put it:

..there’s some really, really serious baked-in problems, I think, with IB art. And I have an MA in education. So if I can’t teach and assess art with an MA in education and MFA, then I don’t know (P: 5_7 i2).

Training and Mixed Feedback

Many participants who underwent specialized training to better understand the DP VA assessment criteria found the process challenging and often inconsistent. One educator shared their experience of receiving contradictory feedback from moderators despite completing rigorous training: “I did a training through IBICUS¹⁴... we had a really complex three days of learning how to mark things... and they said, ‘You have 100%. You are really, really accurate.’” However, when their marking was reviewed during an IB exhibition, the feedback was conflicting: “One feedback said, ‘She’s been way too generous in category C&D,’ and another moderator said the exact opposite. They absolutely cancelled each other out.” Reflecting on the situation, the participant recounted the response from their IB coordinator: “This is how it is with art. It is really random” (P 5_7 i2).

This frustration was echoed by another participant who summarized the broader sentiment among DP VA teachers: “The thing they’re most frustrated with... is assessment because teachers feel confused by the results from the IB. They come to workshops saying, ‘I don’t understand why my student didn’t do well.’ Sometimes it’s clear, but other times I agree with them, assessment is not easy for anyone to decipher” (P 5_10 i2). Such uncertainty leaves educators feeling perplexed and unsupported in their role as assessors.

¹⁴ IBICUS is a private company specializing in IB courses for students and teachers; running International Baccalaureate (IB) training workshops throughout the UK since 2003 (<https://www.ibicus.org.uk/>).

The grading process was further complicated by perceptions of inconsistency, particularly the frequent improvement of marks following remarking. One participant described a striking example: “I’ve sent a process portfolio back for remark, and it’s gone up two bands before. It’s crazy, the discrepancy” (P 1_4 i2). Another educator shared a concerning statistic from their school’s coordinator: “Our DP coordinator let us know about the remarking scheme... they told us that one in five students gets an improved mark. And that was outrageous because in any other profession, if you’re wrong 20% of the time, you’d be fired. If 20% of students across all subjects can improve their mark, it means something’s going wrong the first time around” (P 1_4 i3). Such inconsistencies erode trust in the system and make it difficult for educators to feel confident in their assessments.

Participants also expressed frustration with the misalignment between the DP VA assessment structure and the inherently subjective and holistic nature of artistic practice. As one educator explained, “Art is completely subjective and qualitative. I can say to a student, ‘Is this good? Is this not good?’ And people might disagree... Art is student-led, it’s totally subjective, it’s totally qualitative. Those things already make it hard. And then the IB inconsistency makes it 100 times harder” (P 5_7 i2). This tension between the fluid, exploratory nature of art and the rigid framework of assessment creates significant challenges for both students and teachers.

From the perspective of an examiner, one participant highlighted how unclear expectations among teachers can negatively impact student submissions. They shared, “Last year I was examining process portfolios, and I came across portfolios where it was clear the students didn’t understand what a process portfolio meant. I don’t know if this was due to a lack of understanding from the teacher, the school, or both.” The participant lamented, “It broke my heart to think, ‘I can’t give points for this student, but it’s not their fault. It’s the system that fails them, whether it’s due to lack of training, unclear requirements, or misunderstanding of IB Art’” (P 1_6 i1).

Given these challenges, many participants advocated for alternative assessment methods that prioritize authentic artistic engagement over rigid numerical grading. One educator emphasized the emotional toll the current system takes on teachers, stating, “Teachers are nervous about marking and being marked down. They often feel their students are on target, only for everyone to be marked down. I can only offer them sympathy and empathy because I don’t always agree with the IB marking either. They want a definitive answer, but there isn’t one” (P 5_10 i3). The uncertainty caused by subjective grading, inconsistent standards, and a lack of alignment between artistic values and assessment frameworks undermines confidence in the DP VA process, leaving educators and students alike feeling disheartened.

Program reputation issues

Perceived difficulty

Participants highlighted that the perceived difficulty of DP VA significantly influences students' subject choices, with many avoiding the course due to its reputation as “the hardest course by far out of all the IB courses.” This perception stems from its rigorous demands and the challenges of achieving high scores. Even talented and capable students often choose other subjects, fearing the unpredictability of assessment and the high expectations that could negatively impact their overall academic performance. One participant explained, “I have students who won’t choose art because it’s hard to score high. So they’ll purposefully take two sciences or two Individuals and Societies (INS) because they don’t want to take art... I really only get the students who really like art and will probably do SL, or those who want to go into art or design” (P 5_4 i2). This reputation discourages students from pursuing DP VA and marginalizes it as an academic discipline within the IB curriculum.

Current DP VA students often advise younger peers against taking the course, further perpetuating its reputation for difficulty. One teacher observed, “We have nine students about to go into their exhibition, and they’ve been telling the younger students how hard it is. They’ve said, ‘If you do IB Art, don’t do HL. Don’t do art at all. But if you really love art, just do SL because it’s so, so hard. And the grading is so random’” (P 5_7 i2). Another participant shared a similar experience: “A lot of my students said, in hindsight, ‘I really wish I’d taken SL instead of HL.’ They even told younger students, ‘Art is really, really hard. Don’t take IB Art. If you have to, take SL’” (P 5_7 i3). This cycle of discouragement, fuelled by students’ negative experiences, has contributed to declining enrolment in DP VA.

Many educators felt that the expectations for DP VA students are more aligned with university-level or even postgraduate-level work, making the course particularly challenging for high school students. One participant noted, “IB is asking our students to work at the level of university, nearly postgrad, creating a body of work, exhibiting it, curating it. IB is meant to be rigorous, but is it too demanding? How does [IB] interpret artistic excellence, and is it consistent across examiners or teachers?” (P 1_6 i1).

Student disengagement with creativity

The pressure to meet deadlines and achieve high grades often leads to burnout and disengagement from art as a creative practice. One educator observed, “It limits the students’ creativity. Eventually, they’re like, ‘I just want to get a decent grade. I don’t even like art anymore’” (P 5_2 i3). Another shared the story of a student who became so overwhelmed by the demands of the program that they lost their passion for art: “IB crams a lot into a very short time. The expectations are so high... One student didn’t want to do any art after graduating. She was so sick of it. It squeezed all the joy out of art-making” (P 1_3 i2).

Participants expressed concern that the DP VA's structured requirements often constrain students' ability to authentically engage with their creative process. The emphasis on meeting strict criteria forces students to prioritize grades over artistic exploration. One educator reflected, "The students are actually [focusing their art-making] for the grade, not for the learning. I don't know how to shift that" (P 5_6 i2). This underscores the need for a more balanced framework that values artistic growth and self-expression over rigid evaluation.

Impact on students with low aptitude

Another issue affecting the program's reputation is the enrolment of students who lack aptitude or genuine interest in art. In some schools, DP coordinators place less academically inclined students in DP VA as a fallback option. One teacher explained, "There are a lot of students who aren't super academic and are struggling in IB. The coordinator puts them in art because maybe it's something they can do... But I get students who don't really have an aptitude or even like art. Then they're thrown into this demanding program, which just makes it worse" (P 5_7 i2). This practice diminishes the credibility of DP VA as an academic subject and creates additional challenges for teachers, who must support disengaged students while upholding the program's rigorous standards

Professional impact

Participants shared that the challenges associated with DP VA assessments negatively impact their confidence, motivation, and perceptions of their teaching effectiveness. The lack of clarity and consistency in the assessment process often leaves teachers feeling uncertain about how well they are preparing students. One participant expressed frustration with the perceived subjectivity of the marking process, stating, "In some years, I feel like it's a throw a dart at a board. Is this going to go well? Is this going to go badly? Sometimes I get frustrated because when I'm marking the Australian HSC system, I'm usually spot on, but with the IB, I have to give that wiggle room, could be higher, could be lower. There's a bit more subjectivity in the moderation than I would like" (P 1_4 i1).

This unpredictability leaves educators feeling unsure about their judgments and unable to provide reliable guidance to students. Another participant highlighted the difficulty of setting expectations for high-achieving students, explaining, "I have some amazing students this year, and I would love to tell them, 'Yeah, I think you're a seven.' But the fact is, it's so rare and ethereal. Maybe someone will sprinkle some fairy dust, and you'll get lucky" (P 5_1 i1). This sense of randomness adds considerable stress to the process, further undermining teacher confidence.

Challenges with feedback from IB

Even when educators carefully align their grading with previous moderator feedback, uncertainty around assessments persists. One participant recounted their experience:

I very carefully looked at last year's moderators' comments because it felt really arbitrary. One thought I was too generous in criterion B and C, another thought I was too strict. I followed their feedback, but I know it may still not be accurate. My IB coordinator said, 'Don't worry, we know it can be very random' (P 5_7 i3).

This inconsistency in feedback and assessment results exacerbates feelings of doubt, leaving teachers unsure about their ability to prepare students effectively.

Hesitancy to award high marks

The subjectivity of DP VA assessments fosters a reluctance among educators to award the highest scores, as they fear over-prediction could harm students' results. One participant admitted, "I've never predicted a seven because... if I predict a seven and they come back and say no, that's going to screw up the student's mark" (P 5_1 i3). Even experienced participants serving as examiners shared their hesitation to confidently award top marks, with one noting, "It's not clear-cut. I feel like in other subjects, it's easier to know what good is, but with art, it's subjective. Is it good? Is it amazing? I don't know. I still feel frustrated and don't always agree with my principal examiner" (P 5_1 i1).

Some participants view becoming an examiner as a pathway to better understanding the rubric, with one sharing, "I applied again to be an examiner. I told my DP coordinator, 'If I become an IB examiner, I'll be a better teacher.' He said, 'Will you be a better teacher, or will you just understand the rubric more?'" (P 5_5 i1).

The elusive seven

The ambiguity surrounding what constitutes exceptional work in DP VA contributes to the hesitation to award sevens. One participant expressed frustration, asking, "Why can't more of them get sevens? If there's a debate on what a seven is, shouldn't more students be able to get it in different ways? But nobody knows what it looks like, so nobody gives it. It's so elusive" (P 5_1 i3). Reflecting on a decade of teaching DP VA, another participant explained their reluctance to predict top marks: "I've never scored a student a seven in the exhibition component. I've had students get a seven, but I've never predicted it...I'd rather predict a six and have IB say, 'No, it's a seven.' I can handle that conversation. I can't handle the one where the student says, 'You said I was a seven, and IB said I was a five'" (P 5_11 i3).

Pressure on DP VA teachers

Many participants expressed feeling personally affected, often questioning their effectiveness as educators. One teacher shared their constant anxiety, saying, "I'm just constantly worried that I'm not doing my job well, that I'm not preparing them well, and that I'll run out of time to get

them to eleven pieces for the exhibition. And what if the pieces aren't great? Then I worry the school's going to look at me and say, 'What the hell were you doing?'" (P 1_3 i3).

Another participant reflected on the emotional impact of declining enrolment, explaining:

I think one thing I would say to add that I haven't said is it's hard for me as a teacher because it feels like it reflects on the quality of my teaching somehow that people don't want to do [the course]. And I know I'm a good art teacher and I know I'm experienced and I know what I'm doing...So, I feel like that hurts me as a teacher, that it hurts my motivation because I feel like the odds are already stacked against me. Do you know what I mean? But I feel like it reflects on me that I've done something not right. And I have, you know, I've been teaching for a while now, and it's just that the program is so hard. But I feel it kind of makes me look bad at the school even though I know I'm doing a good job. So that's hard, but, you know, that's life. I suspect every art teacher feels this way (P: 5_7 i3)

These pressures, combined with an unpredictable and subjective assessment system, leave many DP VA teachers feeling unsupported and demoralized, further highlighting the need for greater clarity and alignment in the program's evaluation practices.

I recount one story here shared by a participant to illustrate the profound toll that the assessment of DP VA has on its teachers. This is not an experience isolated to new teachers; it is one that even seasoned educators endure, and the emotional weight of it lingers long after. The participant shared their story with raw honesty and their words conveyed not only frustration but also a deep sense of vulnerability, as they recounted:

So even though the fact that now I've been teaching art, DP art for 15 years, and I've had many students get sevens, I still feel like it's a complete gamble. Even when I'm examining.... I just cross my fingers because... And it drives me crazy that I still don't feel like I know exactly what is expected. I got disqualified this year and I got kicked out. In my [examiner] qualifications. Yes. In each one, I got one wrong. And I couldn't quite... I disagreed with them.

I feel like I know what I'm doing. And so it makes me really insecure, I guess. I'll do it again next year. I was actually quite excited because I was... Then there's some years where I didn't get disqualified, but it was just luck that my numbers matched up. I feel the same way about my students being examined. It's just luck, and I hate that.

I feel like I know what's needed. I can guide, but it's still... No matter how much I know or how many years I do it or how many samples I look at, there's still an element of depending how you look at it or whatever. I feel like by now I should be able to, but I don't know if I'll ever be able to.

... Some of them I disagree with. I'm not saying that I know better, but it's just weird. So [the principal examiner's] word counts for more. But I don't think they're more qualified necessarily.

It was four qualifications. One was off, but not even that much. And then the next round, one was off. And then I just never heard from them. And I was like, Oh, that sucks.... It just sucks for my own confidence..... I have my own students marking that's lagging. So it's not like I need more work. But it's more like my confidence and my ego.. And that I don't really know what I can do to know better (P: 5_7 i2).

What struck me most was this participant's admission of being disqualified as an examiner; a moment that impacted their confidence despite years of dedication and success. The story reveals the emotional toll of striving to meet unclear expectations year after year. The participant's vulnerability was deeply moving as they described how, no matter how much effort they put into understanding the assessment criteria, they still felt uncertain and dependent on "luck" The participant also touched on the disconnect they feel between their expertise and the outcomes determined by external examiners, as there is no recourse or ability for the teachers to discuss with external examiners.

Summary of assessment complexities

The findings within 'assessment complexities' reveal that a high level of assessment uncertainty stems from the unpredictable and subjective nature of grading, systemic inconsistencies in the assessment framework, and the misalignment between artistic values and evaluation criteria. These issues not only undermine the confidence and professional well-being of DP VA teachers but also create cascading effects that damage the reputation of the course and its ability to attract and retain students.

That experienced DP VA teachers describe assessment outcomes as a "complete gamble," shows a concerning lack of trust in IB's assessment system. Such inconsistencies create a climate of doubt, where teachers feel their judgments are undermined and their expertise disregarded. Struggles with the subjective nature of the assessment criteria, is particularly problematic in a subject like DP VA, where technical skill and conceptual depth are weighted in ways that are often difficult to quantify. Teachers are left navigating conflicting priorities, such as whether to emphasize traditional skill-based work or more conceptual approaches, fearing that certain creative risks, might not align with examiner expectations.

Chapter 10 : Implicit Conceptualizations of Quality: Management Complexities

In this chapter, I share key findings from Phase 3: in-depth interviews surrounding implicit conceptualizations of quality through ‘management complexities’ within coded discussions of ‘VA medium preferences’, ‘time management challenges’, ‘external learning experiences’, ‘digital integration’, ‘exhibition logistical complexities’ and ‘upload process complexities’.

The theme of DP VA Management complexities delves into the nuanced challenges and opportunities encountered by DP VA teachers, specifically in relation to the demands and expectations of the DP VA curriculum. While many of the issues discussed within this theme intersect with broader concerns tied to international school institutional policies and geographic contexts, the primary focus remains on their relevance to the DP VA program and the imperative to uphold its rigorous creative and academic standards.

A significant aspect of the discussions surrounding the management of DP VA is DP VA teachers’ management of budgets and sourcing of resources. However, these issues also extend beyond the scope of the management complexities being intricately linked to institutional policies, administrative frameworks, and the geographic realities of international schools, and as such, they are explored further in ‘educational and institutional contexts’ in the discussion of supplementary themes in Chapter 11.

Codes that emerged within the discussions surrounding this theme were ‘VA medium preferences’, ‘time management challenges’, ‘external learning experiences’, ‘digital integration’, ‘exhibition logistical complexities’ and ‘upload process complexities’.

Table 12. Codes identified within ‘DP VA management complexities’

Codes	Coding Excerpts
VA medium preferences	32
Time management challenges	28
External learning experiences	20
Digital integration	14
Exhibition logistical complexities	10
Upload process complexities	6

Note: Codes for ‘DP VA management complexities’ revealed through coding of combined in-depth interviews

VA medium preferences

The discussion surrounding ‘VA medium preferences’ in DP VA reveals the diverse interests and challenges students encounter when working with different artistic materials. Within the Process Portfolio (PP) component, students are expected to engage with a variety of mediums

across 2D, 3D, and 4D domains. As one participant explained, “There’s not much challenge in terms of media occasionally, because we have those three columns that we need to meet. We have to think about how to direct the students to ensure that they do pieces for artworks based on the columns of 2D, 3D, and lens-based” (P 1_6 i1).

Many educators view these medium requirements as an opportunity to encourage students to explore and experiment with different artistic forms. One participant shared, “I want the students to be able to experience each medium because they might realize they have a passion or a strong connection to one medium or another. We do a lot of this. I don’t even break it into the themes” (P 1_4 i1).

However, participants also noted that students often gravitate toward familiar and preferred mediums, such as drawing and painting, and expressed the difficulty of balancing exploration with technical mastery. One teacher observed, “My current students don’t like [exploring new media] that much. [In DP2], they all have strong strengths in certain media, and they like to stick with that. I think maybe IB is a little bit restricting them by forcing them to do other media they don’t feel naturally drawn to” (P 1_6 i1). This highlights the tension between fostering artistic exploration and allowing students to work within their comfort zones.

2D mediums

Painting and drawing emerged as the most commonly preferred mediums among students. Many participants observed “a lot of the students are drawn toward drawing and painting” (P 5_2 i2), as they often feel more confident and capable in these areas. These preferences reflect the accessibility and familiarity of these mediums, particularly for students who may lack prior experience with more complex forms of art-making.

However, the preference for painting is not without its challenges. Teachers noted that producing high-quality paintings requires significant time and effort, which can deter some students. As one participant explained, “painting is very labour-intensive... to achieve a good quality painting, students need to invest time after school, which can cause frustration” (P: 1_5 i3). Despite these challenges, participants emphasized the importance of supporting students in building their technical skills in painting, often through guided still-life projects and structured lessons. However participants shared within the 2D medium there are variety of materials and within their DP VA classes they explored: watercolours, oil painting, acrylic painting, cyanotype, pencil, charcoal, mark making, experimental drawing, drip painting, monoprint, silk screen, lino prints, Gelli prints, collagraphs, working with printing press, ink, makers, coloured pencils, scratchboard or scraffito into clay.

Mixed media also emerged as a popular 2D choice among participants, offering a flexible approach that combines elements of different mediums. One educator noted, “a lot of [students] will do mixed media... a combination of collage, painting, or drawing” (P 5_4 i1). This

versatility allows students to experiment while still working within familiar frameworks, making it an appealing option for those who may feel less confident in traditional mediums like sculpture or ceramics.

3D mediums

For 3D mediums, clay sculpture was the most discussed medium, however, in contrast to 2D, sculpture and ceramics were less popular among students, with many participants noting a lack of interest or resources in these areas as one participant explained, “The sculptural side, we’re not strong on. We don’t have a ceramics department. We don’t have much in terms of anything, in terms of sculpture. (P: 1_3 i2). Limited availability of materials and facilities was often discussed among participants, with lack of kilns and space which they felt restricted students’ ability to explore these mediums, though some teachers encourage their inclusion in the process portfolio to provide a more diverse range of skills and experiences.

However, in terms of 3D mediums, participants discussed working with wire sculpture, cardboard and other found materials such as recycled industrial and hardware parts, glue gun and 3D printing pens, resin, plaster moulds and strips, cement, ceramics, play doh and magic moulding materials, armatures, plastic, and crafts such as embroidery and textiles.

4D mediums

For 4D mediums, many participants shared personal interest in the lens-based forms and so within the DP VA classes they explored photography and photo-based things, digital drawing, multimedia arts, installation, Virtual Reality, video, digital and photographic animation, stop animation, performance art and most recently AI and programming languages.

Digital media was an area where participants noted students had a growing interest, particularly as it aligns with contemporary trends and technological advancements, “The [students] love digital media, like doing... a digital drawing” (P 5_4 i2), while another shared:

“I really, really enjoyed actually teaching compositional photography. That’s been really fun, actually. And Lightroom as well. I mean, this is the first year that I’ve ever used or taught a digital platform, but it’s actually quite easy when you get into it. There’s some amazing things that you can do. We’ve got two students in the class that maybe can’t draw. It’s been really helpful to give them that” (P: 5_3 i2).

Participants highlighted how digital tools enable students to visualize and refine their ideas, especially when their technical drawing skills are limited. One participant shared an example of using AI to assist a student, “he had these ideas but couldn’t sketch them... AI helped him see what he was trying to visualize and set up his project.” (P 1_1 i3) This integration of technology demonstrates how digital media can serve as both a creative tool and a means of overcoming technical challenges.

An interesting conversation that was raised by many participants was the value of experimenting with a variety of traditional medium as they noticed the growing influence of digital realms and question its capacity to allow a full artistic experience as one participant explains:

I really was trying to encourage them to do traditional mediums so when they write their reflectives, it's so authentic because they know, charcoal feels this way, pencil feels this way. It makes this a sound. Like, digital makes no sound, has no feeling. It just creates visual. So it's different, I think. It's a very sensory experience. Instead of [digital, is] quite a sterile experience, isn't it? That's it. I remember when I went back to... my university after being away for I don't know how many years, and I walked into the art department and I could smell the oil the paints and the different things. It was like a blast into the past of when I was 18 and 19, and I was like, Oh, my God. I just need to sit with this for a minute. It was almost like an assault, not a bad one, but an assault of the senses. It would be a pity that they... How could they get through a whole IB course.... and..not to have been stimulated so much. (P: 1_3 i2)

Anecdote about mediums

Another delight of the discussions about mediums was when participants shared stories from their art classroom illustrating the tentative nature that exploring mediums can bring:

And then I don't think it's a must know, but.. it was funny because it's sometimes in terms of, like, you know, encouraging that experimentation, encouraging, trying new things and sometimes forget when I can leave. And in this case, it was one of my very, very good students. He was one of my top students this year, and he wanted to experiment with sculptural cement. I was like, you know, go for it. Like, I think that could be really cool, using the moulds, everything like that. And he did a fantastic, really cool sculptural models. And then I think I stepped away for just a moment. I was like, oh, can you pack that up and then I'll go across. And then I came back and he was dumping the spare cement into the art sinks. No, I was like, tell me, do you remember what happens when you make cement and water? And so we had to run, like, all the taps for, like an hour just to make sure that it was flushing through and not, like, destroying the entire [plumbing]. So, yeah, that was a funny story from last year. And I was like, okay, just note to self, when you're using certain mediums, just remind that even at DP2, some of the students don't know how to use correctly (P: 1_4 i3)

Time management complexities

Within 'time management complexities', participants discussed the difficulties students face in managing their DP VA workload and meeting deadlines within the broader IB coursework, as well as the challenges of class scheduling, studio session lengths, and maintaining accountability.

These issues underscore the need for structured strategies to support time management and foster student responsibility.

Managing time over the two year course

Within these discussions, participants thoughtfully consider how best to manage the expectations of the course, carefully designing the allocation of time to specific components in an effort to guide and scaffold students learning in a way that supports student's creative development as one participant explains:

Yeah. And the time is always the challenge. Do you have enough time? The two years is pretty full on. I mean, like from day one, you start introducing things gradually, and it just seems to pick up pace every year just faster and faster because you got so much to try and put into those two years of course work. (P: 1_6 i1)

Class time schedules and studio time

Class scheduling and the limited length of studio sessions emerged as significant barriers to effective time management in DP VA. Many educators expressed frustration with short class periods, which restrict opportunities for in-depth projects and skill-building. One teacher explained, "Art cannot be done in short blocks... it's not like math, where you can solve a problem and move on. We have six blocks of 55 minutes, but it's not enough to sit down, experiment, and develop new skills. In a double period, let's say I have an hour and a half, you can't really work much with clay because when you start, it's like, 'Okay, time's up. Wrap it and keep it moist.' It's a lot of hassle" (P 1_1 i3).

Some participants also shared challenges related to students' long commutes, which impact their ability to engage with studio work outside of class. One teacher noted, "The students have to get on the bus at 3:30 because some of them live two hours away. When they get home, they don't have supplies or energy. I just don't feel like we can get to that next level they really need for their studio practice. I can't run Saturday sessions either because there's no way to get here. It's just crazy" (P 5_8 i3).

Frequent interruptions from school events, such as sports days, public holidays, or other activities, further exacerbate time constraints. One participant described their situation: "We're having a public holiday tomorrow, sports day on Friday, and last week was Loy Krathong celebration. One thing after another eats into these lessons. I've got students working on clay who couldn't even start because it'll dry out before they can continue. It's pushing things further and further back. I was just counting how many weeks we have left, and it freaked me out. I got 10 more gray hairs in my head now" (P 1_6 i1).

The time limitations also affect students' ability to balance their creative ambitions with practical constraints. One teacher discussed the challenge of managing students' expectations:

“Sometimes the hardest part is students who don’t understand time management. They choose huge, detailed projects that are taking way too long. I’ve told them, ‘If you’re doing this, you need a counterpoint, a short-term project you can complete quickly, or you’ll only produce three artworks by the exhibition.’ I had a student working on a beautiful embroidery piece, but it was so huge I had to say, ‘I love the project, but you’re not working on this in studio time. This is an at-home project, show me progress, but in school, you need to focus on something manageable.’ It’s a constant negotiation” (P 1_4 i3).

The pressure of completing art projects during DP2 becomes overwhelming for students, who must also contend with other school activities and academic expectations. One participant explained, “Those weeks are so important. My school still has grade twelves go on experience week, which is so problematic because half the cohort doesn’t even go. They stay home, saying, ‘Hello, I’m trying to do all this other stuff. I don’t have time’” (P 5_11 i3).

Some schools attempt to address time challenges, but DP VA is often overlooked, creating additional hurdles. As one teacher shared, “During senior week in October, my students weren’t allowed to work on their art because there was no one to supervise them in the art room. One student stayed home the whole week because he wasn’t allowed to work on his art at school. They told him, ‘We’re just going to study and work on the extended essay,’ and he was like, ‘I need to work on my art.’ But since no one could supervise, he just stayed home” (P 5_5 i3).

These constraints highlight the significant impact of scheduling and time management on students’ ability to fully engage with the creative process in DP VA, presenting ongoing challenges for both educators and learners.

Managing student accountability

Some participants emphasized the importance of setting clear expectations early in the program, though managing student accountability often remains a significant challenge for teachers, especially when students fail to take responsibility for their own work. While many international schools use organizational tools like ManageBac (Faira Education Group, Oregon, US) and Toddle (Karnataka, India), which are specifically designed for the IB program to track grades, comments, and student progress, participants noted persistent struggles with late submissions and parent communication. As one teacher expressed frustration:

Why should I have to tell you [the parent] that your 16-year-old son hasn’t done his work? Why don’t you check in? It’s managed. It’s all on ManageBac. You have access to it. You can see what he’s done and what he hasn’t done. He can see his grades, and you can see the comments I’ve written for all his subjects. So, it’s all my time going to this stuff. That’s the frustration” (P 1_3 i3).

To address these challenges, teachers stressed the importance of maintaining strict deadlines and structured routines. One participant shared their approach: “I’ve set them tasks and followed up

with their parents and guardians with screenshots of their screens and what they need to do. So I'm accountable because a lot of the students may not do any work, but by emailing the parents and saying at each conference, 'Can you just keep an eye on your child and make sure they're working?' hopefully, I'll get some outcomes next week. But it's unlikely. The best time to get output from the student is ultimately in the class. If they can do four or five lines of written work for homework, I think that's a good result, really. This is the Achilles' heel" (P 1_5 i2). These scenarios highlight the need for stronger collaboration among teachers, students, and parents to create a shared understanding of responsibilities.

To maximize productive class time, many participants advocated for a flipped classroom approach, where students complete written and research tasks outside of school hours to leave class time for creating artworks. One participant explained, "I would really tell them not to research in class. I would tell them to make use of the time. Coming back to school is really about testing so we can sort out what's the issue. Unless they haven't figured out their concept and ideas yet, then the whole lesson would just be talking" (P 1_1 i1).

Others implemented structured homework expectations, using online tools to monitor progress. As one teacher described, "I say 35 to 40 minutes of homework a night is the optimum amount of time, increasing to 60 minutes over the weekend. Then I try to tell them to break it down into small, manageable bite-size chunks. Some of them are doing it, and others are not. You can always tell with what they've done because you can click on the clock on Google Slides" (P 1_5 i2). These strategies aim to maximize both in-class productivity and student accountability through clear guidelines and effective use of technology.

External learning experiences

Participants discussed the benefits and challenges of incorporating 'external learning experiences' to enhance student exposure to diverse artistic practices, fostering inspiration, and building critical skills within this code. These activities complement classroom learning, providing students with a well-rounded and immersive education in DP VA.

Field trips

Field trips to galleries, exhibitions, and cultural landmarks were widely recognized as valuable tools for enhancing students' visual literacy and deepening their appreciation for art. Many participants encouraged students to engage with their local cultural environments. One participant shared, "We spend time sketching during the nicer months, if possible, downtown, if not, out in our sunflower fields here" (P 5_8 i2).

In addition to local outings, some educators organized artist visits during the school day. As one participant described, "Here I had a workshop with a photographer for 35 millimetre... [the artist] came in with his darkroom equipment and set it up. So cool" (P 5_6 i2). Others planned excursions to local galleries to inspire students. One teacher noted, "I try to take them out to see

more artworks so they feel inspired... I took them to Art Basel. I'm taking them to Tai Kwun... We're going to get a guided tour" (P 1_1 i3).

Extended trips, such as full-day workshops or visits to art studios, were also highlighted as effective ways to immerse students in creative practices. One participant shared, "We do full-day excursions, like drawing workshops... It's amazing how much you can get done. I had some students produce three or four pieces, as a foundation, unrefined, but work immediately there" (P 1_4 i3).

Trips to artist studios provided students with hands-on exposure to professional techniques and artisan practices. One educator explained, "We went to Chiang Mai and did a pottery workshop with a ceramicist. We also did a hand-build workshop with another artist... We visited galleries and did a tie-dyeing textile workshop at a cotton farm" (P 5_2 i2).

Some schools also organized week-long international trips to major art hubs like London and Florence, where students experienced exhibitions and workshops. As one teacher reflected, "The students absorb so much more than they let on" (P 1_3 i3). These trips not only expose students to professional art but also inspire their own work. "The whole purpose is to raise their visual literacy... I keep telling them, you have to go to all the exhibitions you can" (P 5_8 i2). Such excursions help students contextualize their learning within broader artistic and cultural frameworks.

Artist-in-Residence

The inclusion of artists-in-residence was another strategy for bringing professional perspectives into the classroom. Participants shared that visiting artists would conduct workshops or discuss their work with students. Others highlighted longer residencies, where artists worked closely with students over an extended period. One participant described, "The ceramicist from Chiang Mai came to our school, so we paid for him to come here for a week. I took them off timetable for two days so they could make a ceramic piece while their skills were still fresh... Now every student has a ceramics piece, even if it's just for their process portfolio" (P 5_2 i2). Residencies provide students with hands-on experience and encourage them to experiment with unfamiliar techniques and mediums.

Mock Exhibitions

Mock exhibitions were frequently cited as a valuable way to prepare students for their final assessments. These events were often organized collaboratively between multiple DP VA schools to simulate the exhibition process. One educator described the impact: "The mock exhibition terrifies them in a really good way... It's always more for their benefit, as they learn so much from the experience" (P 1_1 i2). Mock exhibitions help students refine their curatorial skills and build confidence in presenting their work.

While external learning experiences offer numerous benefits, logistical challenges often hinder their implementation. Organizing trips, securing funding, and coordinating schedules can be particularly difficult in international school settings. One participant noted, “The school tells me to take kids out on Saturdays or after work, but we’ve already worked so many Saturdays in the first term” (P 5_6 i2). These constraints limit opportunities for experiential learning and underscore the need for more supportive administrative policies to facilitate such activities.

Digital integration

The integration of digital tools and platforms in DP VA has significantly influenced time management, transforming how both teachers and students explore ideas, create, and present artworks. While these tools expand creative possibilities and streamline artistic processes, participants voiced concerns regarding over-reliance on such technologies, limited independent thinking, and modern distractions that impact students’ focus, key themes highlighted during the interviews.

Participants emphasized the increasing role of digital platforms such as Adobe Creative Cloud (San Jose, California, US), Procreate (Hobart, Tasmania), and AI tools in art-making. Schools have invested in resources like Wacom tablets (Kazo, Saiama, Japan) and Adobe licenses to support students in developing industry-relevant skills. This access enables students to produce professional-grade digital artwork.

However, not all schools prioritize or supply digital platforms equally. One participant explained, “It’s mixed. It’s a bring-your-own-device policy at this school. Most kids have iMacs, MacBooks, or an iPhone” (P 5_6 i1). In contrast, another educator shared, “I don’t teach digital drawing. I don’t teach digital because we don’t have it. We don’t even have Photoshop. I don’t have a tablet myself, and the school hasn’t bought one, so I don’t focus on it” (P 1_2 i2). Such disparities highlight unequal access to digital resources across institutions.

Digital tools also aid students in visualizing ideas, especially when they encounter technical challenges. For some, digital art becomes their primary medium, aligning with their strengths and interests. However, participants expressed concerns about students’ over-reliance on digital tools, particularly AI and social media platforms like Instagram (Menlo Park, California, US) and Pinterest (San Francisco, California, US).

The abundance of online tutorials and simplified processes can create a false sense of mastery among students. One educator explained, “Students see quick videos and think they can do it... they don’t realize the persistence and skill development required” (P 5_2 i2). This misconception often leads to poor time management, resulting in superficial work that lacks depth and refinement.

AI tools have also started to play a role in digital integration, with some educators experimenting with their use during the course of the interviews. One participant shared their experience:

It's funny because I was so anti-AI... but the other day, we were doing a unit on portraiture, and I said, 'Let's just try AI. Let's see what your ideas look like visually.' A student had ideas but couldn't sketch them, so he used AI to piece them together. It was fascinating. He could see his vision, make changes, and then figure out how to take his own photos for it (P 5_5 i2).

The participant reflected on their own curiosity about AI, spending time after school testing tools like Pixel, noting, "The images were so good... but the AI still had quirks, like extra fingers or arms in the drawings."

While digital tools provide immense creative potential, these interviews underscore the importance of balancing their use with critical thinking, traditional skills, and time management to ensure students' work remains both innovative and meaningful.

Exhibition logistical complexities

A primary logistical challenge within time management that was often discussed by participants was the organization of the final exhibition in support of the EX component.

Securing Exhibition space

One of the main logistical challenges discussed by participants was securing appropriate spaces for the final exhibition, a critical component of the EX assessment. Many schools lack dedicated gallery spaces, forcing teachers to repurpose classrooms, auditoriums, or shared facilities. This adds to the workload and complicates scheduling. As one educator explained, "We don't have proper boards or an exhibition space... in the past, we've just done it in the art room because that's the only space available" (P 5_6 i3).

Scheduling conflicts further exacerbate this issue, particularly when exhibition spaces are shared with other school activities. One participant noted, "Our exhibition space is also used for primary parent-teacher conferences, so we have to take the exhibition down right after it's displayed" (P 5_7 i3). Such constraints often limit the exhibition duration to just a few days or a weekend, reducing opportunities for community engagement.

Timing of the Exhibition

Coordinating the timing of the exhibition poses additional challenges, as it requires balancing the demands of the IB curriculum with preparation and scheduling. Teachers must align dates with academic calendars and other school events, while also managing logistical tasks like securing space approvals and coordinating with maintenance teams. Delays in these processes can further complicate setup.

Participants emphasized the dual purpose of the exhibition as both an assessment and a celebration of students' artistic journeys. One teacher shared, "I want the exhibition to feel like a celebration, a moment for students to showcase their hard work and creativity" (P 5_2 i3). The event also serves to foster community engagement, with teachers often inviting parents, administrators, and peers. As another participant explained, "The exhibition is a chance to highlight the incredible work our students are doing and to build appreciation for the arts within the school" (P 5_8 i3).

To enhance the significance of the event, many schools organize opening ceremonies featuring speeches, music, and community involvement. One participant described, "We have an exhibition ceremony. DP2 and DP1 students attend and support each other. Music students perform, there are speeches, and the exhibition is opened by a local artist. It's up for a week, and parents and community members are invited. It's nice, everyone gets dressed up, and we make it more of a big deal instead of just putting it on the wall" (P 5_2 i3).

Logistical demands

The logistical demands of organizing exhibitions often extend beyond regular school hours, with teachers dedicating evenings and weekends to ensure success. One participant shared, "I'm in the art room most nights until 5:00 and on Saturdays... students need the extra time to prepare" (P 5_11 i3).

DP VA teachers also face unexpected challenges, such as technical issues or last-minute adjustments, adding to their workload. As one participant explained, "It's a lot of coordination. The walls and boards have to be installed and repainted because they get dirty sitting outside. I spend months organizing with maintenance staff, but things always get delayed. Then the students come to set up the day before, and half of them don't show up. I had to get the IB coordinator to call them because it was opening the next day" (P 5_6 i3).

Participants underscored the need for additional support, such as art technicians or assistants, to manage the complexities of exhibitions. One teacher stated, "No technician, no assistant... it's all on me and the students" (P 5_5 i3). Another shared their overwhelming workload: "I mount everything, print and cut name tags, frame pieces, and prepare displays, all while teaching, grading, and writing reports. I'm exhausted. Last year, I was asked to do set design for the theater production, and I had to say, 'This girl ain't gonna hack it. I'm a one-man band'" (P 1_6 i3).

These challenges highlight the immense effort required to organize successful exhibitions, underscoring the need for greater administrative support and resources to reduce the burden on teachers. However, despite these challenges, many educators see exhibitions as opportunities to foster student autonomy. One teacher shared, "I believe in getting the kids involved as curators of the show. They design the invitations, decide which works to showcase, and handle logistics

like layout and setup. I create the overall plan and assign roles, such as a lead curator to liaise with our facilities team. It's logistical, critical thinking, and challenges all rolled into one. The students love it" (P 5_8 i3).

Upload process complexity

Within discussions surrounding 'upload process complexity' in DP VA, participants discussed the detailed requirements for uploading student artwork, the importance of proper documentation and presentation, and the need to navigate a range of technical and logistical hurdles. These challenges emphasize the necessity of careful planning, clear communication, and thorough preparation to ensure compliance with IB standards.

Technical requirements

Managing the technical requirements for submitting student artwork is a critical aspect of the upload process, requiring careful planning and significant time management. Participants emphasized the need to adhere to specific file formats, sizes, and naming conventions set by the IB submission platform. Ensuring consistency in file preparation is essential to avoid complications during uploads. One teacher explained, "I create a Google Drive folder for each student with a clear labelling protocol... I check everything to ensure it's in the right format and size before uploading" (P 5_7 i3).

Proper documentation and presentation of artwork are equally important. Participants highlighted the necessity of high-quality photographs and well-organized digital submissions. One educator stated, "Blurry or poorly lit photos are unacceptable... I insist on retaking pictures to ensure the quality is sufficient for submission" (P 5_2 i2). Another participant noted, "The way the process portfolio or comparative study is organized can make a difference... clear and professional presentation can elevate the overall impression and impact the grade" (P 1_4 i2). To ensure legibility, handwritten text is discouraged. As one teacher explained, "I don't let them handwrite anything... examiners need to be able to read it clearly" (P 5_3 i2).

Time constraints and scheduling

The upload process is further complicated by tight schedules and time constraints. Teachers described the need for structured schedules to ensure timely submissions. One participant shared their approach: "Students are given a 20-minute slot to upload with the IB coordinator... even if they're unwell, they must attend" (P 5_7 i3).

Technical challenges, such as slow upload speeds and server congestion, were also noted as significant obstacles. One educator recounted, "Our IB coordinator had to wake up at 2 AM to upload files because the system was too busy during normal hours" (P 5_7 i3). These logistical issues add an extra layer of complexity to an already demanding process.

Institutional support

Participants expressed frustration with the lack of institutional support for managing the upload process. Many noted that assistants or administrators often lack the expertise needed to navigate the IB's specific requirements. One teacher commented, "The learning curve is too steep to expect an assistant to handle this... it requires a deep understanding of the process" (P 1_5 i2).

The IB submission platform allows both students and teachers to upload artworks, with teachers only needing to validate and authenticate submissions when students handle the uploads themselves. However, most participants reported that DP VA teachers typically take full responsibility for organizing and uploading student components. While this practice reduces the logistical burden on students and IB coordinators, it significantly increases teachers' workload and stress. One participant shared, "I know that's what I'm fighting for, for my school. I'm like, why am I sitting here till 6:00? And then I stress out because what if I'm not perfect? I'm fallible. What if I make a mistake and forget some student's artwork or don't upload something correctly? Why is that on me?" (P 5_6 i3).

Shifting the full responsibility for uploads onto DP VA teachers creates additional challenges in time management and adds considerable pressure, highlighting the need for better support systems to streamline the process.

Summary of DP VA management complexities

The management of the DP VA program presents participants with a wide range of complexities, particularly in the areas of exhibition logistics and time management, which emerged as the most significant concerns in interview discussions. Alongside these, challenges related to organizing external learning experiences, addressing art medium preferences, budget allocation, and resource management, as well as logistical issues with the upload process, further complicate the administration of the program. These multifaceted challenges underscore the need for strategic planning, adaptability, and institutional support to ensure the program's success.

Chapter 11 : Implicit Conceptualizations of Quality: Supplementary Themes

In this chapter, I summarize the findings from Phase 3: in-depth interviews surrounding the remaining four themes as shared in Table 7 in Chapter 6: ‘holistic art education practices’, ‘educational and institutional challenges’, ‘professional growth’, and ‘international school dynamics’. Discussions around these four themes are valuable and impact the conceptualization of quality among teaching DP VA within international schools, however they were less prominent in participant discussions. Due to the scope of this study, these four themes are summarized here, but further exploration of each in more depth is recommended.

Holistic art education practices

The first supplementary theme, ‘holistic art education practices’ discussions of the complex interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators were at the forefront, highlighting personal growth and inclusion with a focus on nurturing of positive student-teacher relationships to foster a conducive learning environment. Codes that emerged within discussions surrounding ‘holistic art education practices’ were: ‘mindful teaching practices’, ‘individualized instruction’, ‘VA as personal growth’, ‘student VA themes’, ‘student autonomy and engagement’, and ‘inclusive practices’.

Table 13. Codes identified within ‘holistic art education practices’

Codes	Coding Excerpts
Mindful teaching practices	23
Individualized instruction	23
VA as personal growth	18
Student VA themes	17
Student autonomy and engagement	16
Inclusive practices	5

Note: Codes identified within ‘holistic art education practices’ revealed through coding of combined in-depth interviews

Mindful teaching practices

Discussions around ‘mindful teaching practices’ centred on guiding students to embrace the creative process and adapt to challenges. By framing the creative journey as both intuitive and iterative, participants shared how they strive to help students develop resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving skills that extend beyond artmaking. Encouraging students to embrace uncertainty fosters a mindset open to experimentation and growth.

Participants discussed how mindful teaching strategies such as helping students develop a language of adaptability, enables students to gradually become more comfortable with

unpredictability and embraced adaptability. Mindfulness also shaped participants' own teaching practices, fostering greater compassion, patience, and inclusivity. Participants highlighted the critical role of sensory and tactile experiences in fostering mindfulness within DP VA. Engaging students' physical intelligence through traditional mediums was seen as essential.

Participants also emphasized modelling behaviour by sharing their own artistic processes, including mistakes and revisions, to demonstrate the iterative nature of art-making. Revisiting their old sketchbooks and portfolios allowed teachers to reflect on their learning journey and share practical insights with students. Participants described how these practices not only enriched students' learning but also reignited their own passion for art, reminding them why they became teachers in the first place: "There's so much busy work in teaching that it's easy to forget what you love. But revisiting my own creativity and sharing that with students gives me the spark to teach with passion" (P 5_10 i1).

Individualized instruction

Participants discussed that the DP VA course naturally gravitates towards 'individualized instruction', enabling teachers to tailor their guidance to meet the unique needs, interests, and abilities of each student. This personalized approach empowers students to take ownership of their creative journeys while building the confidence and skills required to express their ideas authentically. This iterative, supportive process allows students to explore techniques that align with their interests while providing the flexibility to experiment, encounter challenges, and try again. Such an approach encourages students to take creative risks and develop their own artistic voices in a nurturing environment.

The diverse nature of student work in DP VA often makes one-on-one instruction essential. One participant explained, "It's always one-on-one. We have group critiques to encourage discussion and sharing, but because everyone's work is so different, the real learning happens in individual sessions. Even with the same starter assignment, their work can be wildly different, and they care deeply about it" (P 5_7 i2).

Beyond artistic development, individualized instruction also extends to supporting students' emotional well-being. Participants recognized that each student brings their own anxieties and challenges to the classroom and so sensitivity allows teachers to adapt their approach to meet each student's emotional and creative needs, creating a supportive and inclusive environment where students feel encouraged to grow. By addressing both the technical and emotional aspects of learning, individualized instruction ensures that each student thrives in their artistic journey.

VA as personal growth

In discussions surrounding 'VA as personal growth', participants highlighted how artmaking allows students to explore individuality, build self-trust, and engage in meaningful self-

reflection. Participants also emphasized the restorative and emotional aspects of VA, for both students and teachers. Many participants also shared, as teachers, the creative process offered similar healing and renewal, with one remarking; “But creating is innate in us, and we need to do it, and it is healing and restorative, and also it lifts you” (P: 1_4 i1)

The joy of art-making was a recurring theme, with classrooms described as uplifting spaces that foster creativity and connection. DP VA teachers balanced structure with freedom to inspire students, ensuring the process remained meaningful. Participants emphasized that VA education should go beyond emotional expression, offering students the structure and freedom to explore their ideas independently while developing their technical skills. By prioritizing a blend of freedom and structure, participants shared how this encourages students to delve deeply into their creative processes, fostering both individuality and growth. Teachers expressed a desire for their students to leave the classroom with a lasting connection to art, not just as a subject, but as a lifelong source of well-being and inspiration.

Strong relationships between teachers and students were also central to this experience, with participants highlighting the importance of mentorship and connection. One participant expressed, “What gives me energy and motivation is these students... I’ve made such good connections with them” (P: 1_6 i3). Through this support, VA classrooms became spaces of trust and encouragement, empowering students to thrive both artistically and personally. These reflections highlight how participants encourage the DP VA classrooms to become spaces of mentorship and support, where students are encouraged to grow not just as artists but as individuals.

Student VA themes

Building on discussions of DP VA as a tool for personal growth, within ‘student VA themes’ participants shared insights into the themes and concepts that often guide their students’ art-making processes. These themes frequently reveal themselves in the students’ final exhibition pieces, forming connections between their personal experiences and creative expressions.

The theme of identity frequently emerged as a central focus in students’ work, with many DP VA teachers recognizing its value as a relatable and authentic starting point, emphasizing how it provides a flexible foundation for students to explore more complex ideas, such as political or cultural themes. From this personal starting point, students often branch out into diverse and creative interpretations, leading to meaningful artistic explorations, turning identity into a platform for exploration and storytelling.

While identity serves as a powerful and authentic focus for students, some teachers expressed concerns about its overuse. One participant remarked, “I try to push them away from just identity because it’s so vague... any artist can do identity or culture” (P: 5_2 i2). However, others noted

that identity resonates deeply with students because it aligns with their developmental stage. As one teacher observed, “They’re teenagers... It’s about them. I think that’s good because it makes it more authentic, and they can relate to it” (P: 5_4 i2). This connection often leads students to create work that feels genuine and personal, even when tackling broader themes like oppression, which they reinterpret through their own adolescent experiences.

In addition to identity, students frequently explored themes such as time, place, and their relationship with the world around them. These themes allowed for a wide range of interpretations, often reflecting the students’ perspectives and creative voices.

Participants discussed the difficulties of guiding students away from generic or overly prescriptive themes, emphasizing the importance of helping them “navigate what is really true to them” and challenging the idea that “being profound makes art better.” This approach supports students in developing authentic, meaningful concepts rooted in their personal experiences and perspectives. By reflecting on their own relationships and values, students created art that resonated with both them and their audiences.

However, participants noted that students are sometimes pressured to pursue controversial or edgy themes to align with grading priorities, which can undermine authenticity and personal meaning. One participant shared an example of a student who wanted to depict the joy and community she experienced during a trip to Africa, only to be told by her teacher that “joy” wouldn’t achieve a high grade. Instead, she was encouraged to focus on “something more controversial” like genital mutilation. The student resisted, saying, “That wasn’t my experience. This wasn’t authentic” (P: 1_3 i2). The participant criticized this approach, highlighting how such pressure forces students into prescribed narratives that may not reflect their genuine experiences. They stressed that art should remain fulfilling and authentic for students, rather than being reduced to a pursuit of conceptual strength at the expense of integrity.

Challenges to sensitive themes by assessment

Participants shared how some students choose to explore deeply sensitive themes within their artwork, often to process personal experiences and emotions. While these explorations can lead to powerful and meaningful pieces, they also present challenges for both students and teachers. For many students, exploring sensitive themes in their artwork becomes a cathartic and healing experience.

However, many participants discussed the challenges posed by the external assessment process, particularly when students’ work delves into sensitive or deeply personal themes. One participant shared how grading such work can feel uncomfortable, as it risks reducing a student’s emotional vulnerability to a numeric score:

One of my students, when I said it was about mental health, that was actually her mental health crises that she had experienced and was going through treatment for, which actually made it really difficult to assess for the internal assessment because her work was so personal. And I understood so deeply how therapeutic it was for her. It was a little bit hard to be like when I was giving the grade at the end, to be like, this isn't... How do you grade someone's therapy? That's difficult. It's not like I was encouraging her to make it her therapy, but it comes... It just comes out. That's what's really important to them. Then how vulnerable to send that to IB to have them come back and be like, your trauma is worth a five. (P: 1_2 i2)

The pressure of having deeply vulnerable pieces graded by external examiners can feel overwhelming for students, and DP VA teachers may find themselves grappling with the ethics of assessing work that is so closely tied to a student's emotional healing.

Relevance of themes

The role of themes in guiding students' artistic processes sparked varied perspectives among participants. Some teachers preferred avoiding strict themes, favouring "passion projects" that allow students to connect personally with their work. Others observed that students often resisted being confined by themes, instead opting for broader, more fluid frameworks. Some participants emphasized the value in themes for creating coherence, particularly for students struggling with conceptual development. Themes provide a foundation, helping students connect their ideas and refine their work, ultimately serving as both a tool for structure and a springboard for exploration. By supporting students in finding authentic connections within their work, participants balanced freedom with coherence, enabling students to navigate their artistic journeys confidently and create meaningful, cohesive exhibitions.

Student autonomy and engagement

Conversations about enhancing 'student autonomy and engagement' emphasized the importance of shifting from teacher-directed instruction to student-led exploration. Participants shared how a gradual transition helps students build foundational skills while fostering the confidence needed to independently navigate the creative process and make personal artistic choices.

Participants shared how they encouraged students to take responsibility for logistical aspects, such as managing materials and arranging printing, as part of their learning experience. By stepping aside, teachers empower students to develop resourcefulness and problem-solving skills, preparing them for future challenges. This approach not only benefits students but also relieves teachers of excessive micromanagement. This emphasis on accountability allows students to take ownership of their successes and failures, fostering a sense of responsibility and independence.

Allowing students to steer their creative journeys was identified as a key factor in fostering engagement and motivation. Participants stressed the importance of enabling students to choose subjects, materials, and themes that resonate with their personal interests. One teacher noted, “I’m really a believer that they must choose works that they themselves... want to pursue. It’s just too long of an endeavour to not be interested” (P: 5_8 i3). Another added, “It’s all about the self and the choice... You enjoy it so much more if you’re working on something that’s come from your own head” (P: 5_8 i3).

Challenges of student autonomy

While fostering autonomy in DP VA has its successes, many participants shared challenges they faced in supporting students with varying skill levels, motivations, and emotional resilience. They reported that less experienced or less confident students often feel overwhelmed when asked to take ownership of their creative processes. Additionally, post-COVID shifts in mental health awareness have further complicated the balance between independence and support. Participants noted an increase in students facing emotional challenges, highlighting the importance of creating flexible learning environments that prioritize both autonomy and support, ensuring that students feel capable of navigating the program’s demands without becoming overwhelmed.

Some participants observed that students’ reliance on external influences, such as social media, has further hindered their ability to think independently. One participant noted, “They want it to be fed to them... what are the Instagram [artists] doing? What is Pinterest doing?... Some of the Internet and social media has made that aspect a bit too easy so that they actually don’t know how to properly research sometimes” (P: 1_4 i3). To counter this, participants shared that they have introduced strategies like exhibition visits and exploring curated art books to encourage deeper critical thinking and more meaningful research. By guiding students toward alternative resources, teachers aim to foster self-driven exploration beyond superficial online inspiration.

Inclusive practices

Through the discussions it was apparent that all participants placed a strong emphasis on fostering ‘inclusive practices’ in DP VA. Many participants shared stories and anecdotes outlining how they felt it was vital to foster a learning environment where all students feel valued, represented, and empowered to express themselves creatively. Participants shared how they actively sought out opportunities to support diverse learners within the school and develop specific strategies for student support. Most participants shared further that student support within DP VA classrooms is a priority among most schools, with most VA classrooms having additional teachers, educational assistants (EA)’s and teaching assistants (TA)’s serving in student support positions.

Participants also shared how they use inclusive practices to encourage students to explore their identities and lived experiences, enriching the classroom with a tapestry of viewpoints and artistic interpretations. Additionally, they help dismantle barriers to participation, such as biases in curriculum content, inaccessible materials, or preconceived notions about who can excel in DP VA.

Euro-centric viewpoints

Discussions surrounding promoting ‘inclusive practices’ frequently highlighted the dominance of Euro-centric perspectives in DP VA, particularly in art history themes. The Western canon, rooted in European and North American traditions, often overshadows non-Western art practices, failing to reflect the diverse cultural identities of international school students. Many participants acknowledged that their own education and training were deeply rooted in Western frameworks, making it challenging to step outside this lens. Addressing this imbalance requires a conscious effort to de-center the Western canon. By integrating global art traditions and encouraging students to explore their cultural identities, teachers aim to create a more equitable and representative learning environment.

Gender imbalance

Another recurring theme when discussing ‘inclusive practices’ was the contrast between the historic male dominance in art history and the low enrolment of male students in current DP VA classrooms. One participant reflected, “My students often comment on how weird it is that... old artists from art history are almost all men” (P: 5_11 i2). In response, participants shared how they have made conscious efforts to ensure gender balance in their curriculum. Despite these efforts, participants observed that male students are underrepresented in DP VA questioning whether teaching styles or the predominance of female art teachers might influence male enrolment, though others suggested societal changes may play a more significant role.

Educational and institutional challenges

The second supplementary theme discusses ‘educational and institutional challenges’ which encompasses issues related to discussions within the broader educational spectrum: resource constraints, and technological access limitations, scheduling, space and time restrictions. Additionally, it addresses administrative hurdles, support inequities between subjects, and professional isolation, highlighting how these factors collectively affect the teaching, assessment, and appreciation of the DP VA programme in schools. Codes that emerged from discussions about ‘educational and institutional challenges’ were ‘school resources and budget’, ‘studio access time’, ‘scheduling and space complexities’ and ‘VA program marginalization’.

Table 14. Codes identified within ‘educational and institutional challenges’

Codes	Coding Excerpts
School resources and budgeting	33

Studio access time	29
Scheduling and space complexities	19
VA program marginalization	18

Note: Codes identified within ‘educational and institutional challenges’ revealed through coding of combined in-depth interviews

School resources and budgets

Resources

Due to the nature of international schools, many participants shared stories about navigating the challenges of sourcing art materials in various locations. One participant currently teaching in an international school in Bahrain described the difficulties of ensuring consistent access to supplies: “It’s quite challenging getting the materials here... When you’re working internationally, you’ve often got one chance to order in the school year...” (P: 1_5 i1). This unpredictability was commonly discussed by participants leading some teachers to overstock on essential items, knowing they might not have another opportunity to replenish supplies for months.

Participants also discussed inequitable access to adequate digital art tools and software. One participant expressed frustration with their school’s inability to provide professional-grade resources: “I gave up applying for the Creative Cloud for my students... it was a battle I realized I wasn’t going to win” (P: 1_6 i2), creating gaps in access and training left some teachers feeling unprepared to fully support students in mastering modern digital tools, further emphasizing inequities in DP VA education across different schools.

Budget

For most participants, their DP VA department budgets were described as ranging from “adequate” to “generous,” with some even calling them “healthy,” “huge,” “really good,” or “infinite.” However, one participant humorously remarked that their “infinite” budget could still be “slashed whenever the accountant decides I have spent too much money” (P: 1_2 i2).

While many participants expressed satisfaction, some noted that planning was required for larger or more specialized purchases. One teacher explained that while smaller items like paint or canvases were easy to acquire quickly, long-term investments, such as a kiln or a press, required more time and negotiation.

In some instances, participants noted that budget allocations were not explicitly communicated, yet they rarely faced restrictions when ordering materials. One participant shared, “I have never been given a budget for art supplies. I just go on and I order whatever I like... Bear in mind that I only received my art supplies for this academic year about two weeks ago because we had a change in ownership and somebody didn’t pay” (P: 1_3 i2). While this flexibility was

appreciated, delays caused by administrative changes or logistical challenges occasionally disrupted students' projects.

Ultimately, having a well-supported budget not only ensured the smooth logistical functioning of DP VA programs but also provided teachers with confidence in their ability to meet students' needs. Reliable access to resources empowered participants to guide students in exploring their creative visions without financial limitations. Whether it involved providing specialized materials, enabling experimentation with new techniques, or ensuring students had the necessary tools, a strong budget allowed both teachers and students to thrive as one participant emphasized, "It's worth it because it's about giving the students the materials to create the best work they can" (P: 1_2 i2).

Team delegation

Many participants noted a range of support staff available, including EA's or TA's who played a vital role in student support and the logistical aspects of art education. These assistants were often responsible for tasks such as preparing materials, setting up and cleaning art spaces, and assisting with the preparation of artworks and exhibition spaces. Additionally, several participants highlighted the availability of technicians within the school or department. These technicians provided essential support for technical tasks, such as moving display boards, setting up lighting and sound, and hanging artworks during exhibitions.

However, challenges arose when assistants lacked an understanding of the specific demands and time constraints of art education. Effective communication and clear alignment on priorities were identified as critical for fostering successful collaboration between teachers and assistants. The complexity of the TA's role was underscored by one participant who remarked, "It's challenging to find someone who can wear all the hats required for this role... they need to manage orders, support students, and understand the demands of the program" (P: 1_5 i2). This highlights the importance of selecting and training support staff who can adapt to the multifaceted requirements of DP VA, ensuring a cohesive and productive team dynamic

Studio access time

A recurring challenge discussed by participants was the limited class time allocated for DP VA, which many felt was insufficient to meet the course's rigorous expectations. The issue of limited studio time was further compounded by scheduling practices in some international schools, where teachers often had to teach multiple grade levels or course types simultaneously. For instance, some participants managed HL and SL students, as well as DP1 and DP2 cohorts, within the same class. In some cases, participants were also responsible for teaching a full timetable beyond DP VA, including lower-grade classes or even K-12, leaving little room for focused attention on DP VA.

The issue of insufficient time was further exacerbated in some schools where the hours allocated for DP VA fell below the recommended IB minimum. This lack of compliance not only hindered students' ability to meet the program's demands but also placed additional pressure on teachers to compensate for the lost time.

Participants strongly advocated for longer blocks of uninterrupted time, emphasizing that art requires extended periods for deep engagement. One participant passionately remarked, "I would just make a plea for schools to give art more time... It's not the IB, it's schools. It's school scheduling... because this one has to teach a middle school class at that time, and this one teaches something else. So, I wonder who's behind the decision-making here" (P: 5_10 i3).

After-hours studio access

To address these time constraints, participants created opportunities for students to access the studio outside of regular class hours. Many offered access during lunch breaks, after school, weekends, and even holidays. One participant explained, "Students often stay during lunchtimes or recesses because they enjoy the subject and want to continue working" (P: 1_4 i3). Another shared their after-school practice: "I offer after-school support sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays... I'm here until 5 p.m. anyway, so students can come for extra help or to work on their projects" (P: 5_2 i2).

Weekend studio sessions were another common strategy, with some participants incorporating Saturday sessions into their DP VA schedules. Others opened the studio on a more flexible basis during peak times, as one participant noted:

I often open the studio on Saturdays... I'm not teaching, but the space is available for students to work on their own projects.. This year, I'm here every weekend because the students are so motivated and driven... if they give 100%, I'll give 200% back (P: 5_1 i3).

Holiday access was also highlighted as critical for supporting students during high-pressure periods. One participant shared, "One week of the holidays, we take turns to open up the studios... So maybe starting at 9 or 10 a.m. and going until 3 or 4 p.m." (P: 1_4 i3). However, this effort often went unrecognized, as participants revealed that they received no additional compensation for opening studios during holidays. One participant explained:

That is out of the generosity of our hearts... Well, yes and no, because, like, [the school administration] want us to get marks. To get those marks, I need studio time (P: 1_4 i3).

Scheduling and space complexities

In discussions surrounding ‘scheduling and space complexities’ it is noteworthy that among all the participants interviewed, no two participants had the same schedule in terms of class time, grades taught, or VA curricula. This resulted in sixteen distinct variations of VA teaching within a relatively small sample of DP VA participants. This diversity underscores the challenges of establishing a standardized approach to teaching VA in international schools and highlights the difficulties DP VA participants face when moving between schools or attempting to collaborate effectively with colleagues.

A major focus of the discussions centered on the differences in responsibilities and expectations across grade levels. Participants noted that teaching younger grades often involves instructor-led lessons, while upper-level classes require more specialized support as students work independently. One participant described the contrast:

My colleague teaches grades nine and ten, and her day seems busier because she’s doing more units and teacher-directed skills. Meanwhile, DP VA students are more independent, but I’m still in the studio until 5:00 p.m. most nights and on Saturdays to help them (P: 5_11 i3).

While teaching younger students often came with enthusiastic feedback, transitioning to the more high-stakes environment of diploma-level instruction required a different mindset and approach. The combination of teaching across multiple grades and managing the intensive demands of DP VA often left participants feeling overburdened. Teachers frequently described the extensive preparation required to support students’ individual needs, particularly in the context of DP VA exhibitions and submissions. One participant described the challenges of teaching DP VA as:

It’s not just running a class, it’s running nine exhibitions for nine students, each working in different mediums, with different artists, and completely different projects. (P 1_4 i3)

This level of personalization demands significant time and effort, often beyond what schools anticipated. Many participants expressed a deep commitment to their students, offering additional studio hours and guidance at the expense of their own time.

VA program marginalization

Participants frequently expressed concerns about the marginalization of DP VA compared to core academic subjects on an institutional level. Inequities in institutional support were also highlighted, with participants noting how sports and extracurricular activities often receive more priority than art-related opportunities. One participant observed: “If there’s a football match, students are excused from art class without question but taking them to see an art exhibition is

often relegated to weekends or after school” (P: 5_6 i3). This disparity affects teacher and student morale, though some participants noted a silver lining in smaller, more passionate VA classes.

Participants also discussed how the contributions of DP VA programs were often leveraged for school marketing purposes, with exhibitions and creative achievements prominently showcased to attract prospective families and enhance the school’s public image. Participants observed how school marketing efforts often ramp up during DP VA exhibitions, with promotional materials and videos showcasing student accomplishments. While these initiatives are primarily aimed at maintaining the school’s polished public image, they also elevate the visibility of the arts within the school community and beyond.

Despite the performative nature of such efforts, participants acknowledged the positive impact of increased visibility for VA programs. Exhibitions inspired younger students and generated interest in the arts, while administrative support was identified as a critical factor in raising the profile of VA within schools. As one participant explained:

The exhibition...it’s one of the ways that younger students can see, ‘Oh, this is IB Art. That looks quite cool. I’m going to find out more about it.’ So, I feel like it’s internal advertising as well to get [younger VA students] thinking about it (P: 5_7 i2).

Examples of strategic initiatives, such as prominent exhibition spaces, demonstrated how leadership advocacy can transform perceptions of the arts, fostering enrolment growth and a culture that values creativity as an essential component of education.

DP VA professional growth

Discussions within the third supplementary theme ‘DP VA professional growth’ encapsulate the multifaceted experiences and challenges for teachers within the DP VA around their evolving professional journey of educators, the significance of continuous professional development, collaboration, and the delicate balance between professional duties and personal fulfilment in art. Key discussions within ‘DP VA Professional Growth’ centred on: ‘career evolution’, ‘DP VA training and examining experience’, ‘personal artistic practice’ and ‘work-life balance’.

Table 15. Codes identified within ‘DP VA professional growth’

Codes	Coding Excerpts
Career evolution	33
DP VA training and examining experience	29
Personal artistic practice	16
Work-life balance	4

Note: Codes identified within ‘DP VA professional growth’ revealed through coding of combined in-depth interviews

Career evolution

Discussions within the ‘career evolution’ of the participants revealed the varied paths and changing priorities of the DP VA teachers as they reflect on their professional trajectories. Participants discussed their transitions from artistic or non-teaching roles to becoming educators, the influence of formal education training, and the structure of teaching certification programs., highlighting the complexities of pursuing career advancement, maintaining a passion for teaching, and nurturing personal creativity. Through these reflections, educators highlighted how their experiences and evolving priorities have shaped their professional identities and practices.

Participants expressed a deep passion for art and teaching as their primary motivation for becoming VA teachers, often inspired by influential VA teachers from their own formative years. These early role models demonstrated the transformative impact educators can have in fostering creativity and confidence, driving participants to pursue careers in art education. Formal education, training, and certification were highlighted as critical in shaping teaching practices and professional growth. One participant noted how their education as a student provided them with insights into guiding students through similar milestones, such as preparing exhibitions or writing extended essays: “Every time you study, you learn different ways of being a student... That helps when you’re directing a student writing an extended essay or putting together an exhibition” (P: 5_10 i2).

Teacher training programs and advanced degrees provided participants with technical knowledge, pedagogical tools, and classroom management strategies, equipping them to balance the creative and academic demands of the DP VA program. Formal education also fostered adaptability and innovation, as exposure to diverse teaching styles and interdisciplinary approaches inspired reflective and dynamic practices in the classroom.

While formal education provided foundational frameworks for teaching, participants emphasized that their artistic skills were largely self-developed through professional development, personal curiosity, and teaching experiences. This blend of academic training and lifelong learning allowed educators to refine their skills and remain responsive to the evolving needs of their students.

In addition to their teaching roles, participants shared aspirations for personal artistic growth, with some expressing a desire to explore their own creative practice more deeply, such as pursuing advanced degrees in fine arts. These aspirations reflect the dynamic balance between personal artistry, professional development, and the commitment to inspiring the next generation

of artists. By navigating these priorities, educators demonstrated a continuous engagement with the intersection of art and education, finding meaning and fulfilment in their evolving careers.

DP VA training and examining experience

Participants highlighted the importance of professional development opportunities, including IB-provided workshops, examining experience, and teacher collaboration, in navigating the challenges of teaching DP VA. IB workshops, offered in both online and face-to-face formats, were widely regarded as essential for understanding the DP VA curriculum and assessment standards. While face-to-face workshops were valued for networking and direct engagement, online workshops provided flexibility. However, participants noted inconsistencies in the quality and relevance of training, particularly with exemplars and concrete takeaways.

Examining student work was seen as a highly impactful form of professional development, offering educators insights into IB assessment standards and inspiring new teaching approaches. Despite challenges such as time constraints and occasional self-doubt, examining provided exposure to global student work, fostering innovation and growth in teaching practices.

Teacher collaboration emerged as a cornerstone of professional growth, particularly for DP VA educators who often work in isolation. Networking, resource sharing, and mentorship were identified as critical tools for navigating the complexities of the DP VA program. Collaborative grading and localized teacher networks provided opportunities for dialogue, consistent standards, and shared solutions. Mentorship from experienced teachers and access to structured resource-sharing platforms further supported educators in managing workloads and refining their teaching. Participants also praised workshops led by external experts, such as Heather McReynolds and her In-Thinking Visual Arts platform, for offering practical guidance and fostering professional connections.

Personal artistic practice

Within discussions of ‘personal artistic practices’ all participants shared that they had a personal artist practice, exploring a mixture of medium noted as: Pottery/Ceramics(2) , Painting(7), Illustration(4) Digital Media(2) , Photography and Lens based(3), Video(2) , Craft(1), Printmaking(3), Installation(2) , Mixed Media(2) , and Slam Poetry(1).

Participants emphasized that their love for art and personal creative practices were key motivations for becoming DP VA teachers. Their artistic identity shaped their teaching approaches, often drawing from experiential art-making rather than formal pedagogical training. However, balancing teaching responsibilities with maintaining an active art practice proved challenging due to time constraints and the demanding workload of DP VA teaching, including documentation and planning.

Despite these challenges, many participants shared that they found ways to stay connected to their creativity, often through smaller-scale, personal art projects. Participants also highlighted the importance of modelling their artistic practice in the classroom to inspire students and establish credibility. By sharing their work, demonstrating techniques, and even participating in art activities alongside students, teachers fostered a sense of shared exploration and mutual respect.

Work-life balance

A recurring theme in the discussions was the physical and mental exhaustion experienced by DP VA teachers due to the multifaceted nature of their roles. One participant described feeling “like a lemon being squeezed out of every last drop,” (P 1_6 i3) reflecting the cumulative toll of managing teaching responsibilities alongside other demands.

Participants also expressed frustration with the lack of recognition for the time required to fulfil these added tasks. One participant remarked, “There’s no understanding of how much time is needed to make things... whether it’s for exhibitions or other projects.” (P 5_6 i2) This lack of awareness often led to unrealistic expectations, with educators feeling pressured to meet demands that extended well beyond their regular teaching duties. Another shared, “I’m constantly interrupted by people asking for help with random projects... it’s hard to focus when you’re being pulled in so many directions.” (P 5_8 i2)

International school dynamics

As explored in Chapter 2, international schools are private institutions that often cater to Western-centric education frameworks, serving expatriate communities as well as affluent local populations in the host country. These schools are shaped by a globalized outlook but operate within localized cultural contexts, creating a blend of influences that inform the teaching and learning process. Within this framework, DP VA teachers must navigate a range of dynamics, including cultural and language barriers, feelings of isolation, and the complexities of working with diverse and multifaceted student populations. Discussions that were implicitly related to the supplementary theme of ‘international school dynamics’ were: ‘cultural navigation’, ‘professional isolation’, and ‘achievement expectations’.

Table 16. Codes identified within ‘international school dynamics’

Codes	Coding Excerpts
Cultural navigation	43
Professional isolation	11
Achievement expectations	11
Portfolio development	

Note: Codes identified within ‘international school dynamics’ revealed through coding of combined in-depth interviews

Cultural navigation

Culture: Art

Participants identified a significant challenge in bridging the cultural gaps that arise from the diverse backgrounds of students, the international locations of schools, and the often Western-centric training of many educators. Participants emphasized the need to adapt teaching practices to reflect cultural diversity, moving beyond Eurocentric approaches to incorporate local and regional art, fostering deeper connections for students. These elements create tension in designing a curriculum that resonates with students while meeting the expectations of programs like the IB. One participant explained this challenge:

.. in international schools, we are not from the country that we're teaching in. The country that we're teaching in has a different culture like the majority of teachers. But then also the art history, what art history are you going to explore with your students? Because [I'm] in China, and that's a very different art history. Would that get them the same results as a more Eurocentric art history focus within the IB? (P: 5_4 i1)

Participants shared how they intentionally tried to move towards inclusive curricula by integrating artists and traditions from the local context and underrepresented groups, such as female and non-Western artists. This approach motivated students by allowing them to see their own cultural heritage reflected in the curriculum. For example, one participant teaching in Bahrain shared how they transitioned from using British-centric art references to introducing Middle Eastern artists, which significantly improved student engagement:

I worked in London for 14 years, and I was getting the students to look at Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth... very British-oriented artists. Then when I came here, I rolled out a Barbara Hepworth unit and the kids looked at it, and they just couldn't relate to it... You could just tell from their body language that they couldn't connect. That was a big learning curve for me. What I did from that moment on was just to make sure that the curriculum was more international-oriented and a curriculum that the students could relate to. I made sure they were looking at artists from Bahrain, but also from the Middle East. Because by doing that, it motivates them and they're thinking, 'Oh, wow, that's a brilliant artist from Jordan and my mom's from Jordan,' and they suddenly can connect more to that (P: 1-5 i1).

Participants also shared how they explored ways to encourage intercultural understanding while respecting students' values, particularly in culturally conservative settings. They guided students to critically engage with challenging artworks while maintaining personal boundaries, enabling them to navigate differing perspectives without compromising their beliefs.

Representation and identity were central themes, with educators fostering discussions about whose voices are amplified in art history and encouraging students to explore their cultural identities. Students investigated artists from their countries of origin or reflected on dual cultural identities, enriching both their personal and creative development. Another participant also teaching in China shared how a student explored their dual identity in their exhibition:

...his exhibition is about finding his identity and through the idea of being too Chinese to be Western and too Western to be Chinese, because he's been going to this international school for the last 15 years....and his dad's family is very traditional Chinese. But he feels a little bit like he doesn't fit in either culture, specifically...." (P: 5_5 i2)

These efforts demonstrated how art education in diverse international settings can serve as a powerful tool for exploring identity, representation, and global perspectives.

Culture: Language

Language barriers presented notable challenges within the DP VA program in international schools, where students often come from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. One participant teaching in Geneva described the multicultural environment of their school, emphasizing the diversity of languages and nationalities represented:

I work at an international school where over 100 mother tongue languages are spoken. I have students from Malawi, Australia, and Northern Canada. It's like the UN because Geneva is where the UN is, so it's super global (P: 5_7 i2).

While this diversity enriches the learning environment, the reliance on English as the primary medium of instruction can create challenges, particularly for students who speak English as a second or third language. These language barriers often hinder students' ability to fully engage with the theoretical and reflective components of the DP VA curriculum.

Professional isolation

A recurring theme among participants was the sense of 'professional isolation' experienced by DP VA teachers in international schools, where often only one VA teacher is employed. This solitude is further intensified by the challenges of adapting to a foreign country, including adjusting to a new culture, language, and school environment. One participant described this "double isolation":

specifically in international, a lot of... ..not only are you alone teaching art, you're also in a country that is not your home country. It's like a double isolation where you're trying to figure out a new culture, perhaps a new language, a new school, and then teaching... Being the only art teacher (P: 1_5 i1).

Many participants expressed a strong desire for more collaborative environments and professional dialogue. For educators working in standalone roles, building support networks was seen as essential to overcoming isolation. Participants also shared instances of teachers reaching out for support, even across international borders.

The absence of collaboration and recognition often contributed to feelings of under-appreciation among VA educators. One participant reflected on this lack of acknowledgment:

I feel the most under-appreciated at this job. It's not that I'm not appreciated, it's just that it isn't expressed. There's a silence to it (P: 1_3 i3).

Without feedback or acknowledgment, many educators felt disconnected and overlooked, which further exacerbated their sense of professional isolation. Overall, participants underscored the critical need for stronger networks, professional dialogue, and recognition to support VA teachers, particularly those working in highly isolated roles.

Achievement expectations

A prominent theme in discussions about international schools was the composition of their affluent student populations, often referred to as “the privileged 1%.” Participants highlighted challenges related to student entitlement and uneven work ethic, with some students showing a disconnect between their high expectations and the effort they put into their studies. Factors such as a “nanny culture,” where responsibilities are often managed by others, were seen as contributing to students’ lack of accountability and work ethic. This entitlement was particularly evident when students and parents pursued prestigious scholarships, despite the students’ lack of consistent effort, creating additional strain on educators trying to manage unrealistic expectations.

The culture of achievement in international schools added further pressure for both students and teachers. Academic success was frequently celebrated and emphasized, reinforcing high expectations. One participant shared how their international school frequently celebrate academic success, reinforcing these expectations:

..we have about seven meetings at the beginning of the year where we go over who were the top performers last year and what our average score was. And they say that over and over and over and over and over, drilled in your head. So, I don't know if that's cultural, but it's something to celebrate when [students] are doing so well (P: 5_6 i2)

For teachers, this created a demanding environment where they felt obligated to maintain these high standards, especially in competitive programs. Students in DP VA faced immense pressure

to excel in developing portfolios and achieving top grades, as many aspired to gain admission to prestigious institutions.

Participants noted that their students often aim high, regularly gaining acceptances to institutions such as the Royal College of Art (RCA), University of the Arts London (UAL), University College London (UCL), Edinburgh College of Art (ECA), New York University (NYU) and Tisch School of the Arts, Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Parsons School of Design, California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), University of Southern California (USC), Berkeley, Columbia University, University of Toronto (U of T), University of British Columbia (UBC), Emily Carr University of Art + Design, and Sheridan College's Animation Program.

This high-pressure environment required educators to balance supporting their students' ambitions while addressing challenges tied to entitlement, uneven engagement, and the intense focus on academic and artistic achievement.

Student portfolio development

With acceptance to prestigious universities being prioritized within international schools, many discussions within 'achievement expectations' surrounded challenges DP VA teachers face in guiding students to create authentic and meaningful portfolios for university applications. Key concerns included academic integrity, student misconceptions about the portfolio process, and external pressures such as cultural practices and the commercialization of portfolio preparation. Many students viewed their portfolios as separate from DP VA classroom work, often relying on external tutors or portfolio companies, which raised concerns about authenticity and undermined the integration of their artistic journey with their classwork.

To address these challenges, participants emphasized the importance of helping students see their classwork as integral to their portfolios, though they noted that much of the earlier work often requires refinement over time. Strategies such as formative assessments, mock exhibitions, and peer feedback were implemented to emphasize the creative process and discourage shortcuts or reliance on external support. Mini exhibitions, in particular, allowed students to showcase their work and receive constructive feedback, reinforcing the value of their artistic journey.

Participants also worked to bridge the gap between classroom learning and post-secondary expectations. Inviting university representatives to review portfolios and encouraging participation in summer programs or workshops provided students with insights into what universities are looking for and exposure to professional artistic environments. These initiatives helped students better understand how to present their work while fostering their development as authentic and reflective artists.

Summary of implicit conceptualizations of quality: Supplementary themes

Discussions for participants surrounding ‘holistic art education practice’, ‘educational and institutional challenges’, ‘professional growth’, ‘international school dynamics’ were rich and provided further in-depth views into the experiences of the DP VA teachers within international schools further impacting their conceptualization and realization of quality within teaching.

The holistic approach within the DP VA program emphasizes personal growth, autonomy, and mindful teaching practices, fostering a student-centered environment where learners can explore their creative potential, build confidence, and grow as resilient, self-aware individuals. However, participants identified significant educational and institutional challenges, including the marginalization of VA programs, inequitable resource allocation, and logistical constraints, all of which impact teaching, assessment, and the program’s broader appreciation. Professional growth for DP VA teachers is driven by evolving career pathways, artistic practice, and a commitment to inspiring students, though it is often balanced against work-life pressures and systemic challenges. Additionally, the dynamics of international school education highlight the complexities of teaching in culturally diverse and resource-variable settings, where DP VA teachers must navigate cultural differences, professional isolation, and systemic disparities to create inclusive and globally relevant learning environments that prepare students to engage thoughtfully with a globalized and culturally complex world.

Chapter 12 : Discussion of Findings

Within this chapter, I synthesize the findings from Phase 3: in-depth interviews considering both explicit definitions of quality and the factors that are contributors of or impacts to its realization. Furthermore, I critically analyze how the influence of identified impacts constrains the ideological conceptualizations of quality teaching creating a current realization of quality within DP VA teaching that shifts the focus of DP VA teachers towards measurable success often at the expense of authentic experimentation, creative risk-taking, and innovative engagement with artistic processes.

Discussion of Phase 3: in-depth interview findings

The findings from the interviews reveal a distinct tension between how DP VA teachers define and strive to achieve quality, the factors that are contributors of quality and those that impact their ability to realize quality in practice.

In response to the first research question specific to the in-depth interviews; how do DP VA teachers in international schools conceive of quality, participants described quality in DP VA teaching as ‘fostering student autonomy’, ‘developing critical thinking’, and ‘consideration of technical skills’. A recurring theme in these discussions was the intrinsic connection between quality teaching and meaningful student learning experiences. Participants emphasized that quality teaching involves designing rigorous yet flexible activities that challenge students’ abilities while allowing them the freedom to explore their own interests and ideas.

Central to this vision of quality is an emphasis on process and reflection, ensuring DP VA students grow holistically as artists, thinkers, and individuals. Quality teaching within DP VA, according to participants, is not solely about the production of polished final artworks or the achievement of high assessment scores. Instead, it is deeply rooted in cultivating critical thinking, self-reflection, and the capacity to navigate the iterative and often non-linear process of art-making. Interestingly, while technical skill development was acknowledged, participants stressed that it must be balanced with conceptual depth and personal exploration, with limited emphasis placed on final achievement scores in this context.

For the second research question specific to the in-depth interviews; what are contributors of and impacts to quality in regards to teaching within the DP VA program in international schools, a clear tension emerged between the factors that are contributors of quality teaching and those that create impacts to realizing it. This tension reflects the dual nature of DP VA teachers’ roles: they are both facilitators of a highly structured curriculum and advocates for a subject often marginalized within the broader school context.

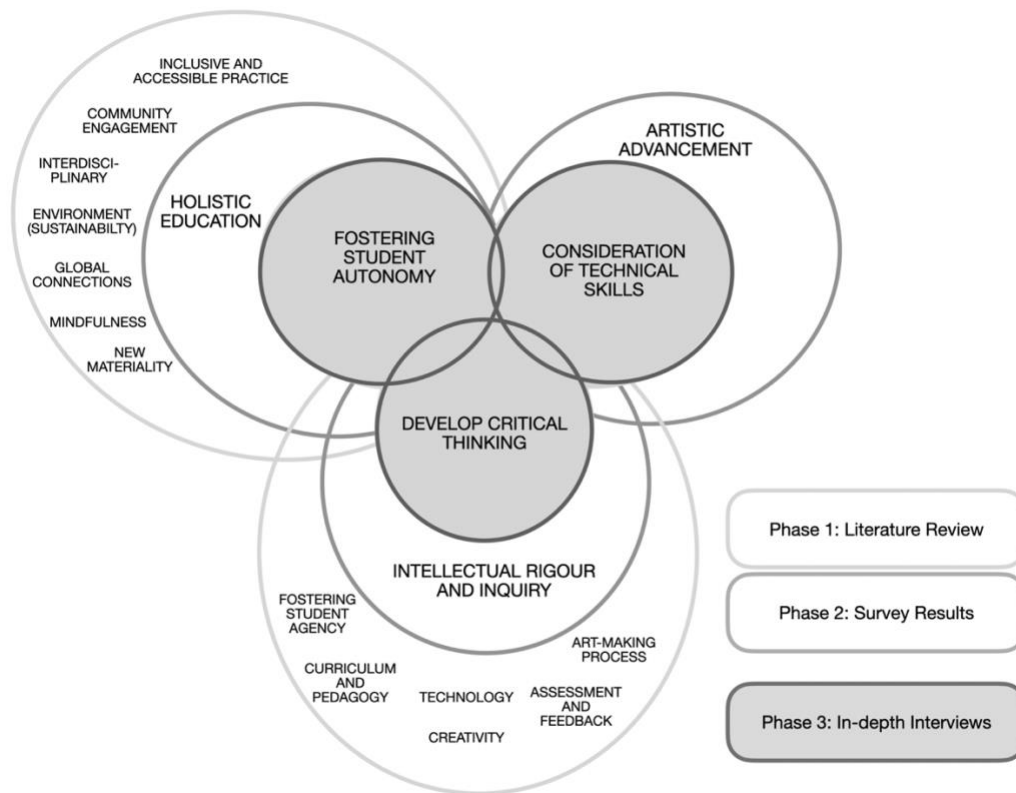
The coded responses from the interviews suggest that contributors of quality teaching in DP VA are grounded in pragmatic and pedagogical elements with key contributions coming in from

areas of ‘DP VA curriculum dynamics’, ‘holistic art education practices’ and ‘school resources and budgeting’ (from discussions of ‘educational and institutional challenges’). In contrast, the impacts to quality teaching within DP VA highlight a range of external and systemic challenges such as ‘management complexities’, ‘educational and institutional challenges’, ‘international school dynamics’ and ‘assessment complexities’.

Explicit conceptions of quality

When considering all three phases of the study, the explicit discussions of quality in teaching DP VA fall into three overarching strands: ‘fostering student autonomy’, ‘develop critical thinking’ and ‘consideration of technical skills’ as shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Visual compilation of explicit conceptions of quality within teaching of DP VA



Note: Graphic created with Keynote using data collected from combined responses from Literature Review, Survey and In-depth Interviews, Amy Atkinson, 2025

The strand, ‘develop critical thinking’, emerged as a key aspect of quality teaching in DP VA. In the in-depth interviews, participants emphasized fostering students’ critical thinking and reflective skills, guiding them through the art-making process, and scaffolding learning experiences with creative yet challenging activities that align with DP VA components. This strand aligns closely with themes identified in preliminary studies with Phase 2: survey

responses highlighting ‘intellectual rigour and inquiry’, emphasizing research, critical thinking, and academic rigour as central to quality teaching and Phase 1: literature review emphasizing ‘fostering student agency’, ‘curriculum and pedagogy’, ‘technology’, ‘creativity’, ‘assessment and feedback’ and the ‘art-making process’

The strand, ‘fostering student autonomy’, centers on encouraging independent exploration, fostering connections through knowledge of art, and providing individual guidance to students. This strand aligns with themes identified in the preliminary studies with Phase 2: survey responses discussing ‘holistic education’, emphasizing student support systems and comprehensive art education and Phase 1: literature review encouraging ‘inclusive and accessible practices’, ‘community engagement’, ‘interdisciplinary’, environment (sustainability), ‘global connections’, ‘mindfulness’, and ‘new materiality’.

The strand, ‘consideration of technical skills’, focuses on supporting students’ technical skill development, encouraging conceptual exploration, and helping students achieve ambitious and meaningful outcomes. This strand further aligns with themes identified in the preliminary studies with Phase 2: survey responses discussing ‘artistic advancement’, which includes professional preparation and technical skill-building. This strand reflects the pragmatic reality of preparing students for higher education in VA, as well as the importance of technical proficiency. This strand was only marginally represented in Phase 1: literature review, with a few discussions within ‘art-making process’ of skills and techniques found in the AD magazine. The general implication for quality in art education within the literature review was discussed as being achieved through inquiry-based learning and critical analysis rather than through a focus on technical skill development.

Additionally, ‘advocacy for art education’ was noted as a prominent theme within Phase 1: literature review but was not discussed within Phase 2: survey or Phase 3: in-depth interviews in relation to explicit discussions of quality within DP VA teaching.

These three strands are highly relevant to the study as they provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how DP VA teachers conceive of and implement quality in their practice. The alignment (and misalignment) between the findings across the study is particularly significant. The connections between Phase 1 and 2 of the preliminary studies and Phase 3 within ‘develop critical thinking’ and ‘fostering student autonomy’ highlight how broader art education theories can inform and support DP VA teaching. However, the lack of alignment between Phase 1 and 2 of the preliminary studies and Phase 3 within the strand of ‘consideration of technical skills’ raises critical questions about the relevance of theoretical discourses to the practical needs of DP VA teachers, underscoring the challenges faced by DP VA teachers, who strive to balance the academic and artistic rigour demanded by the IB framework along with the achievement expectations of international schools.

For DP VA teachers, this analysis highlights the need to navigate a delicate balance between theoretical and practical approaches to art education. It also suggests a need for further research and collaboration to bridge these gaps, ensuring that both academic literature and teaching practices are aligned with the realities of DP VA classrooms. For the broader field of art education, these findings emphasize the importance of integrating technical skill development with conceptual exploration to better support the diverse and evolving needs of DP VA teachers.

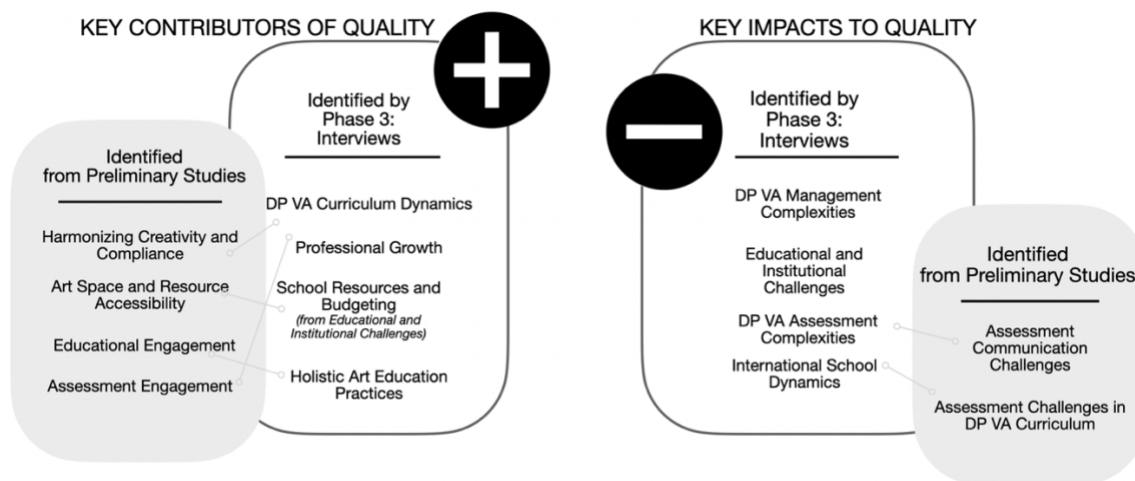
Contributors of and impacts to quality

In terms of contributors of quality, participants in Phase 3: in-depth interviews discussed a variety of factors within the theme of ‘DP VA curriculum dynamics’, which aligns closely with Phase 2: survey responses about ‘harmonizing creativity and compliance’ and ‘assessment engagement’ as shown in Figure 15. Discussions from the interviews around ‘school resources and budgeting’ allocation align with survey responses emphasizing ‘art space and resource accessibility’. Similarly, in-depth interview discussions about ‘holistic art education practices’ align with survey responses highlighting the importance of ‘educational engagement’, further underscoring the shared recognition of the need for comprehensive and student-centered teaching approaches.

A particularly strong alignment was evident between Phase 3: in-depth interview discussions on ‘DP VA assessment complexities’ and Phase 2: survey responses concerning ‘assessment communication challenges’ and broader ‘assessment challenges within the DP VA curriculum’. Both of these phases of the study highlighted the ongoing struggles teachers face with unclear assessment criteria, grading inconsistencies, and the pressures of aligning their teaching practices with the rigid requirements of the IB framework.

The observed alignments between the preliminary studies and Phase 3: in-depth interview findings are highly relevant to the study as they reinforce the validity and consistency of the themes identified across the two data collection methods. This triangulation of data strengthens the argument that certain contributors and impacts, such as curriculum dynamics, resource accessibility, and assessment complexities, are universally recognized by DP VA teachers as critical factors affecting the quality of their teaching. Moreover, the alignments highlight the systemic nature of the challenges faced by DP VA teachers. For example, the shared emphasis on assessment challenges underscores the need for clearer communication and more consistent frameworks in IB assessments. This finding suggests that addressing assessment-related issues could have a significant and positive impact on quality teaching within the DP VA program.

Figure 15. Visual compilation of contributors of and impacts to quality revealed through the study.



Note: Graphic created with Keynote using data collected from combined responses from Literature Review, Survey and In-depth Interviews, Amy Atkinson, 2025

The relevance of these findings, as shown in Figure 15, provide actionable insights for stakeholders such as school administrators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. For instance, the alignment of resource accessibility points to the pressing need for international schools to invest in adequate art spaces and materials, which are foundational to fostering creativity and meeting program requirements. Similarly, the emphasis on ‘DP VA curriculum dynamics’ and ‘holistic art education’ practices reveals the importance of professional development opportunities that equip DP VA teachers to balance the dual demands of creativity and compliance.

Current realization of quality within DP VA teaching

Throughout the study, I observed that when participants articulated their conceptualizations of quality, they described how they envisioned it being realized in the teaching of DP VA. These discussions tended to adopt an ideological focus, emphasizing what DP VA teaching ‘should be’ and the transformative possibilities of what they ‘could create’ or ‘could achieve.’ Through the informal and nuanced discussion within Phase 3:in-depth interviews, a secondary narrative emerged which revealed a significant disjunction between the aspirational conceptualizations of quality teaching in DP VA and the realities shaped by systemic constraints as shown in Figure 16.

Specifically, the impacts to quality identified in the interviews centered around ‘DP VA assessment complexities’, combined with the overarching emphasis on academic achievement and university placement as discussed within ‘international school dynamics’ were found to contribute to a more constrained and pragmatic realization of how quality is currently

conceptualized in the teaching of DP VA. Participants disclosed that, within the current execution of the DP VA course, the impacts discussed above over-rode the ideological conceptualizations of quality and created a focus within the DP VA classrooms that is narrowly defined by aims to score highly in the external assessments. Therefore, the realization of quality within DP VA teaching is predominantly measured by how effectively teachers can create opportunities for their students to achieve high scores.

To that end, all participants shared common concerns regarding the significant time demands required to effectively teach the DP VA course, which far exceeded the hours allotted by their schools in alignment with the IB's recommended instructional hours (IBO, 2019). Participants consistently expressed that to effectively support their students' progress, they extended their teaching beyond scheduled class hours, frequently offering additional sessions during lunch breaks and after school throughout the academic year. This was particularly evident during DP2, when participants reported utilizing weekends, most commonly Saturdays, to provide extended studio time for their students. Furthermore, many participants expressed that they organized and supervised access to studio spaces during school holidays, recognizing the importance of uninterrupted time for students to refine their work. These extra sessions, which were neither formally scheduled nor compensated by the schools, significantly increased participants' teaching hours. These unwritten expectations of additional time and effort emerged as a recurring theme in both the survey responses and in-depth interviews, particularly within the categories of 'DP VA management complexities,' and supplementary themes of 'professional growth,' and 'educational and institutional art challenges' highlight substantial personal and professional expectations of DP VA teachers.

As discussed within 'DP VA assessment complexities', due to inconsistencies in assessment criteria and the lack of clear, actionable feedback from examiners, DP VA teachers reported commonly focusing on what had historically performed well in their earlier assessed components to plan their curriculum and guide students in their art-making and component executions. This approach has led to a culture of risk aversion among DP VA teachers and students alike as student's are encouraged to rely on safe mediums; those they are confident will demonstrate technical mastery, such as 2D work, illustration, and painting. These safer choices are perceived as more likely to align with the assessment criteria and ensure favourable outcomes.

Conversely, more experimental or process-driven approaches, such as working with fired clay, installation art, or other exploratory mediums, are often discouraged or avoided by students entirely. Participants noted that these mediums are seen as unpredictable, with outcomes that may not meet the assessment standards or risk being compromised by technical issues, such as cracking in the kiln or structural instability in installations.

Within 'component focus' discussions, DP VA teachers discussed how they encouraged their students to showcase recognizable globally understood technical skills, which often results in an

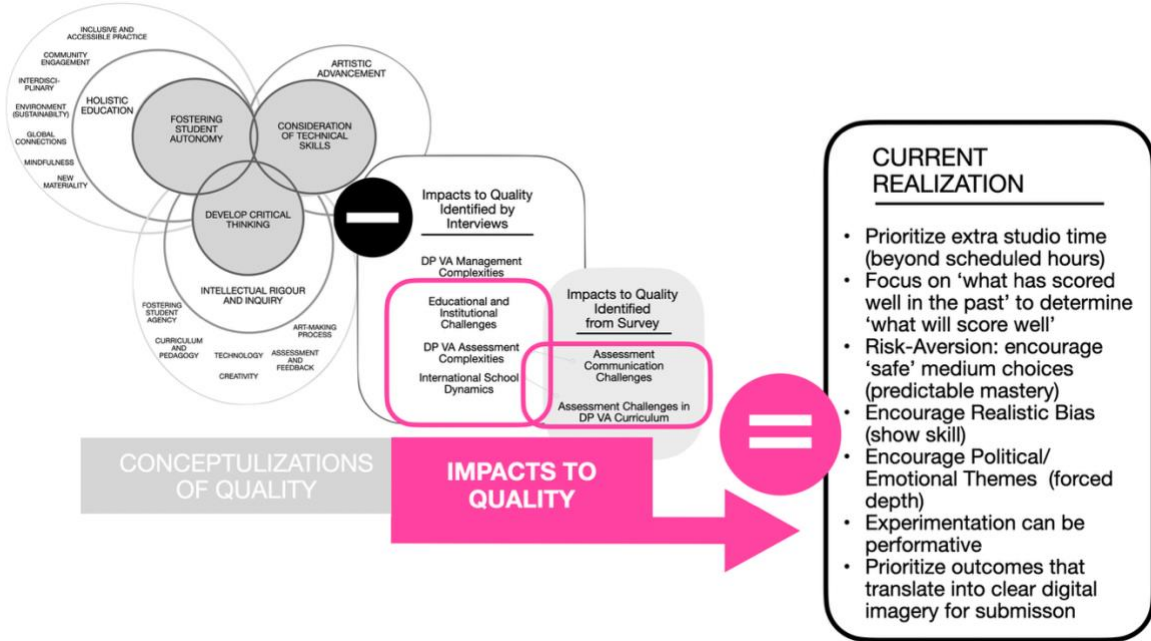
overemphasis on realism, particularly in portraiture, illustrative skills and Euro-centric mixed media approaches. This focus stems from a perception that experimental, abstract or largely craft works may be more difficult for examiners to interpret and assess within the structured confines of the DP VA examination process. Teachers feel compelled to guide students toward art forms and styles that are more universally understood and easily evaluated, ensuring alignment with the assessment criteria and mitigating the risk of subjective misinterpretation by examiners.

Also revealed within 'student VA themes', DP VA teachers often encourage students to explore themes that are emotionally charged or politically oriented, such as narratives of strife, protest, or social justice. These themes are perceived as more likely to resonate with examiners due to their clarity, universality, and the emotional or conceptual weight they carry. While these themes can lead to powerful and meaningful student work, they can also be formulaic, inauthentic and create disturbing practices of forcing contrived narratives and exaggerating or fictionalizing hardships.

Discussions within 'DP VA management complexities' highlighted the constraints imposed by time limitations and students' grade-focused motivations further exacerbate these challenges. Many students are reluctant to engage in genuine experimentation or risk-taking, as such processes that are perceived as time-consuming with uncertain outcomes. Instead, the experimentation required for the PP often becomes a performative exercise, completed retrospectively or as isolated, one-off activities. Students tend to prioritize safe, predictable approaches that align with their established focus and technical strengths, avoiding mediums or methods that might yield unresolved or less polished outcomes. This pragmatic prioritization, while understandable in the context of high-stakes assessment, undermines the potential for deeper exploration and innovation within the DP VA program.

Specifically, within discussions of 'upload process complexity', DP VA teachers highlighted constraints the digital submission process creates in presenting student work. Students must submit one primary photograph or video of their artwork, accompanied by up to two supplementary images. This limited mode of presentation creates additional pressures, as certain mediums translate more effectively into digital formats than others. Participants shared that they encourage students to consider how their work will appear in photographs and to choose mediums that can be easily and clearly documented. For example, 2D works, such as paintings, photographs, or mixed-media pieces with added collage or texture, tend to translate well digitally and are straightforward for examiners to assess. In contrast, more complex or immersive mediums, such as virtual reality installations or large-scale sculptural works, are challenging to document effectively within the constraints of the digital submission process. These systemic pressures often lead to a homogenization of creative outputs, limiting the diversity of artistic practices and the potential for students to fully explore their creative capacities.

Figure 16. Current realization of quality within the teaching of DP VA as revealed by the study



Note: Graphic created with Keynote using data collected from combined responses from Phases 1, 2 and 3, Amy Atkinson, 2025

Within the interviews there were many discussions on how the DP VA teachers did create opportunities to revel in the artistic process to encourage opportunities of ‘fostering student autonomy’, to encourage students to ‘develop critical thinking’ and to balance conceptual and critical thinking with ‘consideration of technical skills’, but they also realized within the teaching of DP VA, they were constrained by an increasingly formulaic process of predictable outcomes which over-emphasized product and created hierarchies in medium choices. DP VA teachers felt pressured to guide students toward “what will score well,” and so much of the interview discussions focused on current realities of DP VA teaching, as DP VA teachers wanted to discuss the strategies they had found that were working within this framework, the times when their strategies didn’t work, coupled with the frustrations of how they didn’t understand the assessments. They also discussed how they felt compelled to prioritize their teaching to align with assessment criteria and how they dealt with, mitigated or tried to shoulder the pressures to create favourable outcomes for their students.

Such strategies, while effective in navigating the assessment framework, stand in tension with the broader ideological aims of the DP VA teachers, the intentions and approaches presented within the DP VA curriculum, and the literature within the VA teaching journals all which emphasize authentic experimentation, creative risk-taking, and innovative engagement with artistic processes. The realities of perceived and actual pressures from IB and international

schools to achieve measurable success undermines these aims highlighting a systemic disconnect within the DP VA and limits the creative potential of both the DP VA teachers and students.

Chapter 13 : Analysis of the findings through the lens of conflict theory

In this chapter, I examine the findings of the study through the lens of conflict theory revealing systemic challenges DP VA teachers face and the broader structural and ideological tensions that shape their experiences.

By adapting Villalobos's (2015) model as initially explained in Chapter 4, to explore emergent tensions revealed through both the preliminary studies (Phase 1: literature review and Phase 2: survey) as well as the main focus Phase 3: in-depth interview responses, I identified four principal sites of conflict to consider as shown in Figure 17:

- Conflict of meaning: divergent understandings of quality among DP VA teachers, students, parents, and school communities.
- Conflicts of function: tensions between the perception of the value of DP VA within international schools and the broader art education field.
- Conflict of position: ideological conflicts between teachers' pedagogical values and the IB's assessment framework and optional Group 6 classification of DP VA.
- Conflicts of power: conflicts between the holistic nature of VA and the achievement markers required for competitive university admissions.

Conflict of meaning

In the domain of conflicts of meaning, I position the understanding and interpretation of quality within the DP VA course as conceived by DP VA teachers themselves. The study revealed ongoing tensions in how quality is both implied and sustained in teaching, particularly in the context of assessment challenges. These conflicts are compounded by the perceived value; or lack thereof, of the DP VA course within the broader international school community, including students and other subject teachers. The course is often seen as a challenging subject with lower scoring trends, which negatively impacts student enrolment and engagement. This perception creates a ripple effect, influencing the course's reputation and the motivation of students to fully commit to the program, further complicating DP VA teachers' efforts to sustain quality.

The explicit conceptualization of quality revealed by DP VA teachers through the interviews shows an ideological view encompassing aims of 'fostering student autonomy', 'developing critical thinking' and 'consideration of technical skills'. However, due to the impacts that perceive quality as measurable through achievement scores and university acceptance rates combined with assessment complexities within the DP VA course, the perception of quality in DP VA teaching is currently being narrowly realized by measurable outcomes and how DP VA teachers are able to create favourable outcomes for their students. This creates further conflicts with how quality is realized within the teaching of DP VA exerting limitations within teaching strategies and creating a homogenization of creative outputs, limiting the diversity of artistic practices and the potential for students to fully explore their creative capacities.

Conflicts of function

In the domain of conflicts of function, I place international schools at the forefront. Within these institutions, DP VA teachers face significant challenges stemming from administrative and stakeholder perceptions of the relevance and value of the study of VA. These perceptions directly impact scheduling, resource allocation, budgeting, materials, and facilities. For example, the prioritization of core subjects often results in reduced resources and support for VA, leaving DP VA teachers to operate within constrained environments. Additionally, the implied value of the DP VA course within the school hierarchy influences enrolment trends and teacher well-being. The sense that the course is undervalued, both in terms of resources and institutional support, creates an ongoing struggle for DP VA teachers to advocate for their subject.

Another point of contention within this domain concerns the conceptualization and relevance of quality as it pertains to secondary VA educators and the broader field of art education. The findings from Phase 1: literature review reveal a significant lack of representation of secondary VA teachers within art education journals and academic discourse, underscoring a disconnect between theoretical frameworks in art education and the practical realities encountered by DP VA teachers. This issue is further compounded within the context of international schools. Art education journals are predominantly national in scope, focusing on topics relevant to national curricula and educational systems. At present, no art education journal specifically addresses the needs and challenges of the international school environment. Given that international schools are composed of educators from diverse national systems, this lack of targeted resources creates additional barriers. This misalignment between academic discourse and the international school context exacerbates the difficulties faced by DP VA teachers in accessing relevant professional resources and support, further isolating them from broader conversations in the field of art education.

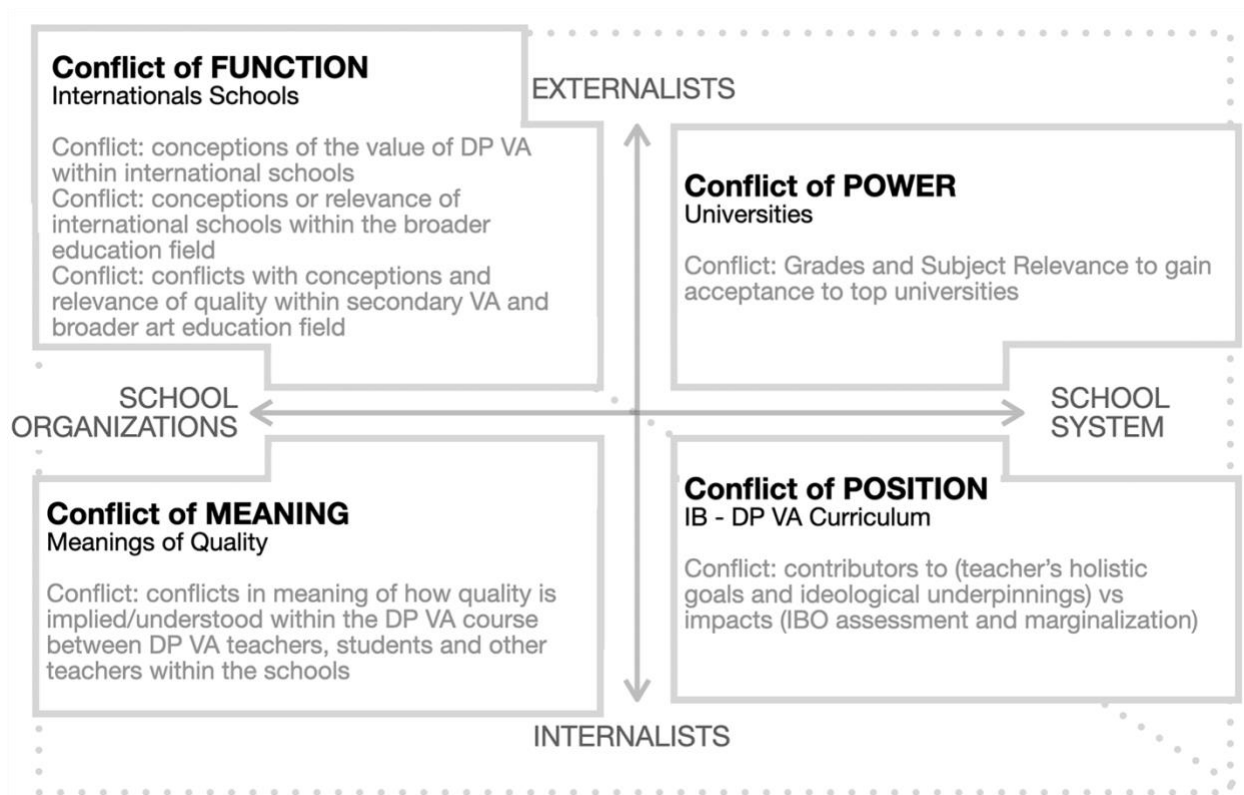
Conflict of position

Within the conflicts of position, I locate the IB and, specifically, the DP VA curriculum. Tensions arise between the ideological and holistic intentions of DP VA teachers; who strive to foster creativity, critical thinking, and personal growth, and the structural and procedural challenges of the curriculum itself. Assessment challenges, including unclear criteria, grading inconsistencies, and misalignments with examiner expectations, create significant frustration for DP VA teachers. Additionally, the lack of sufficient resources and clarity within the curriculum and frustrations with the current workshops and professional development support available for DP VA teachers further exacerbate these tensions. The low-scoring trends and contradictory expectations of the assessment process highlight a fundamental disconnect between the ideals of the DP VA program and its practical execution, leaving DP VA teachers to navigate this difficult terrain largely unsupported.

Conflicts of power

In the domain of conflicts of power, I position universities as a central influence. The current educational model in international schools is structured around the goal of securing student acceptance to top-tier universities. This competitive university system privileges and prioritizes core academic subjects, often to the detriment of creative subjects like DP VA. Misalignments and a lack of transparency in university application requirements further complicate the situation, as universities often fail to recognize the subjectivity and creative value of VA. Instead, there is an overemphasis on technical skills and quantifiable outputs, which contributes to the overly challenging nature of DP VA assessments. These systemic pressures places DP VA teachers in a position where they must reconcile the holistic and creative aims of their teaching with the narrow, outcome-driven expectations imposed by the broader educational system.

Figure 17. Visual of Compiled Analysis using Conflict Theory



Note: Graphic created with Keynote using data collected from combined responses from Literature Review, Survey and In-depth Interviews, Amy Atkinson, 2025

Summary of analysis through the lens of Conflict Theory

These four domains: conflicts of meaning, function, position, and power, underscore the multifaceted challenges that impact DP VA teachers as they navigate the complexities of teaching the DP VA curriculum within international schools. By applying conflict theory, this study provides a clearer framework for understanding the systemic and institutional tensions that shape the experiences of DP VA teachers. This analysis is particularly relevant as it highlights the interconnectedness of these conflicts and their cumulative effects on teaching quality. For instance, the undervaluation of the DP VA course within schools (a conflict of functioning) is directly tied to its perceived relevance in university admissions (a conflict of power) and the structural challenges of the IBO curriculum (a conflict of position). These overlapping tensions create a challenging environment for DP VA teachers, who must balance competing demands while striving to deliver meaningful and high-quality DP VA education.

Chapter 14 : Considering support for DP VA teachers

In this chapter I consider the findings of the study in terms of the over-arching research question and present recommendations for two critical directions to support DP VA teachers: a collaborative micro-credential program offered by universities, led by art education faculty and a greater focus on advocacy to universities and the International Baccalaureate. Next, I consider the mixed messages inherent within the current directions of VA in general as well as the DP VA course and propose advocacy of a radical new direction for DP VA studies.

Before beginning this study, I did not fully understand that feminism is, at its core, a way of challenging what we take to be universal. I had not yet appreciated how questioning patriarchal, hegemonic structures is one of the most profound ways of disrupting the given and, in doing so, learning how the given has been constructed and imposed. Feminist theory taught me that reality is usually “just someone else’s tired explanation” (Ahmed, 2017b, para 9). This realization has become a cornerstone of my journey, both as an educator and as a researcher.

The findings of this study bring to light what many DP VA teachers already intuitively know and navigate in their daily work; a clear divergence between the priorities of practicing DP VA teachers, the ideological aims of VA highlighted in the teaching journals, and the overarching aims of DP VA within international schools and the IB. While the theoretical discourse of art education journals champions inclusive practices, student agency, and advocacy, the lived experiences of DP VA teachers reveal a more pragmatic focus on fostering creativity, technical skill development, and critical engagement with artists. DP VA teachers are deeply invested in balancing conceptual exploration with technical skill-building, while contending with immense pressures exerted by the hegemonic structures of international schools and the IB. These structures, driven by achievement goals, outcomes, and university acceptance rates, often stand at odds with the ideological pedagogical priorities highlighted in journals and discussed as aims by DP VA teachers, creating a tension between the ideals of art education and the realities of institutional demands.

The overarching research question for this study is:

What do I need to know to create a support programme to encourage quality within the teaching of International Baccalaureate Diploma Visual Arts within International schools?

Informed by the findings of the study I recommend what I believe to be two critical directions:

1. A collaborative micro-credential program offered by universities, led by art education faculty for DP VA teachers
2. Advocacy to Universities and the International Baccalaureate

Proposal for a Micro-credential Program

The findings of this study highlight a pressing need for professional development (PD) opportunities tailored specifically to DP VA teachers. Participants in the study expressed a strong desire to network with peers, collaboratively explore strategies for planning and implementing the DP VA curriculum, and address the complexities of assessment. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of having dedicated creative time for their own artistic practice; both to refine their specialized skills and to explore new mediums and techniques. Additionally, contemporary approaches and strategies within art education were identified as critical areas of interest that could enhance their teaching practices and professional growth.

A further challenge lies in the lack of representation for secondary VA teachers, particularly those in international schools, within existing art education journals, which predominantly focus on higher education contexts. This limited representation is compounded by the priorities within international schools, which often emphasize measurable outcomes and university acceptance rates for DP VA students. Bridging this gap through open lines of communication between DP VA teachers in international schools and art education institutions could create valuable cross-collaborative opportunities. Such exchanges would not only provide international VA educators with access to relevant professional resources but also allow art education institutions to gain insights into the distinctive challenges and practices of international VA teaching, fostering mutual learning and growth.

To address these needs, I advocate for the establishment of a collaborative micro-credential program, offered by universities and led by a collaborative hybrid teaching team of experienced DP VA teachers and art education faculty. University professors and lecturers could provide the theoretical and pedagogical expertise necessary for DP VA teachers to remain current and innovative in their lesson planning, while experienced DP VA teachers could provide IB curriculum, assessment, and international school specific expertise. Concurrently, studio-based sessions led by artisans and practicing artists would allow teachers to further develop their mastery of artistic techniques, explore emerging technologies, and engage in creative renewal. These programs would also foster a sense of community, providing a collaborative space for DP VA teachers from international schools worldwide to connect and share ideas.

Micro-credential courses in VA could offer focused, flexible training opportunities in specific areas focused on key learnings identified from the study. With short, stackable courses participants would be able to build skills at their own pace and can be credited toward broader qualifications. This structure provides a cost-effective and efficient method for DP VA teachers to enhance both their professional and personal artistic practice.

Courses could be scheduled during non-teaching periods, such as summer holidays, to minimize disruption to educators' responsibilities. While some courses could be delivered online, face-to-face instruction was highly prioritized by participants, as they craved connection and time to

discuss ideas, inspirations and challenges not just with instructors with other like-minded colleagues. particularly for fostering hands-on artistic development and collaboration. Courses would be designed to accommodate global participation, ensuring accessibility for DP VA teachers working within the varied academic calendars of international schools across the northern and southern hemispheres.

Each course could be short in duration, ranging from 2 to 4 weeks of daily classes. The program would initially focus on key areas such as the DP VA curriculum, contemporary theories in art education and international school expectations. Over time, it could expand to include additional strands, such as other standardized VA curricula and broader primary and middle years art education topics.

Eligibility for these programs would be limited to certified DP VA teachers but with no fixed pathway required. Teachers could choose to take courses on an ad hoc basis or work towards accreditation by completing a series of focused courses. Accumulating a pre-determined number of credits could also lead to a foundational or specialist diploma, which may contribute to the requirements or prepare DP VA teachers to continue to an MA program or fulfil professional development obligations mandated by accreditation bodies in certain countries.

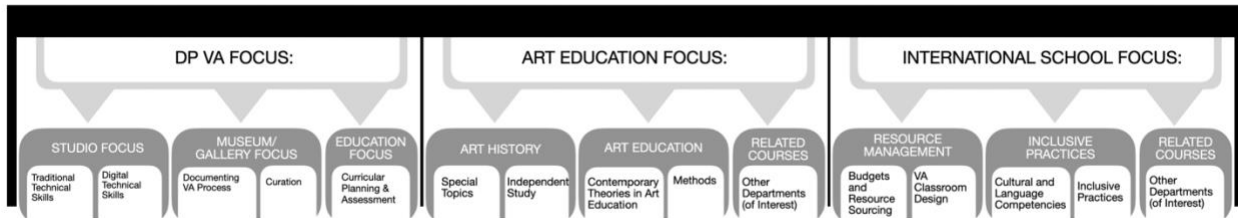
To ensure accessibility and program success, courses would ideally be hosted at universities with short-term accommodation options available for participants. This format would create an immersive learning experience, fostering both academic and creative growth for DP VA teachers as well as keeping university academics exposed to the practicalities of current secondary education practices while building a global network of DP VA educators. By addressing the challenges and needs of international school teachers, this program has the potential to significantly enhance the quality of VA education worldwide.

Micro-Credential Program plan for DP VA teachers

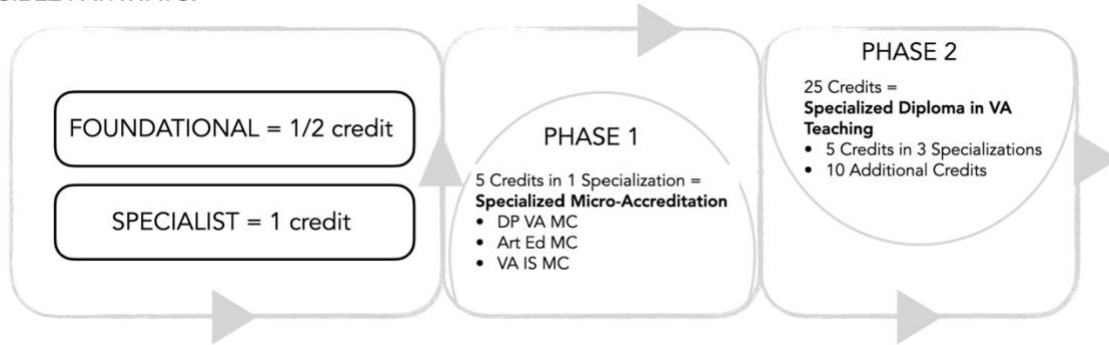
One possibility for a micro-credential program could be organized with three content strands and two possible pathways as shown in Figure 18.

Figure 18. Proposed organization for Micro-Credential Course Plan for DP VA teachers

CONTENT STRANDS:



POSSIBLE PATHWAYS:



Note: Created with Keynote and Photoshop, Amy Atkinson, 2025.

Content Strands: DP VA focus, Art Education focus, International Schools focus

DP VA focus:

- Studio Focus courses in traditional technical skills as well as digital technical skills by artisans or studio art instructors.
- Museum/Gallery Focus courses exploring current strategies to document VA processes and curation co-led by DP VA teachers and art education faculty with museum/gallery focus with considerations on documenting art-process as well as displaying artworks.
- Educational Focus in curricular planning and assessment led by experienced DP VA teachers and examiners.

Art Education (Theoretical) focus:

- Art History: offering options of special focus chosen and led by Art History professors and lecturers to share contemporary issues within Art History and independent study options allowing for participants to work with Art History professors and lecturers to explore topics to support teachers own interests or art historical issues related to the location of their current international school placement.
- Art Education: offering courses in contemporary theories in art education as well as methods chosen and led by Art Education professors and lecturers to share contemporary relevant theories.

- Related Courses: offering options for participants to explore courses in other departments or self-interests. (Art Therapy courses could also be included in this strand)

International Schools focus:

- Resource Management: offering options for either directed or self-study for participants to learn how to organize budgets and resources relative to the location of their current international school placement, led by experienced DP VA teachers. Also options for participants to work with artisans to explore strategies for classroom VA design.
- Inclusive Practices: offering options for participants to study courses relevant to cultural and language competencies related to the location of their international school as well as to explore further inclusive practices within Art Education.
- Related Courses: offering options for participants to explore courses in other departments or self-interests relative to the location and situation of their current international school placements.

Possible pathways:

The two possible pathways shown in Figure 18 of Foundational and Specialist ensure that participants have the time to explore the topics that they are interested and to create an ongoing educational experience which can both support their current position as DP VA teacher within international schools, but also bridge their academic learning preparing them and leading into a continuation of their studies at the MA or Ph.D. level.

- Foundational Level: Participants can earn a Specialized Micro-Accreditation (MC) by completing 5 credits within 1 specialisation (DP VA MC, Art Education MC, Visual Arts (VA) in International Schools MC)
- Specialist Level: Participants can earn a Specialized Diploma in Visual Arts (VA) Teaching by completing 25 credits: 5 credits each in the 3 MC specializations with 10 additional credits.

Identified challenges

Developing a micro-credential program specifically for DP VA teachers in international schools does present challenges primarily due to the current hegemonic university structures. In a recent interview with Paul Lincoln of *National Institute of Education* (NIE) in Singapore (personal interview. September 11, 2025), he explained that most universities remain oriented toward preparing educators for national systems and receive funding aligned with the educational priorities of their home countries. This national focus creates a gap in resources, expertise, and infrastructure for addressing the needs of international school educators. Consequently, questions arise about the funding and sustainability of such a program. While international schools benefit from hiring teachers trained within national education systems, it follows that the responsibility

for providing specialized training to DP VA teachers may naturally fall to these schools. However, the absence of a central governing or unifying body for international schools complicates efforts to direct advocacy and resources effectively. This highlights the importance of collaboration between international schools, universities, and the IB to address these challenges and advocate for targeted solutions.

Advocacy to Universities and the International Baccalaureate

In the preliminary study Phase 1: literature review, ‘advocacy for art education’ emerged as a highly ranked theme, yet it was less discussed among survey respondents and interview participants. Personally, I was struck by how prominently advocacy was represented in academic literature. As I read through the journal texts, I found myself asking: Why should teachers be expected to not only teach the subject but also advocate for it? It felt like an added burden on an already overloaded role. Yet I also recognize that I do advocate for my subject constantly. I spend countless hours promoting its relevance; to students, administrators, and parents, through displays, social media posts, discussions, tote-bags, posters, and so many other ways, to ensure DP VA remains visible and valued. I often joke about being a salesperson for my subject, a point I explored in a recent publication (Atkinson, 2025).

The findings of this study, however, reveal that the issue of advocacy runs deep. The greatest barriers to quality in DP VA teaching are tied to a trifecta of dominant perspectives controlling the outcomes: universities, the IB, and international schools. These entities create a bottleneck of expectations, funnelling the teaching of DP VA into a narrow definition of quantifiable quality; one that is measured according to gate-kept requirements. In this context, advocacy becomes not just relevant but essential. It is a means of challenging these power structures and ensuring that the broader, more dynamic potential of VA education is not lost to rigid, institutionalized metrics.

Advocacy to Universities

Advocacy is essential to encourage universities to critically examine the broader impacts of their policies and practices, particularly in relation to recruitment and assessment. The current emphasis on metrics like citation counts to evaluate professors fosters a system that prioritizes academic output for the sake of visibility rather than meaningful contributions, ultimately influencing the kinds of research that are valued. Advocacy to encourage universities to reconsider their frameworks for recognizing academic excellence becomes relevant. A shift in the focus from numerical metrics to a more holistic understanding of the impact and relevance of academic work, particularly for disciplines like VA, where contributions are often less about citations and more about cultural and educational enrichment is necessary.

Additionally, universities need to reassess their acceptance requirements for creative subjects, which frequently rely heavily on numerical grades. This system often discounts the non-linear, process-oriented nature of creative work that cannot always be distilled into standardized

assessments. Greater flexibility is needed to accommodate the strengths of students applying to creative programs. Furthermore, universities must address systemic barriers created by acceptance requirements for other fields. Many students avoid taking DP VA because they feel pressured to enrol in multiple science courses to meet the prerequisites for humanities or science-oriented university programs. This narrow pathway discourages creative exploration and reinforces a hierarchy of subjects that marginalizes the arts. Advocacy becomes important to encourage universities to broaden their acceptance criteria to ensure that students who wish to pursue creative subjects are not penalized for their choices, fostering a more balanced and inclusive academic environment.

Advocacy to the International Baccalaureate

Advocacy is equally necessary to the IB particularly with respect to its curriculum development and institutional priorities. For the IB, the DP VA curriculum components themselves were not identified as significant issues. The main challenge lies in the assessment procedures. DP VA teachers expressed unanimously about their uncertainty about how assessments are graded, creating a lack of transparency with negative professional impacts. This ambiguity also contributes to the negative reputation of DP VA among students and parents which then reduces student enrolment in DP VA classes, further marginalizing the subject within international schools.

The current DP coordinator at CDNIS (my colleague) often refers to the DP VA program as ‘the diamond of the DP program,’ highlighting the glittering spectacle of the annual final exhibition. This event, which showcases the culmination of two years of dedicated creative work, features highly conceptual and technically excellent artworks that inspire and astound parents, teachers, and peers alike. The metaphor of a diamond is particularly apt, as diamonds are formed under immense pressure. The findings from my study reveal that this pressure is deeply felt by both DP VA students and teachers. Students face overwhelming expectations and intense demands on their time, while DP VA teachers shoulder the responsibility of supporting them through these challenges and ensuring they achieve the high scores necessary for university acceptance. This dual burden underscores the unsustainable pressure embedded within the program.

I presented my research recently at the *International Academic Forum* (IAFOR)¹⁵ in Tokyo (ACAH 2025). During the Q&A session, a professor from Thailand asked how my findings might impact students. Although this study focused on the DP VA teacher experience and the conceptualizations of quality from the DP VA teacher’s perspective, drawing from my own experiences teaching DP VA, I was able to share my perspective.

Personally, in my own classroom I’ve witnessed how these pressures influence student learning year after year. Students often create artworks that reflect their feelings of being overwhelmed by

¹⁵ <https://iafor.org/>

the dual expectations of the IB curriculum and the demands of international schools, as seen in Figure 19. This environment teaches students that grades are the ultimate priority in education. As a result, they select mediums and design their artworks with the sole purpose of ‘getting the grade’, which diminishes their opportunities for authentic creative exploration. Students also observe and fear the inconsistent assessment of the DP VA and see that their teachers are frustrated and disempowered. Advocacy becomes of grave importance to encourage the IB to consider the impact of the assessment challenges revealed within this study and to consider with these challenges what is the real learning that is happening within the DP VA course?

Figure 19. Artwork from DP VA Student’s Exhibition Submission



Note: Title: Life as a Teenage Burnout Medium: Oil Paint, Paper, Spray Paint Size: 48 x 72 in
Exhibition Text: To live happy, or live successfully? I ask this question through this piece. The portrait surrounded by graffiti and wrecked test papers depicts the overwhelming amount of tasks and pressure set by the education system onto young teenagers such as myself. My portrait stares at the audience with a tired look, aiming to convey the anxiety that students feel to give their all at all times towards school. Shared by permission of student.

Further areas for advocacy

However, the findings also reveal that the DP VA curriculum is robust and well-designed. Throughout the conversations, DP VA teachers emphatically expressed their appreciation for many aspects of the program, highlighting how it engages and inspires students who are often deeply determined to succeed. The curriculum's components are interconnected, with learning carefully scaffolded over the two-year program. This structure allows students to elevate both their technical skills and creative problem-solving abilities, ensuring they are well-prepared; at times even overly prepared, for the demands of university-level programs. There is much to commend in the ideas and framework of the DP VA curriculum, and its strengths should not be overlooked. However, this is an area of research that remains under explored. More scholars need to engage with and critically analyze the DP VA curriculum, particularly as its influence continues to expand globally.

The findings also suggest that all three major stakeholders; the IB, universities, and international schools, contribute to varying extents, in reinforcing a Marxist view of education as a tool to sustain hegemonic power structures. From this perspective, education is utilized to promote the interests of the elite, with programs like DP VA functioning as mechanisms to ensure their children are well-prepared to excel in prestigious universities and maintain the status quo. The ideological ideals embedded in the DP VA, such as fostering creativity, critical thinking, and cultural awareness, serve to both excite and engage DP VA teachers, but they may also act as bait to ensure these teachers remain committed to their roles. This dynamic can lead to the exploitation of DP VA teachers, who are drained of their energy, creativity, and passion, while being treated as replaceable within a system designed to prioritize outcomes over well-being.

To address these challenges and better support DP VA teachers, it is essential that teachers amplify their voices and advocate for systemic changes. In many government or local education systems, teachers have access to unions and national societies for VA education that provide collective support and representation. However, in international schools, such structures are conspicuously absent. Establishing professional networks, advocacy groups, or other mechanisms for collective action within international schools could not only support teachers in navigating the pressures of their roles but also ensure their voices are heard in shaping the future of the DP VA program and similar initiatives.

But, what is Visual Arts?

VA education has not developed in isolation; rather, it has been deeply shaped by prevailing ideas about the broader purposes of schooling. Given the dynamic and ever-shifting landscape of VA, it is understandable why education in VA can appear ambiguous, particularly in the context of contemporary art. When a banana duct-taped to a gallery wall can sell for \$6.2 million at auction (Stoclet, 2024), it underscores the complexity of defining what constitutes quality in VA. This challenge is further compounded by the global diversity of students in international schools, where timelines and practices in VA education often differ from; and sometimes oppose, the

Western canon. For DP VA teachers, this creates significant challenges in understanding what is being assessed and how to navigate these shifting expectations.

This study revealed mixed messages about quality in the field of art education. Findings from the preliminary studies discussed in Chapter 5 argue that art education should move away from technical skill development and instead focus on conceptual, student-driven practices. However, findings from the interviews as discussed in 12 and evidence from the IB subject reports (IBO, 2024b) suggest that DP VA assessment remains closely tied to the demonstration of advanced technical skills. DP VA teachers shared that while students with excellent conceptual ideas, but weak technical execution tend to score poorly, those with strong technical skills but weaker conceptual work can still perform well. This emphasis on technical prowess creates a tension between the creative autonomy DP VA teachers aim to foster and the rigid assessment standards imposed by external examination criteria.

From the standpoint of the DP VA course, with its heavy reliance on external assessments that are far removed from the student's DP VA studio and confined to the digital realm, aligning with a skills-based structured approach (Eisner, 1987) might seem beneficial in providing clearer expectations. However, the study revealed that DP VA teachers tend to ideologically lean toward encouraging critical thinking, fostering student autonomy, and prioritizing conceptual exploration. These goals often conflict with the current assessment framework, which narrows the space for creative freedom and significantly amplifies subjectivity in evaluation. This dissonance between the curriculum's ideals and its assessment practices underscores the challenges faced by DP VA teachers as they navigate the complexities of balancing technical skill development with conceptual growth in their classrooms.

A radical new direction

The balance between high expectations and the pressure of grades serves as a driving force that motivates students to succeed. This dynamic often pushes students into a sustained creative state, a space where, according to the DP VA teachers, the true magic of the program is revealed. In many of the interview discussions, DP VA teachers described how, during these periods of art-making, students were deeply engaged; immersed in their work. Teachers shared how they could circulate the room not as instructors enforcing rigid outcomes, but as facilitators, engaging in discussions, exploring ideas, and helping students refine their concepts to elevate their artworks to new levels. Some participants even noted that they brought in their own artwork during these sessions, creating alongside their students to tap into that collective creative energy.

During the Q&A for my presentation at IAFOR conference in Tokyo (ACAH 2025), another observer from Belarus, who was teaching VA in the Czech Republic, expressed surprise at the DP VA curriculum's heavy focus on external examinations and grading. He explained that in the Czech Republic, recent updates to the curriculum (Greger & Waterova, 2007) prioritized critical

thinking, with technical skills being considered supplementary, and students were not required to complete final examinations. “Yes, of course” I replied wistfully, “that is the dream.”

But does it have to remain just a dream? What if the process *was* the outcome? What if we revisited the initial intentions of the DP VA curriculum, informed by the theories of Whitehead (1967), where art education is described as an “imaginative consideration of learning” (p. 146), a process that enables learners to envision new possibilities and imagine new worlds? What if teachers, as Whitehead suggests, were “lighted up with imagination” (p. 146), inspiring students not simply to meet benchmarks but to explore the expansive potential of creative learning? What if we strove to follow the ideals of Dewey (1934) where the VA studio becomes a hive of “doing and undergoing” (p. 104), an evolving, interactive experience (p. 49) where VA learning focuses solely on experimentation, reflection, adaptation, and reorganization. The DP VA ideological framework creates a strong foundation at its core, but I can’t help but wonder, is it time to revisit it and rethink the DP VA framework? To shift the DP VA from its current status as a pressure cooker for grades to a space for dynamic exploration and creative making rather than rigid assessment?

In a recent issue of *Canadian Art Teacher / Enseigner les arts au Canada*, (Atkinson, 2023) I shared an interview with Dr. Lorrie Blair discussing this issue. Blair shared that:

teaching [the students] how to learn might be the key, because things will change so quickly. [When] I was an undergraduate, I had a class on technology, and we learned to use Mimeograph machines and overhead projectors. We learned to thread projectors for film. But who even knows what a Mimeograph machine is today? How do we teach students to be flexible, to be curious, to want to know how to change, and to be able to do more, and how to create new tools.....imagine if art education could be part of the process of developing new tools. Rethinking how tools are used (p. 82).

This vision is further supported by Hetland et al (2007), who highlight the complex reasoning and dynamic mental processes required for art-making, reminding us that “an artist’s mind flows dynamically from one way of addressing artistic problems to another” (p. 89). Why not encourage students to fully embrace the opportunity to think and create “like artists” (p. 4)? This means fostering an environment where students are not simply meeting objectives but are experimenting, iterating, failing, and reimagining, where the act of creation itself not external assessment is valued above all else.

During the 2024 *International Journal of Art and Design Education Conference*¹⁶ (iJade) Conference, Peace, informed by our positionality as artist-teachers, Dr. Blair and I (Blair & Atkinson, 2024) shared our observations that to create like an artist is to engage in an iterative

¹⁶ <https://www.nsead.org/courses-advice/events-conferences/>

process: to explore multiple ideas, to experiment, to fail, and to change direction. It is a process of following a thought, discarding it, and then pursuing another thread of inspiration. Following up on (and inspired by) Blair's assertion during our *Creativ-tea* interview (Atkinson, 2023):

It would be interesting if [university admissions] switched up [asking for finished artworks in a portfolio] and [instead] asked for the process. That would give students more options, since I see so many portfolios, and most of them show more of their teachers' assignments (p. 83).

Based on these understandings, we propose a radical new direction for VA education; one that challenges the systemic dominance of linear, test-based subjects and embraces the generative, expansive potential of the experiential process. This approach centers on revitalization, inclusivity, and re-generation, shifting the focus and embracing the Post-Object.

In this paradigm, the emphasis rests not on the final product but on the complexities revealed through the act of making. The VA classroom becomes a sanctuary for exploration and transformation, a space where learning is transitional, ephemeral, and constantly evolving. Within the Post-Object framework, art-making begins with nothing but an idea and ends with nothing but a memory. It values the intangible, the fleeting, and the emergent, the growth that occurs in the process itself. By advocating for a new approach, DP VA can foster not only creative autonomy but also critical and conceptual depth, offering students an educational experience that transcends the limitations of traditional assessment.

Chapter 15 : Contributions of the Study

Within this chapter, I discuss the significance of the findings within this study and the contribution of my research to the greater field of art education.

The significance of my research lies in the ability to delve deeply into the experiences, priorities, and challenges faced by DP VA teachers within the DP VA framework. By centering the study on the perspectives of these educators, the research amplifies the voices of those directly involved in delivering VA education. For a marginalized field like VA, storytelling emerges as a crucial method for illuminating challenges that are often overlooked or minimized. Through capturing the insights of practitioners, this study uncovers the complex and multifaceted realities of providing quality VA education in international school settings.

What distinguishes this research is my dual role as both a researcher and a practitioner, fostering authentic and collaborative conversations with DP VA educators. These dialogues aim to offer an unprecedented glimpse into the realities of teaching DP VA in international schools. As the first study of its kind to provide such a comprehensive and intimate account, it captures the depth of experience, dedication, and passion that these teachers bring to their roles. Beyond highlighting the challenges they encounter, the research celebrates their resilience, creativity, and unwavering commitment to delivering meaningful and impactful VA education.

Bridging the gap between theory and practice

The research highlights a significant disconnect between the theoretical discourse within academic literature on arts education and the day-to-day needs and concerns of DP VA teachers. While academic journals offer valuable insights and frameworks, they are often inaccessible; both literally and figuratively, to DP VA teachers working within international schools. Many DP VA teachers do not have the time, resources, or institutional support to access these journals, and even when they do, the topics discussed frequently fail to resonate with their immediate realities or the specific challenges they face in their classrooms. Moreover, the voices of practicing teachers are conspicuously absent from much of this academic discourse, which tends to prioritize theoretical perspectives over firsthand accounts from educators themselves.

This disconnect reveals an important opportunity to bridge the gap between theory and practice. By aligning academic dialogue more closely with the lived experiences of VA teachers, researchers can create scholarship that is both accessible and actionable. This alignment could involve greater inclusion of teacher voices in academic research, ensuring that their insights shape the direction of inquiry.

Additionally, this gap underscores the need for professional development (PD) opportunities that integrates academic research into practical, classroom-relevant strategies. The IB and international schools could play a pivotal role by facilitating access to research, hosting workshops led by both

scholars and practitioners, and encouraging collaborative projects that connect theory to practice by creating spaces where teachers and researchers can engage in meaningful dialogue. My proposal for a micro-credential program for DP VA teachers offers a way to bridge this divide fostering a more dynamic and responsive approach to VA education, one that values the expertise of teachers, addresses their challenges, and equips them with the tools to inspire their students while navigating the complexities of international education.

Highlighting the situation of assessment challenges within DP VA

A profound revelation from my study is the immense pressure DP VA teachers face due to the uncertainties and discrepancies within the DP VA examination procedures and outcomes. These challenges create significant professional strain, as teachers navigate a system where the criteria and grading processes often feel opaque and inconsistent. By bringing these dynamics to light, my research underscores the urgency for IB policymakers to critically revisit their assessment procedures. There is a pressing need to evaluate the standards of marking within DP VA, ensuring that final grades more equitably reflect the considerable skills, effort, and dedication invested by both DP VA teachers and students in the development of their submissions. Such recalibration would not only validate the hard work of DP VA teachers and students but also elevate the credibility and fairness of the DP VA program as a whole.

Another critical finding from my study is the constant strain placed on DP VA teachers and the subject itself due to the persistent marginalization of Group 6 subjects within the IB framework. Despite being heralded as ‘the diamond in the DP curriculum,’ DP VA teachers are burdened with immense pressures from all sides of the educational field. These pressures stem from a combination of systemic undervaluation, limited student uptake, and the expectation for VA to serve as both a showcase and a recruitment tool for international schools, all while being treated as ancillary within the broader curriculum.

By foregrounding these dynamics, my study calls attention to the need for advocacy on behalf of DP VA teachers and the value of the VA subject to IB policymakers to recalibrate their conception of DP VA and reconsider the optionality of Group 6 subjects within the DP curriculum. Also my study calls for advocacy to universities to re-evaluate their valuing of creative subjects and to accommodate the strengths of students applying to creative programs by broadening their acceptance criteria. This re-evaluation should aim to create a more equitable standing for creative subjects, ensuring that they are recognized as integral to holistic education. Addressing these systemic issues could empower DP VA teachers, provide students with greater opportunities for creative exploration, and strengthen the overall integrity of the IB program within international schools.

Chapter 16: Critical Reflections and Limitations

Within this chapter, I critically reflect on the methodological decisions made during the research process, examining the limitations that may have influenced the overall efficacy and scope of the study. I also outline potential directions for future research, drawing on insights and considerations informed by the findings of this study.

Navigating the intricate landscape of DP VA within international schools, as both a DP VA teacher and a researcher, has given me profound professional and personal stakes in the direction and outcomes of this study. While I was already aware of the challenges I have faced in my own teaching of DP VA within international schools, having these struggles validated and repeated through the voices of others, in so many varied and equally challenging forms, was overwhelming to process.

Taking it personal

At the outset of this study, I deliberately avoided sharing my personal story. I wanted the research to speak for itself, and I was reluctant to unpack my own choices. I preferred to ‘just get on with it,’ choosing to focus on the research. But, making art, and teaching art, for me, is like breathing; it is the pulse of my heart. To have this passion marginalized, but also to realize that it is part of a much larger systemic issue felt overwhelming. It wasn’t something I wanted to fully confront. Yet, I am deeply grateful to my wise and supportive supervisor, Dr. Lorrie Blair, for encouraging me to take this direction, even when it was difficult to face.

In my recent article (Atkinson, 2025), one of the participants in my pilot study shared their reasons for resigning from their secondary VA teaching position that resonated profoundly with my own and many from this study:

For many reasons... I just, I wasn’t that great at the end compared to how I started. And even in mid-career...the demands, like, the management demands were too much and it was counter to my research. I was pushing for grades because that was what was required, I always needed a mark for the report card, and so that whole idea of engaging in the process, it just wasn’t happening.... And all the managing and the parents, and it was just getting to be overwhelming... The joy was leaving me (p. 17).

At the time, when I was writing this storied-research, I saw these words as creating a dramatic climax to the narrative. In the article, I remarked that her words were saddening. However, after working through this study, I have come to realize that her words are not just a poignant moment in the story; they are an authentic reflection of the lived reality for many VA teachers. Her experience has been echoed by every participant in this study and countless other DP VA teachers working in isolation across the globe. These shared experiences underscore pervasive

struggles faced by VA educators and highlight the need for systemic change to support their well-being and their vital work.

Connecting with DP VA teachers

One of the most valuable outcomes of this study has been the opportunity to connect with extraordinary DP VA teachers from around the globe, educators who are deeply passionate about their craft and unwavering in their commitment to teaching VA. Their insights, experiences, and dedication have profoundly deepened my own understanding and appreciation of what it means to teach VA. Their words have not only inspired me but have also informed and enriched my own teaching practices in ways that I could not have anticipated.

Through this research, I have been reminded of the essential importance of community among VA teachers; a space to come together, share ideas, voice frustrations, and, perhaps most importantly, create art. This sense of connection and collaboration is the lifeblood of a VA educator. It sustains us, fuels our creativity, and reminds us of the shared purpose that brought us to this profession in the first place. Yet, it is something that happens far too infrequently. Building and fostering these communities must become a priority, as they provide not only professional growth but also the vital support and inspiration needed to navigate the challenges of teaching VA.

Reflecting on misalignment challenges

The journey of this study was not without its challenges. My initial proposal included only one primary research question. With the use of grounded theory, I felt confident starting the study. However, as I worked through the three phases of the research concurrently, I began to notice misalignments and inconsistencies that made the process feel messy and difficult to manage. Adding sub-research questions partway through the study proved to be a pivotal adjustment, as these helped me refine my focus and better structure my inquiry. However, the concurrent implementation of the three phases introduced complications that only became apparent during data synthesis which led to further realignments, allowing Phase 3: in-depth interviews to move into key focus.

I am grateful for the assistance of Dr. James Lani and the use of Intellectus Software, which aided me in organizing key themes during the coding process of Phase 3. This allowed me to step back and see the bigger picture, helping me to better understand the data and return to my transcripts with a clearer focus. Using Charmaz's (2015) line-by-line coding method further supported this process, enabling me to deepen my analysis and identify critical insights within the data. Ultimately, the pragmatic approach of my mixed-methods study fulfilled its intention to better understand DP VA teachers' perceptions of quality in their teaching practices, despite the challenges I encountered along the way.

Selection of Conflict Theory

The decision to use conflict theory as an analytical framework emerged late in my study. I am deeply grateful for the work of Dr. Michael Bindon (2023), whose research, building on Elpus' (2019) earlier studies, on the uptake of the arts within the IB curriculum, proved to be a turning point for me. Bindon's work not only validated my own research by addressing the concerning marginalization of Group 6 subjects within the DP framework but also provided a sense of solidarity. Learning that the former curriculum manager of Group 6 for the IB shared similar experiences and viewpoints regarding the marginalization of the arts was a balm for my soul.

I am also indebted to Bindon (2023) for his innovative application of Villalobos' (2015) model, which he adapted to better address the dynamics of the IB system. At the time, I was grappling with two conflicting theoretical underpinnings: the ideological foundations of Whitehead and Dewey, which informed the development of the DP VA course, versus the structural complexities underpinning Marxist theory, as realized through the educational frameworks inherent in international schools. Conflict theory fit like a glove. As I began applying its tenets to the phases of my study, it helped me delineate the tensions revealed in my research and frame them within a larger narrative of educational inequity. This framework brought clarity to my findings and allowed me to situate them within the broader context of systemic inequalities in education.

As Bindon (2023) so eloquently states, "Conflict theory allowed me to frame these tensions and barriers in a way that connected micro experiences with macro societal values, making a potent case for articulating the sidelining of the arts as not just an educational oversight but a profound societal injustice" (p. 161). His words resonated deeply with me and reinforced the value of using conflict theory to connect the everyday struggles of DP VA teachers to larger societal forces. This framework not only illuminated the inequities present within the IB system but also underscored the urgency of addressing them as part of a broader movement toward educational justice.

Considering the international school landscape

As discussed in Chapter 2, unlike national educational systems that provide structured training aligned with their curricula, international schools recruit teachers educated in national universities and place them in roles that require them to navigate unfamiliar curricula, such as the IB framework, with little formal preparation. I am deeply grateful to Paul Lincoln of National Institution of Education (NIE) in Singapore for his insightful discussions helping me to fully grasp the ramifications of this issue. He highlighted the challenges my proposed micro-credential program may face in gaining acceptance within universities that are primarily focused on supporting their national curricula. His perspective has been invaluable in shaping my understanding of the complexities involved in bridging this gap and reinforced the need for advocacy to the IB for meaningful professional support.

Limitations of the study

Conducting a study on international schools with a global reach presented several significant limitations. Chief among these were the size and scope of the project, compounded by my role as a full-time DP VA teacher, which placed constraints on my time. Coordinating across time zones and connecting with teachers worldwide proved challenging, particularly as the study relied on promotion through Facebook groups and my website. Additionally, the demanding nature of the DP VA teaching role impacted participation; while many teachers initially expressed interest, some later declined or withdrew, citing workload pressures. In hindsight, streamlining the study's focus earlier on would have strengthened its design. A more focused approach during the planning stages would have simplified the coding and analysis processes, enhancing the overall efficiency and clarity of the research.

Size and Scope

While the survey and interview data provide valuable insights, the sample size, though suitable for an exploratory study, remains relatively small. Expanding the participant pool to include broader geographic and institutional representation would enhance the generalizability of the findings, making them more reflective of the IB's global reach. This study focused primarily on the experiences of DP VA teachers in international school settings. Moreover, given my location in Hong Kong, most participants were from the eastern side of the globe and within the northern hemisphere. Including participants from the Americas and those in the southern hemisphere would provide a more balanced and robust representation of the population.

Reliance on self-reported data

This study relied heavily on self-reported data, capturing participants' perceptions, priorities, and experiences. While this was crucial for understanding teachers' perspectives, it introduces potential biases and limitations in articulating the full nuances of quality teaching. Without direct classroom observations, the study could not triangulate self-reported data with evidence of instructional practices or students' learning experiences. Including classroom observations in future research could provide deeper and more comprehensive insights.

Potential for researcher bias

As the co-editor of the *Canadian Art Teacher / Enseigner les arts au Canada* journal and a DP VA teacher myself, I may have brought certain biases and assumptions to the interpretation of the data, despite efforts to maintain objectivity. Engaging external reviewers or collaborating with a more diverse research team could have further enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings.

These limitations notwithstanding, in my perspective this exploratory study serves as an important first step in understanding the complex, multifaceted nature of quality in DP VA

teaching within international school contexts. The insights gained can inform future research and the development of more comprehensive, longitudinal studies to deepen our understanding of this emerging area of VA education.

Further research directions

Embarking on this research journey has been profoundly transformative, pushing me to deeply reflect on my own role and practices within the context of DP VA and the broader international arts education landscape. I have come to realize that I occupy a certain vantage point; a blend of academic researcher and practitioner embedded in the realities of teaching DP VA. This dual perspective not only demands academic rigour but also places upon me a responsibility to advocate for the needs and challenges of VA teachers within this system.

Additionally, my research has illuminated several areas ripe for further inquiry. One significant area is the impact of globalized educational systems, such as the IB, on national ideologies of art education. How do these systems influence; or perhaps conflict with local values and traditions in the teaching of VA? Another area of interest is the disconnect between the practical realities of K-12 VA education and the theoretical frameworks emphasized within academia, potentially creating a gap between theory and practice. The marginalization and isolation experienced by VA teachers in international schools also emerged as a pressing concern. Many participants in my study shared feelings of professional isolation, compounded by the challenges of teaching in international school contexts where the arts are often undervalued compared to other disciplines. This marginalization has significant implications for teacher well-being, retention, and the overall quality of VA education. Furthermore, the role of mindful teaching practices and the modelling of creative behaviours by VA teachers warrants deeper exploration. How do these practices influence not only student outcomes but also the sustainability of teachers' own creative identities? This research has only scratched the surface of several complex and interconnected issues within teaching of DP VA. As the international school sector continues to grow and evolve, targeted, collaborative, and contextually grounded research will be essential to understanding and addressing the challenges faced by DP VA teachers and to ensuring that VA remains a vital, celebrated part of the educational landscape

Explore the DP VA student experience

Another key direction for future research lies in examining how the inconsistencies unveiled within my research impact the students within the DP VA course, a perspective that was beyond the scope of this study. While my findings provide a deep understanding of the challenges faced by DP VA teachers, the implications of these challenges on student learning, engagement, and outcomes remain an essential and underexplored area. This line of inquiry aligns with and could build upon the foundational work of Bindon (2023), who investigated the broader Group 6 arts sector. Bindon's research began to explore how systemic issues within the IB framework, such as the marginalization of Group 6 subjects and the tension between creative process and

achievement metrics, affect students' experiences in arts education. Extending this research specifically to DP VA students could reveal how these systemic challenges manifest in the classroom and influence students' artistic development, creative confidence, and overall engagement with VA.

By focusing on the student perspective, future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the DP VA program's strengths and weaknesses, ultimately contributing to the development of a more equitable and effective VA education framework. Investigating these impacts would not only complement the findings of this study but also help to ensure that the DP VA curriculum better meets the ideological expectations of both teachers and students in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and a lifelong appreciation for the arts

Research-Creation in development

My initial proposal included a research-creation component (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2012), which, unfortunately, did not find its way into the final study due to time constraints. However, throughout the course of this research, I have filled two notebooks with journal entries, capturing detailed experiences and stories that have unfolded in my DP VA classroom over the past two years, alongside those shared with me by interview participants. These stories, rich with insight and emotion, reflect the bond that VA teachers share, a deep and unspoken understanding of one another's challenges, triumphs, and creative journeys. Though time was not on my side during this study, I look forward to revisiting these notebooks when life allows. I will read through my notes, reflect on the voices and stories captured within them, and return to my beloved art-making practice.

Canadian Art Teacher

As co-editor of the *Canadian Art Teacher / Enseigner les arts au Canada* (CAT), the findings of my study have been profoundly eye-opening, especially regarding the need to amplify and support the voices of K-12 VA teachers. Within CAT, we are actively working to encourage more K-12 educators to share their experiences and insights through our peer-mentorship system for submissions. This system is designed to guide new authors in navigating the expectations of academic publishing, mentoring them to refine their submissions and more effectively communicate their narratives and messages. This process not only supports teachers in contributing to the academic discourse but also highlights the invaluable knowledge that emerges from their classrooms, bridging the gap between practice and research.

In addition, my co-editor Marie-France Bérard and I are collaborating with Mike J. Emme, the Director of Publications for CSEA/SCEA, to launch CAT Conversations, our first online discussion series. Sponsored by the Rita L. Irwin Art Teacher Dissemination of Knowledge Award, this initiative aims to create an accessible platform where VA teachers and art education scholars can come together to exchange ideas, share pedagogical innovations, and explore

strategies for addressing the challenges they face in their practice. These conversations will serve as a space for collective learning and professional growth, fostering a stronger sense of community. Future research could build upon these initiatives by examining how mentorship programs, such as the CAT peer-mentoring system impact the confidence and capacity of K-12 VA teachers to engage with academic publishing.

Visual Arts International Schools

A key finding from this research was the strong desire among DP VA teachers for more relevant PD opportunities and a greater sense of community. In response, I established *Visual Arts International School (VAIS)*, which is in the process of developing a journal specifically focused on VA within international school contexts. This journal aims to provide a platform for all VA teachers within international schools to share their insights and innovations, fostering a global community of practice.

As an initial step, in October 2024, along with fellow DP VA teacher, Michelle Wang and the Asia Art Archive (AAA) in Hong Kong, I developed a weekend workshop for DP VA educators, *Encountering Time*. The workshop provided a peer-sharing space to unpack the DP VA curriculum, focusing on practical strategies to elevate individual planning and teaching practices. Participants engaged in discussions about integrating creative development into their teaching while also prioritizing their own artistic practices. The workshop was well attended, drawing participants from across Southeast Asia, and the feedback highlighted a strong demand for similar initiatives. This workshop, along with the broader VAIS initiative, serves as a starting point for development of future workshops and resources to support VA teachers within international schools.

Final thoughts

In a world increasingly marred by divisions, amplified anxieties about belonging, identity, and purpose, as well as fears about the sustainability of our planet and the fairness of societal systems, the unifying and transformative power of VA cannot be overstated. This raises a pressing question: if the IB's mission is to cultivate a sense of international mindedness and an interconnected world, how can the role of VA be underestimated in achieving this vision?

It cannot be denied that VA and the creative arts are celebrated within the IB for their transformative potential, but as my study highlights, echoed by Elpus (2019), Bindon (2023) and Kotowich (2021), the arts are too often marginalized in the practical realm of curriculum decision-making. By shedding light on the challenges within the DP VA teacher experience and the barriers to quality teaching within the current framework, I hope to inspire a broader conversation about elevating VA within the DP framework.

The challenge for international schools and the IB is not merely to acknowledge the richness that VA brings to their curricula. They are encouraged to boldly reimagine and actualize a structure where VA is connected equally with other subject groups. I believe this vision can extend further, with IB fostering collaborative connections with universities. This would help to create a more coherent and supportive continuum for arts education. By doing so, we can cultivate vibrant learning environments that support DP VA teachers to feel successful, supported and “lighted up” (Whitehead, 1967, p. 146) with excitement, imagination and fulfilment. This support would enable DP VA teachers to create VA classrooms of creativity and harmony, sanctuaries for exploration that support students to explore their creative visions and allow them to relish in the moment of the art-making process of doing and undoing. This will allow them to engage fully in the process of experimentation, exploration and transformation, where learning is transitional, ephemeral, and constantly evolving.

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AI Acknowledgement:

I acknowledge that during the preparation of this dissertation, I used digital intelligence services to help organize the data and refine my written presentation. AI driven software purchased from Intellectus Statistics (Clearwater, Florida) was used within the coding phrase to sort the combined transcripts of the in-depth interviews and to organize into key themes. Online Grammarly (San Francisco, California) services were used during the final editing phase to assist with correcting and refining grammatical and citation issues. After using both AI powered applications, I have reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content presented within the work.

Appendix A: Ethics Certificates

Ethics Certificate 2023-2024



CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Amy Atkinson
Department: Faculty of Fine Arts\Art Education
Agency: N/A
Title of Project: An Exploration of Quality in Visual Art Teaching of the
International Baccalaureate Diploma Visual Arts
Program within International Schools
Certification Number: 30018397

Valid From: July 31, 2023 To: July 30, 2024

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "D. Waddington", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. David Waddington, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee



CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard DeMont".

Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B: High-Quality

Screenshot of DP VA Guide Page highlighting mention of ‘high-quality’

Diploma Programme Visual arts guide

Published February 2014
Updated February 2017

Published on behalf of the International Baccalaureate Organization, a not-for-profit educational foundation of 15 Route des Morillons, 1218 Le Grand-Saconnex, Geneva, Switzerland by the

International Baccalaureate Organization (UK) Ltd
Peterson House, Malthouse Avenue, Cardiff Gate
Cardiff, Wales CF23 8GL
United Kingdom
Website: www.ibo.org

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Appendix C: Brief History of DP VA

A Brief Historical Outline of Diploma (DP) Visual Arts (DP VA)

From a pedagogical perspective, IB's Diploma (DP) Visual Arts (VA) course has aligned with John Dewey's principles of progressivism, emphasizing the notion that arts education is fundamentally rooted in experiential learning (Dewey, 1938). Dr. Ian Hill (2002) who served as Deputy Director General (from 2000-2012) for the IB affirmed that the DP VA course has traditionally prioritized experiential, self-directed inquiry over instruction focused on rote memorization or the recall of facts and data (Blaikie, 2025). Conceptually, it is significant that, in the 1980s and 1990s, the DP VA course was not high-art focused or formalist in spirit (Feldman, 1992), but rather, focused on sociocultural contexts. In a significant way, the DP VA anticipated and embraced art education trends that called for a multicultural approach (Blandy & Congdon, 1987, 1988; Chalmers, 1992; Duncum, 1999), and later, visual culture (Freedman, 2003). DP VA teachers were expected to facilitate students' independent explorations via identification of their own interests in relation to artists, designers, and crafts-oriented makers and practitioners across cultures. Ultimately, students were to engage in self-directed studies and art-making practices.

Doug Boughton (2005) who served as Chief Examiner (from 1993-1998) observed that the DP VA embraced all forms of visual cultural production, as well as enabled students to pursue their interests in popular, as well as the fine arts, and pay more attention to both the content and context of artistic expression (p. 5). The content of the Process Journal (Research or Investigation Workbook, now branded Visual Arts Journal) was intended to be open-ended in the sense that DP VA students were encouraged to develop classroom experiences into independent explorations of ideas. Students are free to interpret ideas encountered both inside and outside class and develop independence in their exploration of art ideas. This characteristic enables students to take risks and move beyond classroom exercises (Blaikie, 2025). Tom Anderson (1994) noted that an added benefit of the DP VA as an art program was not only for future artists but for future citizens who will have developed the "power of general critical appreciation" (p. 21). Through his work as an DP VA examiner, Anderson observed that the DP VA is a model for content-based art education, incorporating art history and criticism alongside skills-based visual studies. It encourages personally driven creative artwork and is set within a consciously cultural context.

Early DP VA Curriculum Incantations (prior to 2006)

In the first incantations of the DP VA course, there were two required curricular components that were interrelated and examined alongside one another: The research workbooks counted for 30% of the final grade, and the exhibition of studio work was worth 70%. The expectations for the research workbook included sketchbook-style visual experimentations, along with detailed visual-textual storying revealing students' idea developments both in writing and visually,

including references to resources and artists. Visual–textual information in the research workbook had to link directly to students’ own resolved artworks shown in the exhibition component. Students were required to curate and select pieces for the final exhibition portfolio, often in discussion with their art teachers. The DP VA course was offered at both higher level (HL) or standard level (SL) both working through the two integrated areas but with differentiated expectations for number of outcomes (Blaikie, 2025).

During the early incantations, DP VA teachers were expected to facilitate students’ independent explorations via identification of their own interests. Through self-directed inquiry, students were encouraged to examine personally relevant genres of art, design, or craft, identifying thematic connections between their own work and the work of artists and designers across selected modalities and cultures. Ultimately, students were to engage in self-directed studies and art-making practices entangling design and VA in a way that presupposed current new materialist trends (Garber, 2019, Blaikie, 1994a, 1994b; Blandy & Congdon, 1988).

Through creating research workbooks and exhibition portfolios, DP VA students were expected to embark on independent visual-textual inquiries and media explorations of a “historical, critical, and cultural nature” (Blaikie, 1994a, p. 306). In annual reports, then chief examiner F. Graeme Chalmers’s references the importance of including multi- and cross-cultural examples of art and design reflecting diverse international populations served by the IB.

For the early assessment model, DP VA students’ two components were examined together, one informing the other, firstly internally by teachers, and then externally by an in-person (one-on-one) consultation with the student by a DP VA examiner. DP VA examiners were tasked with visiting every DP VA school around the world to discuss the art-making process with each student and scrutinize portfolio and research workbook components on display. Examiners then submitted to IB examples of their marking, including highest, average, and lowest scoring results. They also wrote a report on the overall quality of work at each school (Blaikie, 2025).

Within annual reports, Chalmers (1992) noted that in relation to criterion referencing, attuning to positive achievements rather than deficiencies were encouraged within assessments. The criteria for assessment of research workbooks including: evidence of independent research; formal technical and aesthetic qualities; awareness of cultural, historical, and social contexts; and for the HL, also experimental studio research. Criteria for examination of portfolios included: imaginative and creative thinking and expression, persistence in research, technical skills, understanding of functions and characteristics of media, understanding of design fundamentals, and ability to evaluate one’s own growth and development (Blaikie, 1994a, 1994b, Boughton et al., 1996).

2006-2016 Curriculum Incantation

In the second incantation (2006 - 2016) DP VA expectations continued with the two required curricular components, renamed to: studio works and investigation workbooks (IWB).

During this curriculum incantation, there were two bifurcated pathways available for DP VA with two distinct options rooted in practical art-making and contextual and critical investigation respectively. One pathway (A) highlighted art-making with greater weight being placed on the studio works (60%) and IWB (40%) while (B) prioritized the IWB (60%) with more focus on art historical and experimentations compared with studio works (40%). Option A was designed for students who wished to concentrate on studio practice in visual arts, while option B was created for students who wished to concentrate on contextual, visual and critical investigation in DP VA. Despite the bifurcation in design, the curriculum was intended as an integrative experience that linked studio and investigation work throughout the course. While both pathways allowed candidates to merge and mix these two key practices, (A) was the more commonly chosen option.

Studio work was defined as practical exploration and artistic production while work in the investigation workbooks involved independent contextual, visual and critical investigation and reflection, both visual and written. Both pathways were further differentiated according to HL and SL designation.

For assessment, the in-person one-on-one conversational examination visits were supplanted and submissions were uploaded digitally to IB's submission platform (IBIS). DP VA students were required to scan selected pages of their IWB. Students were also required to submit photos of their resolved works and exhibition set up as well as a candidate statement. There was also an option to include a 15 minute video of the student discussing their intentions with their exhibition.

For example, for Option A:

Components	HL Strand	SL Strand	Weight
Studio Work Component (externally assessed)	- 12-18 photographs of individual artworks - photograph of EX setup - Candidate Statement (300 words)	- 8-12 photographs of individual artworks - photograph of EX setup -Candidate Statement (300 words)	60%
Investigation Workbook (IWB) (externally assessed)	25-30 scanned pages from student's IWB.	15-20 scanned pages from student's IWB.	40%

Optional	Video – Interview of 15 minutes or additional written statement (1000 words)	
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2016 - 2025 (Current) Curriculum

By 2014, a major cyclical review had taken place for the DP VA, rebranding itself from DP in Art and Design to the IB DP Visual Arts (VA) and resulting in a new and different VA curriculum, released for teaching in 2014 and for first examination in June 2016. The overhauled 2-year DP VA curriculum was examined for the first time in northern hemisphere schools in June 2016, while students’ work from southern hemisphere schools was examined in December 2016. (Blaikie, 2025)

In the DP Visual Arts Guide (IBO, 2014), IBO defined its VA education as

- centres on learners
- develops effective approaches to teaching and learning
- works within global contexts, helping students understand different languages and cultures
- explores significant content, developing disciplinary and interdisciplinary understanding that meets rigorous international standards

Within the 2014 (current) DP VA curriculum, all candidates are required to engage with both streams – art-making and investigation – as co-constitutive experiences, explicitly encouraging experimentation across a broad range of contemporary practices and perspectives as encountered in multiple formats, media, and contexts. DP VA students are encouraged to consider their status as critically informed makers and consumers of visual culture (IBO, 2014).

In the DP VA guide (2014), IB explains the DP VA course as “one that encourages students to challenge their own creative and cultural expectations and boundaries” (p. 6). It is meant to be “thought-provoking” and to encourage students to develop analytical skills in problem-solving and divergent thinking, while working towards technical proficiency and confidence as art-makers. Through participation in the DP VA course students are expected to explore and compare VA from different perspectives and in different contexts, and “engage in, experiment with and critically reflect” (p. 6) upon a wide range of contemporary practices and media. It is noted that the course is designed for both students who aim to study VA in higher education as well as for those who are “seeking lifelong enrichment” (p. 6) through VA. However, The VA course has acquired the reputation as a subject for which it is exceedingly difficult to achieve highest marks. This concern is often voiced by both DP VA teachers and students.

The IB DP VA syllabus consists of three equal interrelated areas: VA in context, VA methods and communicating VA (IBO, 2014).

- Visual Arts in Context explores the perspectives, theories, and cultures that influence VA practice.
- Visual Arts Methods focus on developing skills, techniques, and processes through engaging with different media.
- Communicating Visual Arts involves understanding and applying the processes of selecting and exhibiting artworks.

DP VA provides a framework that allows teachers to choose content and activities appropriate to the school context with the precise taught activities and subject materials generated by the teacher and students. When constructing a holistic course of study, the DP VA teacher must understand and appreciate how the assessment tasks are drawn from the syllabus areas and design a curriculum which ensures that students are fully equipped and informed in accordance with the VA aims and assessment objectives. An integrated relationship between the core areas of VA in context, visual arts methods and communicating VA is essential throughout the course.

These three areas are woven together through the 3 areas of practice: Theoretical, Art-Making and Curatorial. The framework provides a range of opportunities for students to explore 3 areas of practice providing a holistic framework that allows teachers to tailor content and activities to their school context, while ensuring alignment with the program’s assessment objectives (IBO, 2014).

DP VA students can approach the course within two strands: Higher Level (HL) and Standard Level (SL) both working through the three integrated areas of practice but with differentiated expectations for number of outcomes.

Each area of practice has one internally assessed (IA) but externally moderated assessment and two externally assessed (EA) components:

Areas of Practice	Components	HL Strand	SL Strand	Weight
Theoretical	Comparative Study (externally assessed)	- 10-15 screens of comparative study components - 5 reflective screens connecting to art-making - List of Sources	-10-15 screens of comparative study components - List of Sources	20%

Art-Making	Process Portfolio (externally assessed)	-13-25 screens of evidence of art-making process -List of Sources	-9-18 screens of evidence of art-making process -List of Sources	40%
Curatorial	Exhibition (internally assessed and externally moderated)	-photographs of 8-12 artworks with exhibition texts -2 photographs of exhibition -Curatorial Rationale (700 words)	-photographs of 4-7 artworks with exhibition texts -2 photographs of exhibition -Curatorial Rationale (300 words)	40%

The CS is a newly introduced curricular component within this incantation and offers space for students to research and compare artworks, counting for 20%. The CS moves DP VA students into analytical, interpretive, and culturally and historically situated scholarly territory, where students show evidence of textual and visual analysis, comparing artworks cognate to their own work in relation to subject, media, style, concepts and cultural contexts. Both SL and HL students offer commentary comparing three artworks by two different artists; while, at HL, students add three to five additional slides to reveal how their own artwork has been influenced by the artworks and artists selected.

The PP is similar in spirit to the former research/investigation workbooks (IWB) and counts for 40%, featuring DP VA students’ visual–textual inquiries. In the PP, students must share documented evidence of focused, self-directed visual, media, and conceptual experimentations and explorations over the 2-year course. At SL, students must show evidence of experimentation across two media; at HL, they must show evidence of experimentation across three media.

The EX follows a somewhat similar pattern to the former portfolio component and counts for 40%. DP VA students are required to select their own “resolved” artworks that show evidence of “technical accomplishment” and “understanding” of materials, ideas, and practices. SL exhibition students select four to seven resolved works and submit a curatorial rationale (400 words maximum) in which they justify their selections in relation to the focus taken up in their studio work and research inquiries. HL students may select eight to 11 resolved works. In the HL curatorial rationale, they are asked to justify their selections but also explain how they intend viewers to experience and understand their curatorial decisions in selecting and placed resolved works for exhibition display (700 words maximum) (Blaikie, 2025).

Moving Forward in DP VA (Updated Curriculum 2025)

IB has recently released updates to the DP VA curriculum, set to be first examined in 2027, with first implementation beginning in August 2025 (for the Northern Hemisphere) (IBO, n.d. a). While the curriculum retains its core structure of three components, it introduces significant developments, such as the addition of word counts to address the extensive writing requirements and a stronger emphasis on visual reflections and evidence of the art-making process. Additionally, the updates now provide clearer differentiation between Standard Level (SL) and Higher Level (HL) components, which many may see as a welcome change. Perhaps most notably, the curriculum encourages students to situate themselves and their artworks within their local experiences; an inclusive and culturally responsive approach that allows for greater personal interpretation and relevance. Within the upcoming curriculum, DP VA students will be examined as developing contemporary artists and consumers, more so than as art learners. They are required to work toward “technical proficiency and confidence as art-makers” (IBO, 2024b, para. 3) who must “experiment with and critically reflect upon a wide range of contemporary practices and media” (IBO, 2024b, para. 3) and “develop an appreciation for the expressive and aesthetic diversity in the world around them, becoming critically informed makers and consumers of visual culture” (IBO, 2024b, para. 4)

Assessment in DP VA

In the early iterations of DP VA assessments, senior DP VA examiners convened biannually for in-person grade award meetings. During these sessions, physical copies of Candidate Record Booklets (CRBs), prepared by individual schools and mailed to the examination center, were reviewed. Each CRB included selected photographs representing both curricular components of a student’s work. Using these CRBs, the chief and deputy chief examiners evaluated examiners’ grading standards, identifying and addressing discrepancies across the two curricular components (Blaikie, 1994a, p. 307). This process also involved comparing DP VA teachers’ predicted grades with the preliminary examination results. Examiners were provided feedback on their grading tendencies, highlighting whether their assessments were overly generous, overly harsh, or accurate. Additionally, senior examiners performed moderation by adjusting grades as necessary, taking into account all outlined factors, including the performance of visiting examiners. During this process, some examiners’ grading was identified as inconsistent, being either too lenient, too strict, or uneven. (Blaikie, 2025)

Global examination and grading standards are set by principal examiners (PEs) for each curricular component and level. For DP VA in the English language, there are six PEs across HL and SL and the three curricular components, for the French and Spanish contingents, creating up to 18 PEs globally. This can lead to uneven standards as each PE establishes their own exemplars for examiner training and standardization. For instance, an English HL PE selects exemplars ranging from weak to excellent, shaped by their epistemological and aesthetic perspectives. To improve standardization, past Head Examiner Fiona Blaikie suggested it would be beneficial for PEs across all languages and levels to collaborate on exemplar selection, with translation as

needed, fostering professional development, consistent student preparation, and stronger examiner training.

Balancing art education with standards-based assessment is challenging across global systems. Defining quality within curricular components remains contested. In large-scale assessments, curriculum developers align learning expectations with detailed assessment criteria, and clear descriptors strengthen achievement levels. For DP VA teachers, students, and examiners, a shared understanding of expectations is essential (Blaikie, 1994a, 1994b; Boughton et al., 1996).

A Digital Platform

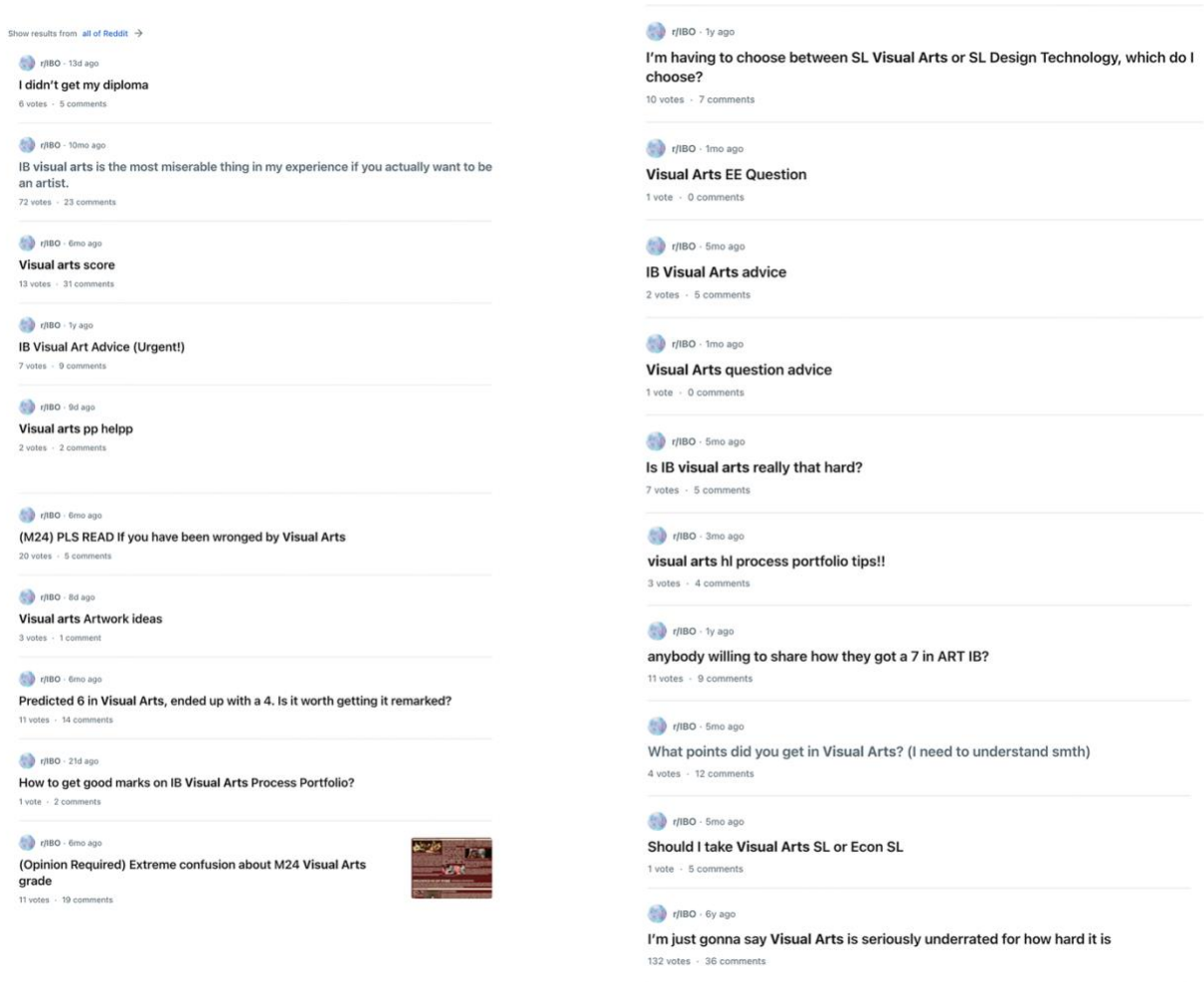
With the new curriculum beginning with examinations in 2016, assessment began using a fully digital platform. The first entirely online grade award took place for the northern hemisphere in June 2016. And since COVID, face to face meetings have been supplanted with online zoom meetings. (IB, Personal communication, 2025)

Blaikie (2025) shares that the move to digital was beneficial and efficient for the IB. Given the burgeoning IB global numbers with over 3,487 active DP schools, including DP teachers, examiners, and students engaged currently, it is understandably cost effective to have online access to the curriculum and curriculum resources, training, examination, and standardization procedures, however, Blaikie (2025) argues (and most DP VA teachers would agree) that it is limiting not being able to view studio work in person. Viewing students' work online does not offer a full sense of scale, techniques, use of materials, and thematic connections. Another concern with the digital updates is that the three curricular components (CS, PP and EX) are examined separately by individual examiners and not considered in relation to one another, as they were previously.

Appendix D: Online Forums discussing DP VA

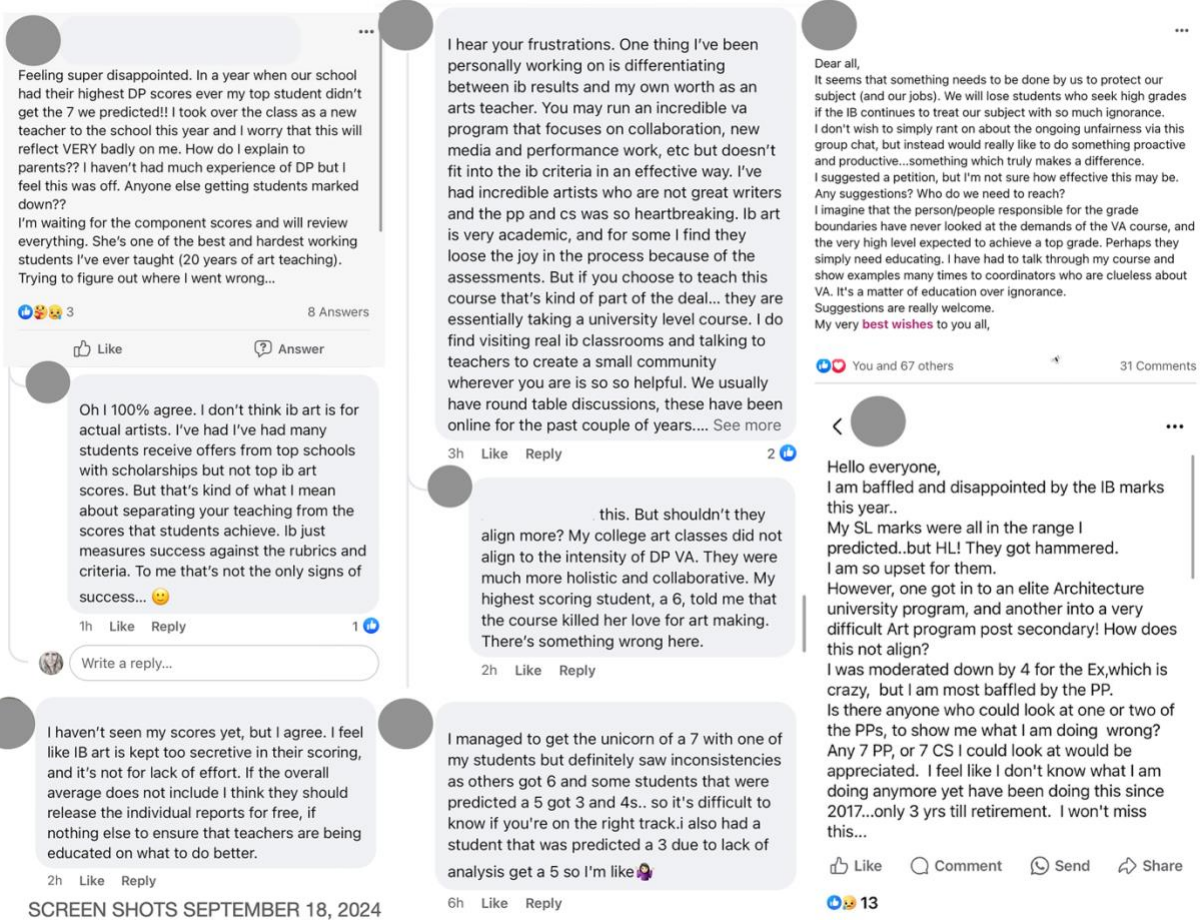
Screenshots from Online Forums (Figure 1: Reddit (posted by students) and Figures 2-8: Facebook (FB) Focused DP VA groups (posted by DP VA teachers))

Figure 1. Discussions about DP VA on Reddit, December 2024



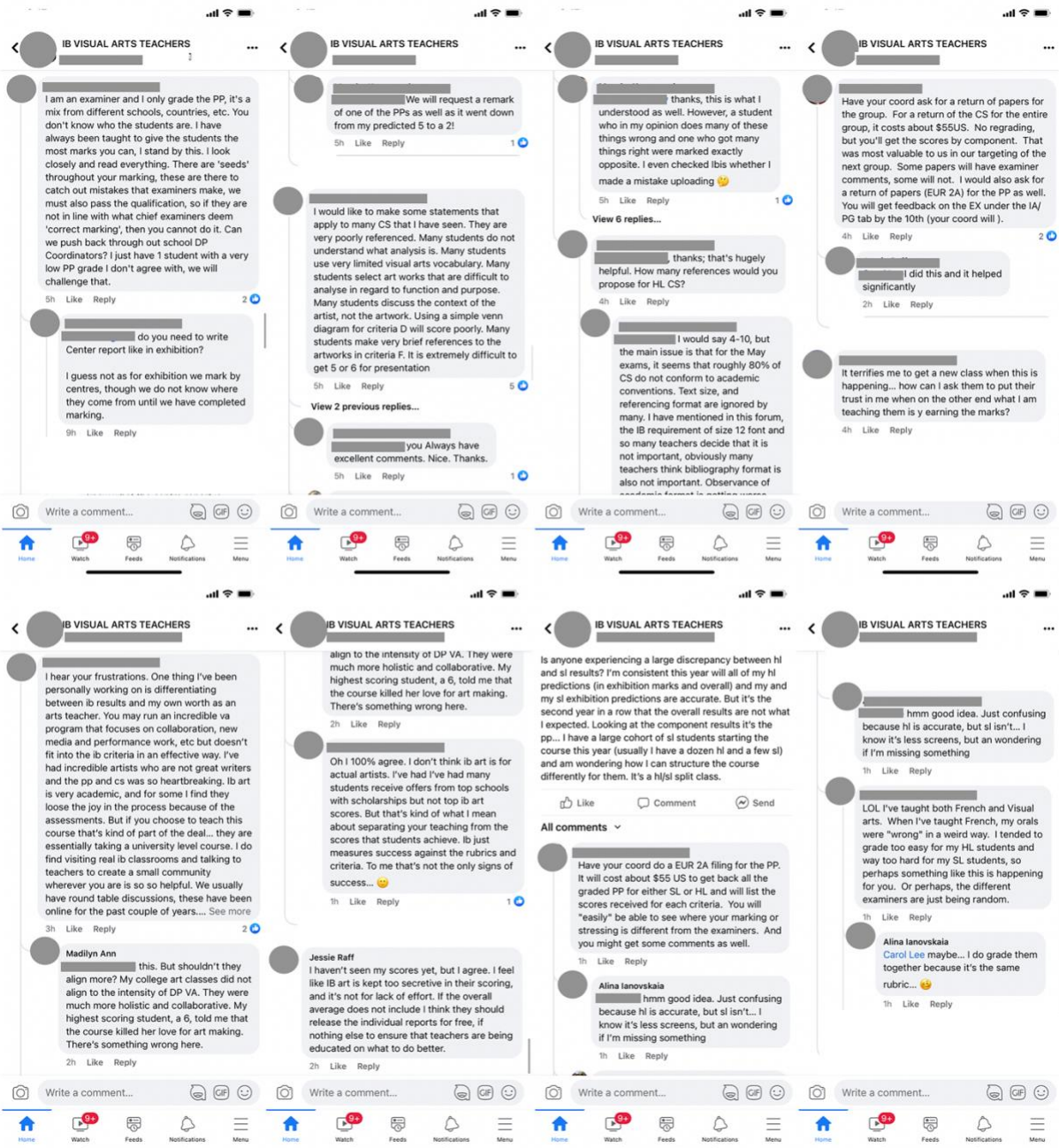
Note: Screenshots from Reddit (12/30/2024). List of chats about DP VA within (2023-2024) with subjects of chats listed; all posted by DP VA students discussing their final score for DP VA. Names and identifying comments removed to protect anonymity of Reddit public posters. Taken by Amy Atkinson, 12/30/2024.

Figure 2. Discussions about DP VA on FB DP VA teachers groups, September 2024



Note: Screenshots from Facebook DP VA Teachers group chat discussion about DP VA grading complexities. Names and identifying comments removed to protect anonymity of private FB group members. Taken by Amy Atkinson, 09/18/2024.

Figure 3. Discussions about DP VA on FB DP VA teachers groups, August 2024



Note: Screenshots from Facebook DP VA teachers group chat discussion about DP VA grading complexities. Names and identifying comments removed to protect anonymity of private FB group members, Amy Atkinson, 08, 2024.

Figure 4. Discussions about DP VA on FB DP VA teachers groups, August 2024

Looking for advice regarding the ib visual arts DP. Every year we receive conflicting reports back for the exhibition. We've never had an overall level 7 just high 6s. I'm struggling to understand what the examiners are actually looking for in exhibition. They keep mentioning they don't want to see a theme they rather a style?
Regarding the process portfolio which is the best way to score high in this. Any tips and advice would be much appreciated

1 Like 6 comments

Like Comment

I sometimes wonder if the examiners actually look or read the submission, all your candidates are marked by the same examiner if I am not wrong as after marking examiners are supposed to write a Center report, but the submission are all jumbled in order so they would not know until they have marked all to sort them into centres.

9h Like Reply

I predicted a 7 for a top student and she got a 5, I am pretty confused and upset.

8h Like Reply 1

same

8h Like Reply

Some observations.
So what do we think? Examiners getting stricter, or art students getting dumber??

World Average for May Exams taken from IBOP Statistical Bulletin

	SL Visual Arts	HL Visual Arts	World mean grade
2012	4.3	4.79	4.67
2013	4.5	4.84	4.7
2014	4.5	4.9	4.7
2015	4.5	4.9	4.7
2016 (New guide)	4.17	4.68	4.8
2017	4.17	4.65	4.81
2018	3.96	4.48	4.79
2019	3.76	4.25	4.76
2020	3.86	4.21	4.80

7 Like Comment

I think the latter. It seems that exam organisations simply don't want a high number of successful students as it might make them look too 'easy' rather than allow a higher number of students to truly succeed and get the grade they have actually deserved and earned.

10h Like Reply

I used to get many 7s with the comparative study of my students for years so I know the criteria well. Over the last two years suddenly the CS started getting the worse grades. Thank God they were getting good grades in the other two components so it was not affecting as much their overall grade. Has something changed dramatically that I am not aware of? Something is nor right. One student specifically we will ask for remark. I can share it and please let me know if that paper is worth a 4

8h Like Reply

I don't understand anymore what the IB wants. One of our school's star students received as much as 15 points lower than my prediction for her CS, while others got 14 points higher.
And for the PP I have students with as much as 16 points less than I predicted, where others stay pretty much the same as my prediction.
It feels SO completely random. How do we know as teachers what to teach these kids anymore?

18 Like Comment Send

All comments

Similar sentiments regarding CS

10h Like Reply

Same here. It is so disheartening

10h Like Reply

Yes we agree with you from our art dept in Sydney from the November sessions. So inconsistent and difficult.

10h Like Reply 1

It is very difficult to get a 7 in DP Art. 6 and 5 are really great scores! The average was around a 4-5 for students in years past.

3h Like Reply 5

I understand that but I feel like this student really did all the right 'IB' things. Research, connections, experiments, reviewed and refined her work.
I feel like the more experience I have the less I understand and worse I get. I stopped being an examiner for this very reason.

2h Like Reply

Note: Screenshots from Facebook DP VA teachers group chat discussion about DP VA grading complexities. Names and identifying comments removed to protect anonymity of private FB group members, Amy Atkinson, 08, 2024.

Figure 5. Discussions about DP VA on FB DP VA teachers groups, July 2024

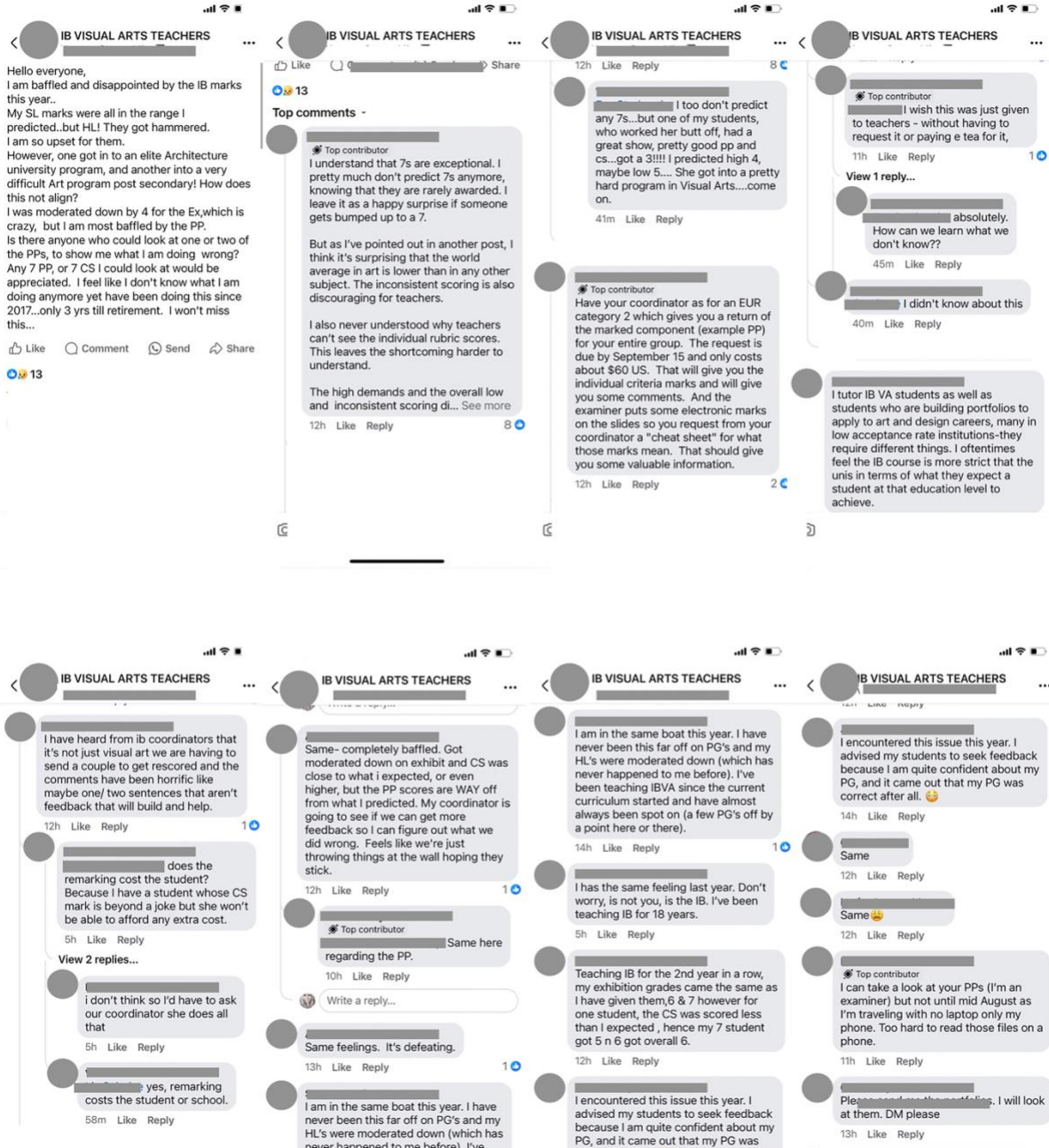
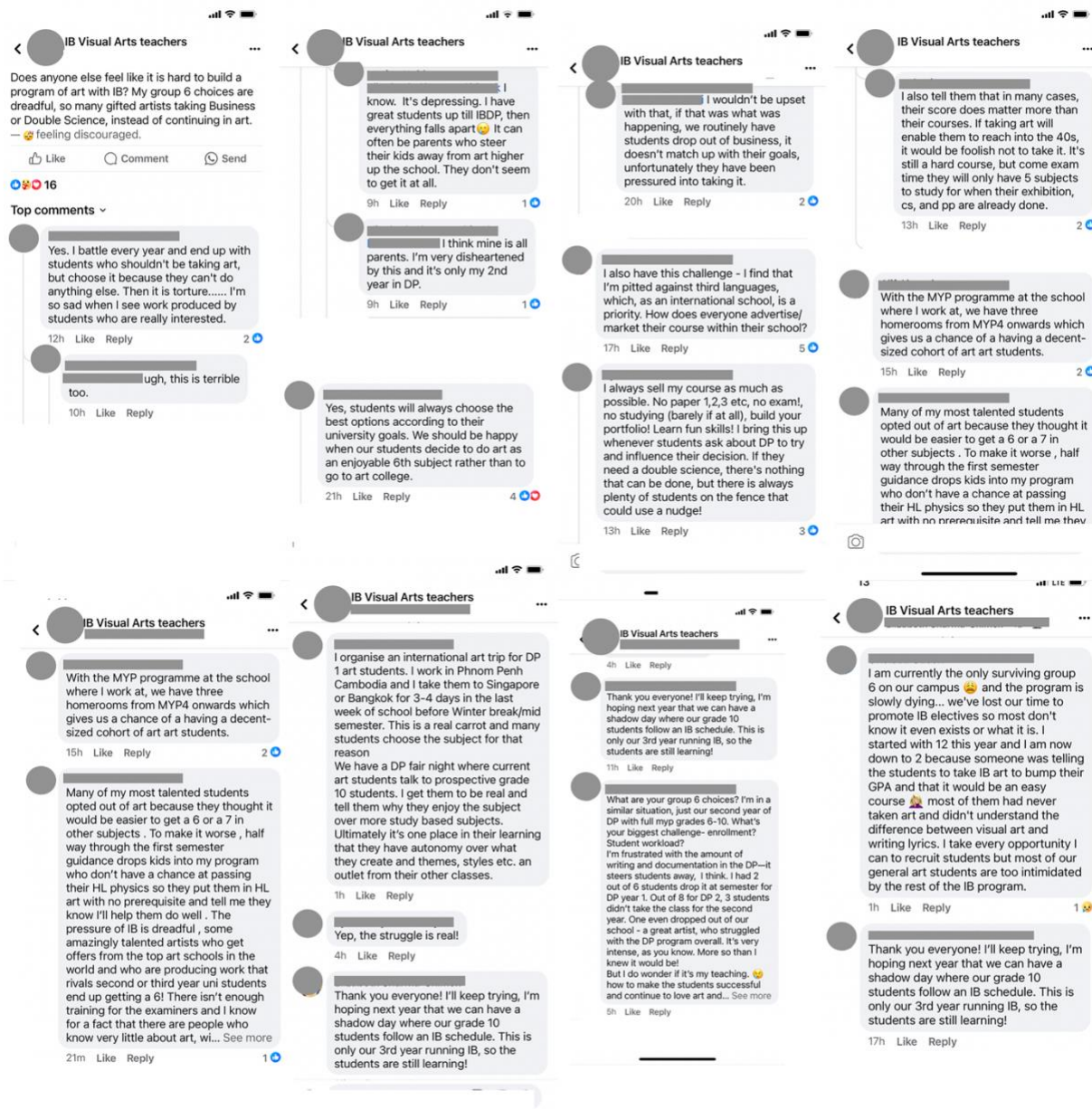
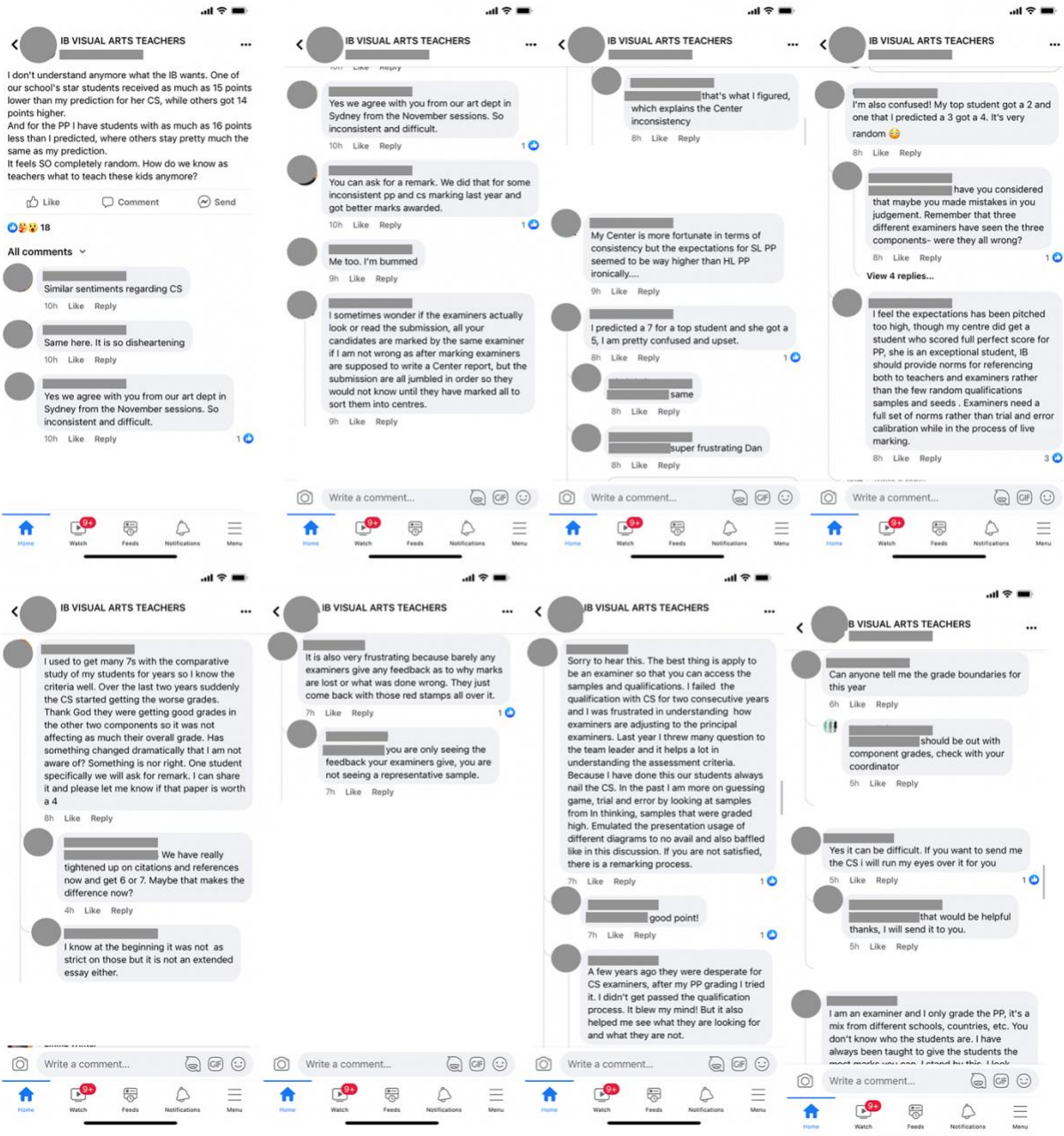


Figure 6. Discussions about DP VA on FB DP VA teachers groups, March 2024



Note: Screenshots from Facebook DP VA teachers group chat (08/2023) discussion about DP VA grading complexities. Names and identifying comments removed to protect anonymity of private FB group members, Amy Atkinson, 03, 2024.

Figure 7. Discussions about DP VA on FB DP VA teachers groups, August 2023



Note: Screenshots from Facebook DP VA teachers group chat (08/2023) discussion about DP VA grading complexities. Names and identifying comments removed to protect anonymity of private FB group members, Amy Atkinson, 08, 2023.

Figure 8. Discussions about DP VA on FB DP VA teachers groups, August 2023

IB VISUAL ARTS TEACHERS

May 2023 stats are out, and once again Visual Arts has the lowest GPA - only 3.8% of our HL students achieved a 7. Why do we continue to punish our students and drive them away from the creative arts?

Subject	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7
DANCE HL	361	4.83	2.5	12.5	23.3	32.3	19.0	10.2	
DANCE SL	436	4.32	4.0	32.5	21.0	19.6	15.8	7.9	
FILM HL	2145	4.51	0.7	6.0	10.0	28.8	27.6	18.1	4.7
FILM SL	1749	4.15	1.1	7.8	20.6	34.5	20.3	12.4	3.3
MUSIC HL	1405	4.78	0.2	2.1	13.9	23.8	30.9	21.4	7.7
MUSIC SL	1880	4.18	0.8	4.5	20.7	32.8	21.1	19.8	3.5
THEATRE HL	2306	5.00	0.4	1.0	7.9	34.9	38.2	26.7	10.3
THEATRE SL	1215	4.61	0.3	4.6	15.4	30.3	28.3	17.5	7.7
VISUAL ARTS HL	939	4.39	0.2	2.2	21.5	30.8	34.5	10.8	2.8
VISUAL ARTS SL	3442	4.01	0.3	3.5	24.5	41.8	18.1	7.7	1.1

Grade Distribution by Subject Group

Group	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7
Studies in Language and Literature	134,310	4.82	0.0	0.9	7.6	29.9	35.3	22.5	
Language acquisition	101,487	5.24	0.1	1.7	7.1	17.4	27.2	32.4	1
Individuals and societies	150,103	4.24	0.4	4.3	11.0	20.0	28.9	21.0	
Identities	130,408	4.38	1.3	9.2	20.1	23.9	21.8	15.8	
Mathematics	109,950	4.37	2.9	10.0	16.2	22.9	22.6	18.5	
The arts	27,910	4.38	0.4	4.2	18.7	32.3	24.0	15.1	
Interdisciplinary	20,315	4.20	1.4	8.2	22.4	25.7	23.8	13.1	
Total	679,762	4.67	0.9	5.3	13.1	24.6	27.5	21.6	

Accounting 27.4 48.3
 Additional Mathematics 44.5 73.5
 Art and Design 1.7 7.9
 Biology 36.1 56.2
 Business Studies 25.7 46.0
 Chemistry 35.0 57.1
 Combinational Science 18.2 40.6
 Computer Science 35.7 55.9
 Co-ordinated Sciences (Double) 39.6 59.0
 Economics 23.0 45.9
 English as a Second Language 13.4 37.8
 Environmental Management 17.6 36.3
 First Language English 9.5 30.4
 French 20.1 46.3
 Geography 17.1 40.7
 Global Perspectives 15.8 42.8
 Hindi as a Second Language 21.2 53.8
 History 22.1 46.4
 ICT 24.3 55.0
 International Mathematics 44.0 61.4
 Literature in English 29.4 59.4
 Mathematics 24.7 44.3
 Physics 38.5 55.2
 Spanish 29.9 48.9

Ally Ravenhall
 I am not convinced that humans grade our students work. I think that an algorithm is at work because the approach seems very arbitrary. The bell curve seems to be a trend and us creative people are wracking our brains each year trying to work out what we are doing wrong.

Heather Honeycutt
 them to improve and take the feedback seriously. As for the actual examiners - it's a crapshoot as IB is accepting examiners with home economics backgrounds and no art education background and only one year of teaching art experience. I had students who were mediocre get a 5 and students who were producing 3rd year university quality work also get a 5.

Paddy Kerr
 The current IB marking system is a joke but universities and other higher education institutions know this so they won't look just at a students grade but at their portfolio if they are applying for creative courses. That's what I tell my students. You have to shoot for the stars but keep your feet firmly on the ground. Statistically most students will get a 4 or a 5. This is the reality unfortunately.

Note: Screenshots from Facebook DP VA teachers group chat discussion about DP VA grading complexities. Names and identifying comments removed to protect anonymity of private FB group members, Amy Atkinson, 08, 2023.

Appendix E: Global Top IB Schools Ranking

Screen shot showing an example of ranking of Global Top IB Schools by Education Advisers

2024 Global IB School League Tables are now live! [Click here to view](#)

Best Schools | Summer Schools | Prep School | 6th Form | SEN | University Advice | +44 1622 813870 | Enquiry Form | info@educationadvisers.co.uk

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Global Top IB Schools

Education Advisers specialise in offering impartial advice and assistance on school placements, working with a number of schools both in the UK and worldwide.

[Click here](#) to watch a video by our Chairman, Les Webb, on factors to consider when choosing an international IB school. If you are interested in discussing this further, please complete this [enquiry form](#) for a free and no obligation video conference with Les or one of our experienced IB consultants.

2024 Results

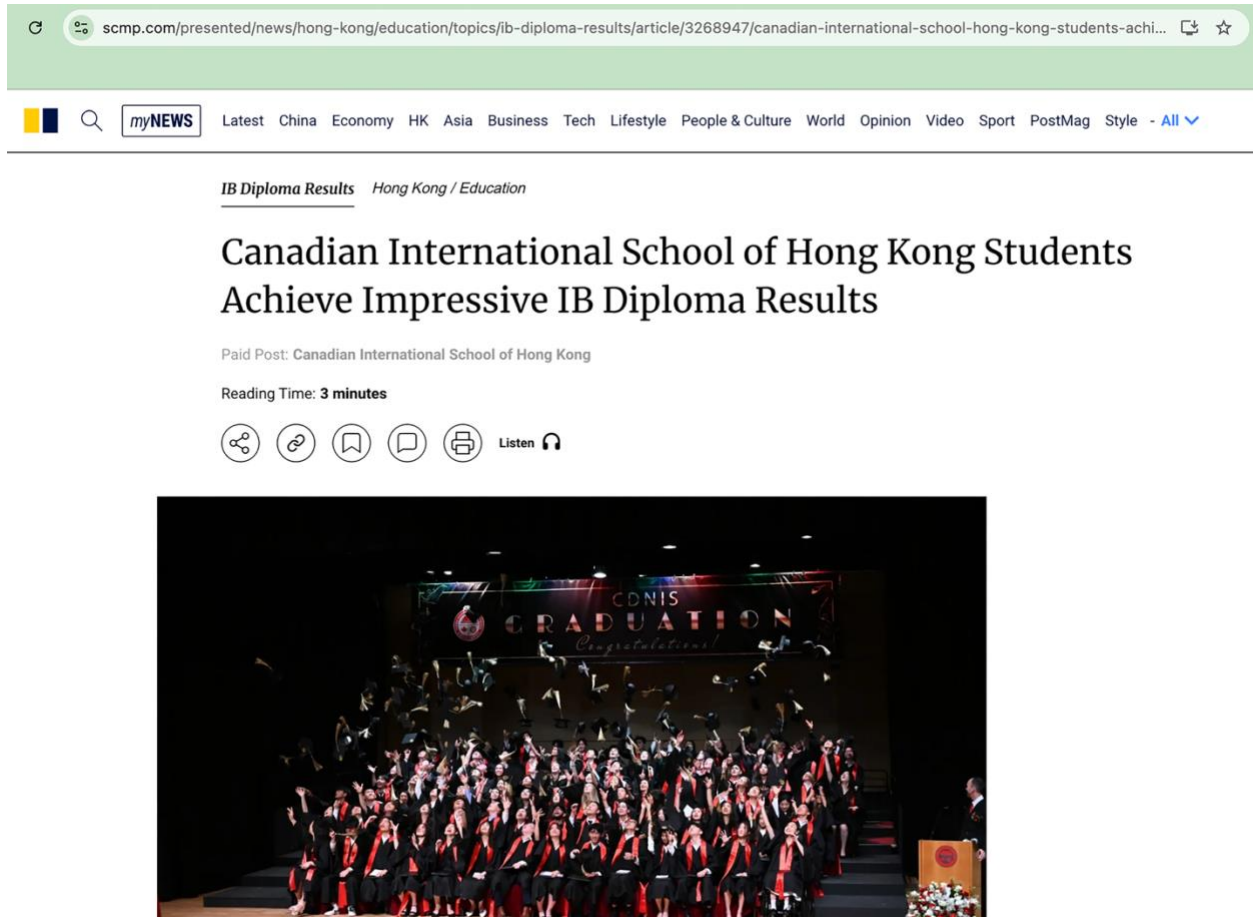
Search:

#	↑ ↓	Avg. Points	↑ ↓	Name	↑ ↓	Country	↑ ↓	Day/Board	↑ ↓	Boy/Girl	↑ ↓	Cohort Size	↑ ↓
1		43.0		Letovo School		Russian Federation		Both		Co-ed		29+	
28		38.4		Bombay International School		India		Day		Co-ed		43+	
=		38.4		Wellington College		United Kingdom		Both		Co-ed		117	
30		38.3		NPS International School		Singapore		Day		Co-ed			
=		38.3		Haileybury		United Kingdom		Both		Co-ed		57	
=		38.3		Brentwood School		United Kingdom		Both		Co-ed		30	
33		38.2		Canadian International School of Hong Kong		Hong Kong		Day		Co-ed		102+	
34		38.0		Victoria Shanghai Academy		Hong Kong		Day		Co-ed			

Note: Retrieved screenshot from ib-schools.com, Amy Atkinson 12/30/2024

Appendix F: News Post sharing DP results

Screenshot of South China Morning Post (SCMP) discussing 2024 DP results from CDNIS



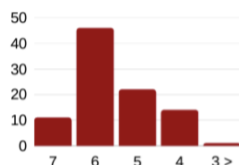
The screenshot shows a news article from the South China Morning Post (SCMP) website. The URL in the browser address bar is <https://www.scmp.com/presented/news/hong-kong/education/topics/ib-diploma-results/article/3268947/canadian-international-school-hong-kong-students-achi...>. The article is titled "Canadian International School of Hong Kong Students Achieve Impressive IB Diploma Results" and is categorized under "IB Diploma Results" and "Hong Kong / Education". It is a paid post from the Canadian International School of Hong Kong, with a reading time of 3 minutes. The article includes social sharing icons for WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Messenger, and Print, along with a "Listen" button. The main image shows a large group of graduates in black and red gowns celebrating on a stage during a graduation ceremony, with a banner in the background that reads "CDNIS GRADUATION Congratulations".

Note: Retrieved from South China Morning Post <https://www.scmp.com/presented/news/hong-kong/education/topics/ib-diploma-results/article/3268947/canadian-international-school-hong-kong-students-achieve-impressive-ib-diploma-results>, July 8, 2024

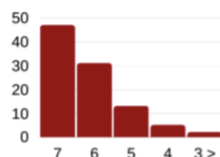
Appendix G: Marketing Pamphlet leveraging DP Results

Screen shot of a marketing pamphlet leveraging DP results, 2021

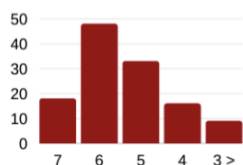
IB Score Distribution 2017 - 2020



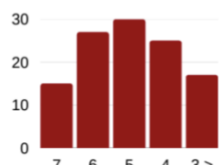
Language & Literature



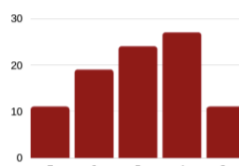
Language Acquisition



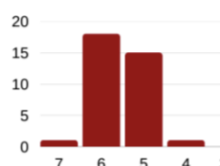
Individuals & Societies



Sciences



Mathematics



Arts

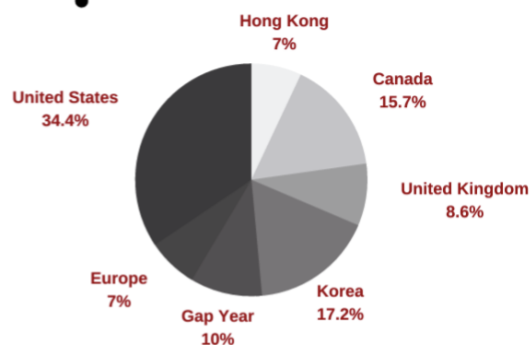
Statement of Impact on Class 2021

The 2020-21 school year commenced 10 August with 90% of students and 40% staff on campus (full school) using a blended model with substitute teachers supervising many lessons in person; we anticipate staff return throughout the semester and plan to resume full face-to-face learning by Semester 2 January 2021.

As of 1 September, 25 of 30 Grade 12 students were on campus. Only 12 of the 30 IB classes being taught to Class 2021 had returning teachers. 18 of the 30 classes have a new teacher most of whom are teaching remotely.



SIS University Matriculations 2018-2020



Class of 2020

IB Diploma Candidates
17

IB Diploma Earners
17

Bilingual Diploma
3

Highest Diploma Score
42

Average Subject Score
5.63

Average Diploma Score
36

Note: Retrieved from High School Profile 2020-2021, created by IB DP Co-ordinator Craig Ortnier for Shekou International School, 2020

Appendix H: Group 6 Grade Distributions

Compilation of Group 6 Grade Distributions 2016 to 2024, retrieved from IB DP & CP Statistical Bulletins 2016 to 2024

Figure 1. Group 6 Grade Distribution: 2016 May Examinations

Group 6	Candidates	Mean Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
DANCE - HL	299	5.1		2.4%	6.8%	19.6%	27.7%	32.1%	11.5%
DANCE - SL	300	4.12	0.4%	4.1%	19.4%	24.3%	20.9%	23.5%	7.5%
FILM - HL	2,172	4.19	0.2%	6.0%	18.7%	29.3%	28.6%	13.2%	4.0%
FILM - SL	1,085	3.96	0.4%	8.4%	23.0%	30.1%	24.6%	10.2%	3.4%
LIT AND PERF - SL	467	4.62		2.4%	14.9%	22.8%	32.7%	21.1%	6.1%
MUSIC - HL	1,222	4.37		1.3%	19.4%	29.3%	33.6%	12.6%	3.8%
MUSIC - SL	2,159	4.18	0.1%	1.2%	17.1%	37.3%	31.3%	11.9%	1.1%
THEATRE - HL	2,617	4.68	0.2%	3.0%	9.3%	25.1%	28.8%	23.2%	10.4%
THEATRE - SL	1,276	4.07	0.9%	5.7%	15.6%	33.9%	25.3%	13.7%	5.1%
VISUAL ARTS - HL	8,985	4.68	0.1%	2.1%	13.2%	24.6%	31.7%	20.7%	7.7%
VISUAL ARTS - SL	4,996	4.17	0.1%	4.8%	21.8%	29.2%	26.6%	13.4%	4.1%
Group 6 Total	25,578	4.58	0.1%	3.4%	16.2%	27.9%	29.4%	17.1%	5.9%

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Statistical Bulletin, 2016. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2016) The IB. Diploma Programme Statistical Bulletin, May 2016 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_x_dpYYY_stb_1605_1_e.pdf, p. 23

Figure 2. Grade Distribution by Subject Group and Group 6 Grade Distribution; : 2017 May Examinations

Grade Distribution by Subject Group										
Group	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7	
Studies in Language and Literature	111,355	5.00	0.01	0.56	5.80	23.74	38.54	25.50	5.85	
Language acquisition	89,521	5.27	0.11	1.42	6.99	16.86	26.00	34.91	13.71	
Individuals and societies	135,605	4.65	0.29	4.40	12.55	26.90	30.92	18.84	6.09	
Sciences	115,003	4.27	1.42	10.12	20.77	24.68	20.78	15.22	7.02	
Mathematics	96,775	4.41	1.65	10.01	16.49	23.16	23.61	16.83	8.25	
The arts	26,078	4.51	0.09	3.76	17.76	28.42	28.41	16.08	5.47	
Interdisciplinary	12,463	4.23	1.36	7.74	23.28	26.01	23.06	13.21	5.35	
Total	586,800	4.68	0.67	5.29	13.12	23.75	28.16	21.30	7.71	

The Arts Grade Distribution										
Subject	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7	
DANCE HL	359	5.03		1.45	9.88	22.67	27.91	26.74	11.34	
DANCE SL	333	4.51		4.39	22.88	20.69	25.71	21.63	4.70	
FILM HL	2,378	4.51		6.03	17.43	25.54	27.32	18.13	5.55	
FILM SL	1,140	4.26	0.19	6.98	21.79	28.40	27.08	11.13	4.43	
MUSIC HL	1,274	4.54		2.38	18.87	25.10	33.88	15.59	4.18	
MUSIC SL	2,151	4.33		2.60	18.96	36.89	27.24	12.59	1.71	
THEATRE HL	2,638	4.86	0.44	3.36	11.16	23.27	28.61	23.31	9.85	
THEATRE SL	1,343	4.45		4.61	16.89	33.85	24.24	14.00	6.41	
VISUALARTS HL	9,545	4.65	0.10	2.54	14.80	27.85	30.16	18.17	6.39	
VISUALARTS SL	4,917	4.17		5.31	26.02	30.38	26.12	9.30	2.87	

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Statistical Bulletin, 2017. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2017) The IB. Diploma Programme Statistical Bulletin, May 2016 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_x_dpYYY_stb_1705_1_e.pdf, p. 23

Figure 3. Grade Distribution by Subject Group and Group 6 Grade Distribution: 2018 May Examinations

Grade Distribution by Subject Group										
Group	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7	
Studies in Language and Literature	117,449	4.97	0.01	0.67	6.05	24.70	37.98	25.05	5.54	
Language acquisition	94,270	5.27	0.05	1.32	7.03	16.67	26.23	35.06	13.63	
Individuals and societies	142,717	4.62	0.26	4.05	13.41	27.78	30.44	18.09	5.97	
Sciences	118,842	4.28	1.26	9.99	20.83	24.58	21.15	14.82	7.37	
Mathematics	99,895	4.32	1.84	10.33	18.00	24.14	22.51	15.70	7.49	
The arts	27,842	4.39	0.20	4.79	20.24	28.59	27.00	14.63	4.55	
Interdisciplinary	14,059	4.18	1.22	9.26	22.34	26.00	24.44	12.29	4.44	
Total	615,074	4.66	0.65	5.30	13.69	24.26	27.87	20.74	7.49	

The Arts Grade Distribution										
Subject	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7	
DANCE HL	368	4.97		1.12	8.12	23.81	33.61	26.05	7.28	
DANCE SL	344	4.36		3.28	26.57	28.06	20.60	16.12	5.37	
FILM HL	2,709	4.46	0.42	5.98	18.30	27.12	25.74	15.57	6.87	
FILM SL	1,301	3.95	0.90	9.77	27.59	28.82	22.91	7.88	2.13	
MUSIC HL	1,450	4.62		3.30	16.74	23.92	33.33	16.02	6.68	
MUSIC SL	2,306	4.42	0.05	2.39	18.23	34.66	26.26	16.06	2.35	
THEATRE HL	2,821	4.88	0.15	3.10	10.71	24.45	27.51	23.96	10.12	
THEATRE SL	1,310	4.28	0.97	7.56	18.91	29.93	25.74	11.10	5.79	
VISUAL ARTS HL	9,883	4.48	0.09	3.17	18.60	28.73	29.41	15.83	4.17	
VISUAL ARTS SL	5,350	3.96	0.10	8.05	30.16	29.85	22.69	7.56	1.58	

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Statistical Bulletin, 2018. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2018) The IB. Diploma Programme Statistical Bulletin, May 2016 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_x_dpyyy_stb_1805_1_e.pdf, p. 24

Figure 4. Grade Distribution by Subject Group and Group 6 Grade Distribution: 2019 May Examinations

Grade Distribution by Subject Group										
Group	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7	
Studies in Language and Literature	121,652	4.96	0.0	0.9	6.5	24.8	37.1	25.0	5.6	
Language acquisition	96,574	5.26	0.1	1.4	7.1	17.0	25.8	35.3	13.4	
Individuals and societies	145,087	4.63	0.3	4.0	12.6	28.7	30.0	18.4	6.0	
Sciences	121,894	4.28	1.3	10.3	20.7	24.0	21.1	15.5	7.1	
Mathematics	103,186	4.26	2.3	11.3	17.9	23.5	23.3	15.0	6.8	
The arts	28,053	4.30	0.2	5.8	22.3	28.9	25.1	13.9	3.9	
Interdisciplinary	14,970	4.18	1.7	7.8	23.9	25.7	23.9	12.0	5.0	
Total	631,416	4.64	0.8	5.6	13.7	24.3	27.5	20.8	7.3	

The Arts Grade Distribution									
Subject	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7
DANCE HL	364	4.80		2.5	11.3	25.2	32.9	20.7	7.4
DANCE SL	282	4.23		4.5	32.8	23.1	18.7	16.8	4.1
FILM HL	2,603	4.40	0.3	6.3	15.3	31.3	29.1	13.8	3.9
FILM SL	1,353	4.09	0.4	8.6	21.8	36.5	19.2	10.8	2.7
MUSIC HL	1,403	4.71	0.1	3.2	17.3	22.2	28.5	19.9	8.7
MUSIC SL	2,308	4.66	0.3	1.6	13.8	30.9	27.5	21.9	4.1
THEATRE HL	2,658	4.88	0.3	3.0	10.6	24.3	27.6	24.8	9.4
THEATRE SL	1,319	4.46	0.8	7.4	14.5	29.3	25.8	14.5	7.7
VISUAL ARTS HL	10,201	4.27	0.1	4.8	23.8	29.5	26.2	12.9	2.7
VISUAL ARTS SL	5,562	3.77	0.3	10.5	35.2	28.3	19.2	5.6	1.1

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Statistical Bulletin, 2019. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2019) The IB. Diploma Programme Statistical Bulletin, May 2016 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_x_dpyyy_stb_1905_1_e.pdf, p. 1

Figure 5. Grade Distribution by Subject Group and Group 6 Grade Distribution:2020 May Examinations

Grade Distribution by Subject Group									
Group	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7
Studies in Language and Literature	124,580	5.21	0.0	0.4	4.5	20.6	34.4	28.5	11.7
Language acquisition	98,486	5.43	0.0	0.9	6.1	15.8	23.6	32.5	21.0
Individuals and societies	148,789	4.96	0.1	2.2	8.8	25.3	28.9	23.5	11.2
Sciences	124,593	4.68	0.5	4.3	16.6	23.9	24.8	19.3	10.6
Mathematics	103,914	4.72	0.9	4.3	11.5	25.2	30.0	19.4	8.7
The arts	28,146	4.33	0.2	5.6	20.6	29.5	27.0	13.0	4.0
Interdisciplinary	16,516	4.37	0.8	6.3	22.2	23.2	26.7	14.5	6.3
Total	645,024	4.95	0.3	2.6	10.3	22.8	28.4	23.7	11.9

The Arts Grade Distribution									
Subject	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7
DANCE HL	380	4.62		4.5	15.8	25.6	27.9	19.4	6.8
DANCE SL	448	4.15	0.3	2.3	36.9	25.0	18.0	13.4	4.1
FILM HL	2,829	4.35	0.4	6.7	17.0	31.2	27.6	12.6	4.5
FILM SL	1,421	3.99	0.8	11.9	22.5	32.5	19.1	10.8	2.5
MUSIC HL	1,301	4.93		1.6	10.5	20.9	35.9	22.5	8.5
MUSIC SL	2,128	4.95	0.1	1.6	9.6	19.0	37.5	25.3	6.7
THEATRE HL	2,448	4.89	0.1	2.2	8.7	26.8	30.1	23.9	8.3
THEATRE PILOT HL	238	5.61			2.6	12.8	31.5	27.7	25.5
THEATRE PILOT SL	52	5.47			2.0	22.4	20.4	36.7	18.4
THEATRE SL	1,107	4.56	0.5	4.2	12.9	32.4	28.1	15.2	6.7
VISUAL ARTS HL	10,210	4.21	0.2	5.9	22.5	31.0	27.6	10.3	2.6
VISUAL ARTS SL	5,584	3.85	0.1	8.0	32.3	33.5	19.8	5.1	1.2

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Statistical Bulletin, 2020. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2020) The IB. Diploma Programme Statistical Bulletin, May 2020 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_x_dpyyy_stb_2005_1_e.pdf, p. 17

Figure 6. Grade Distribution by Subject Group and Group 6 Grade Distribution: 2021 May Examinations

Grade Distribution by Subject Group										
Group	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7	
Studies in Language and Literature	124,604	5.25	0.0	0.4	4.4	19.4	33.5	30.0	12.2	
Language acquisition	98,321	5.61	0.1	0.7	4.4	13.2	22.5	32.5	26.6	
Individuals and societies	148,835	5.23	0.1	1.5	6.0	20.2	28.9	26.7	16.5	
Sciences	124,892	5.04	0.2	2.2	11.4	21.1	26.2	22.5	16.5	
Mathematics	100,323	5.08	0.3	1.8	8.8	22.3	28.2	22.3	16.2	
The arts	27,041	4.65	0.1	2.1	15.1	29.3	29.4	17.2	6.9	
Interdisciplinary	16,561	4.72	0.6	3.9	15.3	23.9	27.1	18.5	10.8	
Total	640,577	5.20	0.1	1.5	7.5	19.9	28.1	26.2	16.6	

The Arts Grade Distribution										
Subject	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7	
DANCE HL	392	5.08	0.5	8.1	20.8	34.4	26.3	9.9		
DANCE SL	407	4.58	1.7	24.8	24.5	20.1	21.2	7.8		
FILM HL	2,731	4.65	0.1	4.0	12.7	28.2	31.6	16.0	7.4	
FILM SL	1,376	4.53	7.3	18.0	21.8	26.6	19.9	6.4		
MUSIC HL	1,303	5.06	0.1	1.1	9.0	21.6	31.5	24.7	12.0	
MUSIC SL	2,061	4.88	0.1	1.2	9.9	28.1	29.6	22.6	8.5	
THEATRE HL	2,453	5.25	0.1	0.8	4.6	18.5	34.0	28.3	13.6	
THEATRE SL	1,207	5.01	0.3	1.1	7.6	27.0	27.8	24.3	11.9	
VISUAL ARTS HL	9,808	4.56	0.1	1.6	17.2	30.9	29.1	15.4	5.7	
VISUAL ARTS SL	5,303	4.24	0.2	2.3	21.7	37.8	27.2	8.5	2.2	

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Statistical Bulletin, 2021. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2021) The IB. Diploma Programme Statistical Bulletin, May 2021 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_x_dpYYY_stb_2107_2_e.pdf, p. 20

Figure 7. Grade Distribution by Subject Group and Group 6 Grade Distribution: 2022 May Examinations

Grade Distribution by Subject Group										
Group	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7	
Studies in Language and Literature	130,698	5.08	0.0	0.7	5.5	23.6	33.8	28.4	8.1	
Language acquisition	99,620	5.39	0.1	1.6	6.1	15.7	24.9	31.4	20.2	
Individuals and societies	153,128	5.00	0.2	2.2	9.2	22.1	29.8	25.1	11.5	
Sciences	127,972	4.75	0.5	5.2	14.2	24.5	23.2	19.1	13.3	
Mathematics	104,260	4.80	0.9	4.4	12.7	23.2	26.5	20.0	12.4	
The arts	26,731	4.50	0.3	3.7	17.0	30.2	27.4	16.0	5.4	
Interdisciplinary	18,151	4.47	1.1	5.1	19.2	24.5	27.5	15.2	7.4	
Total	660,560	4.96	0.3	2.9	10.1	22.4	27.9	24.1	12.3	

Subject	The Arts Grade Distribution								
	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7
DANCE HL	432	4.89	0.7	11.7	25.1	30.4	24.6	7.4	
DANCE SL	428	4.39	2.7	26.4	27.3	21.8	16.1	5.8	
FILM HL	2,676	4.55	0.4	4.9	13.6	30.2	27.9	17.6	5.5
FILM SL	1,444	4.35	0.4	8.4	16.1	28.3	29.1	12.7	4.9
MUSIC HL	1,580	5.03	0.1	1.7	8.3	22.0	30.9	26.3	10.7
MUSIC SL	1,615	4.71	0.8	3.1	9.9	28.8	31.4	20.0	6.0
THEATRE HL	2,192	4.96	0.6	1.9	8.9	23.7	30.2	24.1	10.7
THEATRE PILOT HL	224	5.77			2.2	9.8	24.6	35.7	27.7
THEATRE PILOT SL	42	5.88				11.9	19.0	38.1	31.0
THEATRE SL	1,088	4.64	0.6	4.5	13.0	28.6	26.9	18.5	8.0
VISUAL ARTS HL	9,543	4.44	0.2	2.9	20.0	30.0	27.7	14.9	4.4
VISUAL ARTS SL	5,467	4.11	0.2	5.2	22.9	38.6	23.3	8.1	1.6

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Statistical Bulletin, 2022. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2022) The IB. Diploma Programme Statistical Bulletin, May 2022 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_x_dpyyy_stb_2207_2_e.pdf, p. 27

Figure 8. Grade Distribution by Subject Group and Group 6 Grade Distribution: 2023 May Examinations

Group	Grade Distribution by Subject Group								
	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7
Studies in Language and Literature	134,004	4.83	0.0	0.9	7.6	29.7	35.2	22.7	3.9
Language acquisition	101,462	5.24	0.1	1.7	7.1	17.4	27.1	32.4	14.3
Individuals and societies	159,100	4.74	0.4	4.2	11.4	24.9	29.8	21.6	7.6
Sciences	130,405	4.35	1.3	9.2	20.0	23.8	21.8	15.7	8.2
Mathematics	106,946	4.37	2.9	10.0	16.2	22.9	22.6	16.6	8.8
The arts	27,509	4.38	0.4	4.3	19.7	32.1	23.9	15.2	4.5
Interdisciplinary	20,315	4.24	1.5	8.2	22.3	25.7	23.7	13.2	5.5
Total	679,741	4.67	0.9	5.2	13.0	24.5	27.4	21.0	8.0

Subject	The Arts Grade Distribution								
	Candidates	Mean Grade	% 1	% 2	% 3	% 4	% 5	% 6	% 7
DANCE HL	361	4.84	2.3	12.7	23.5	31.7	19.5	10.2	
DANCE SL	436	4.34	4.0	32.3	20.6	19.9	15.9	7.4	
FILM HL	2,645	4.52	0.7	6.0	12.7	29.8	27.8	18.1	4.9
FILM SL	1,749	4.16	1.2	7.8	20.6	34.2	20.2	12.7	3.3
MUSIC HL	1,401	4.80	0.2	2.1	13.9	23.3	30.7	21.5	8.3
MUSIC SL	1,665	4.16	0.6	4.5	26.5	33.0	21.1	10.5	3.9
THEATRE HL	2,305	5.00	0.4	2.1	7.7	24.7	28.0	26.2	11.0
THEATRE SL	1,215	4.57	0.4	4.8	14.6	30.1	25.7	16.9	7.6
VISUAL ARTS HL	9,890	4.40	0.3	3.3	21.4	30.4	24.5	16.0	4.0
VISUAL ARTS SL	5,842	4.02	0.3	5.5	24.5	41.8	19.1	7.8	1.1

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Statistical Bulletin, 2023. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2023) The IB. Diploma Programme Statistical Bulletin, May 2023 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_x_dpyyy_stb_2308_2_e.pdf, p. 27

Figure 9. Grade Distribution by Subject Group and Group 6 Grade Distribution:

Grade distribution by subject group										
Subject group	Students	Mean grade	%N	%1	%2	%3	%4	%5	%6	%7
STUDIES IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE	142,480	4.8	2.2	0.1	1.1	7.5	28.1	36.2	21.4	3.5
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION	107,262	5.2	1.5	0.1	1.4	7.0	17.7	27.5	31.0	13.8
INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETIES	169,058	4.8	2.7	0.4	3.8	11.0	24.2	29.0	21.4	7.5
SCIENCES	139,132	4.4	2.2	1.3	8.3	19.2	23.5	20.3	15.6	9.6
MATHEMATICS	112,532	4.4	2.1	2.6	9.5	16.1	22.8	22.5	16.2	8.2
THE ARTS	28,985	4.3	4.6	0.3	4.4	20.1	31.5	23.0	12.6	3.5
INTERDISCIPLINARY	21,612	4.2	3.2	1.5	8.1	21.8	25.2	23.6	11.7	4.8
Total	721,061	4.7	2.3	0.8	4.8	12.8	24.0	27.1	20.3	7.9

The arts grade distribution										
Subject	Students	Mean grade	%N	%1	%2	%3	%4	%5	%6	%7
DANCE HL	392	4.6	2.6		1.8	17.6	28.3	23.5	19.6	6.6
DANCE SL	461	4.2	9.8	0.2	8.2	23.0	20.4	19.7	14.5	4.1
FILM HL	2,822	4.5	6.6	0.4	3.8	14.2	30.7	25.4	15.3	3.6
FILM SL	1,947	4.1	10.2	1.3	6.6	21.0	29.7	17.8	10.5	2.9
MUSIC HL	1,377	4.8	3.1	0.1	1.7	9.4	24.5	34.2	20.9	6.2
MUSIC SL	1,697	4.3	7.5	0.1	4.0	20.0	32.0	22.5	10.5	3.5
THEATRE HL	2,400	5.0	3.9	0.3	2.5	9.9	19.4	27.4	24.1	12.5
THEATRE SL	1,312	4.6	4.5	0.6	4.0	16.5	24.5	26.4	15.9	7.5
VISUAL ARTS HL	10,468	4.3	2.7	0.2	3.2	23.6	31.5	24.7	12.2	2.0
VISUAL ARTS SL	6,109	3.9	4.6	0.4	7.3	23.8	41.1	16.3	5.8	0.7

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Statistical Bulletin, 2024 .International Baccalaureate Organization. (2024) The IB. Diploma Programme Statistical Bulletin, May 2024 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_x_dpyyy_stb_2407_2_e.pdf, p. 28

Appendix I: DP VA Subject Grade Boundaries

Compilation of DP VA Subject Grade Boundaries 2016 to 2024, retrieved from DP VA Grade Boundaries 2016 to 2024.

Figure 1. DP VA Grade Boundaries: 2016 May Examinations

Subject: **VISUAL ARTS** Lvl: **HL** Subject Option: **VISUAL ARTS** Timezone: **0**

COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL		
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To
1	0	5	1	0	4	1	0	4	1	0	12
2	6	11	2	5	8	2	5	9	2	13	26
3	12	17	3	9	13	3	10	13	3	27	41
4	18	23	4	14	17	4	14	18	4	42	55
5	24	29	5	18	22	5	19	24	5	56	71
6	30	35	6	23	26	6	25	29	6	72	85
7	36	42	7	27	30	7	30	34	7	86	100

Subject: **VISUAL ARTS** Lvl: **SL** Subject Option: **VISUAL ARTS** Timezone: **0**

COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL		
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To
1	0	4	1	0	4	1	0	3	1	0	12
2	5	9	2	5	8	2	4	8	2	13	26
3	10	14	3	9	13	3	9	12	3	27	41
4	15	18	4	14	17	4	13	17	4	42	55
5	19	22	5	18	22	5	18	23	5	56	71
6	23	26	6	23	26	6	24	28	6	72	85
7	27	30	7	27	30	7	29	34	7	86	100

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Grade Boundaries, 2016. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2016) The IB Diploma Programme Grade Boundaries, May 2016 Examination Session, <https://resources.ibo.org/dp/topic/Grade-boundaries/?lang=en>

Figure 2. DP VA Grade Boundaries: 2017 May Examinations

Subject: **VISUAL ARTS** Level: **HL** Subject option: **VISUAL ARTS** Timezone: **0**

COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL		
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To
1	0	5	1	0	4	1	0	4	1	0	12
2	6	11	2	5	8	2	5	8	2	13	25
3	12	17	3	9	13	3	9	12	3	26	40
4	18	23	4	14	17	4	13	17	4	41	54
5	24	29	5	18	22	5	18	23	5	55	70
6	30	35	6	23	26	6	24	28	6	71	84
7	36	42	7	27	30	7	29	34	7	85	100

Subject: **VISUAL ARTS** Level: **SL** Subject option: **VISUAL ARTS** Timezone: **0**

COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL		
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To
1	0	4	1	0	4	1	0	3	1	0	12
2	5	9	2	5	8	2	4	7	2	13	25
3	10	14	3	9	13	3	8	11	3	26	40
4	15	18	4	14	17	4	12	16	4	41	53
5	19	22	5	18	22	5	17	22	5	54	70
6	23	26	6	23	26	6	23	27	6	71	84
7	27	30	7	27	30	7	28	34	7	85	100

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Grade Boundaries, 2017. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2017) The IB. Diploma Programme Grade Boundaries, May 2017 Examination Session, <https://resources.ibo.org/dp/topic/Grade-boundaries/?lang=en>

Figure 3. DP VA Grade Boundaries: 2018 May Examinations

Subject: VISUAL ARTS												Level: HL			Subject option: VISUAL ARTS			Timezone: 0		
COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL											
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To									
1	0	5	1	0	4	1	0	4	1	0	12									
2	6	11	2	5	8	2	5	8	2	13	25									
3	12	17	3	9	13	3	9	12	3	26	40									
4	18	23	4	14	17	4	13	17	4	41	54									
5	24	29	5	18	22	5	18	23	5	55	70									
6	30	35	6	23	26	6	24	28	6	71	84									
7	36	42	7	27	30	7	29	34	7	85	100									

Subject: VISUAL ARTS												Level: SL			Subject option: VISUAL ARTS			Timezone: 0		
COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL											
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To									
1	0	4	1	0	4	1	0	3	1	0	12									
2	5	9	2	5	8	2	4	7	2	13	25									
3	10	14	3	9	13	3	8	11	3	26	40									
4	15	18	4	14	17	4	12	16	4	41	53									
5	19	22	5	18	22	5	17	22	5	54	70									
6	23	26	6	23	26	6	23	27	6	71	84									
7	27	30	7	27	30	7	28	34	7	85	100									

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Grade Boundaries, 2018. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2018) The IB. Diploma Programme Grade Boundaries, May 2018 Examination Session, <https://resources.ibo.org/dp/topic/Grade-boundaries/?lang=en>

Figure 4. DP VA Grade Boundaries: 2019 May Examinations

Subject: VISUAL ARTS												Level: HL			Subject option: VISUAL ARTS			Timezone: 0		
COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL											
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To									
1	0	5	1	0	4	1	0	4	1	0	12									
2	6	11	2	5	8	2	5	8	2	13	25									
3	12	17	3	9	13	3	9	12	3	26	40									
4	18	23	4	14	17	4	13	17	4	41	54									
5	24	29	5	18	22	5	18	23	5	55	70									
6	30	35	6	23	26	6	24	28	6	71	84									
7	36	42	7	27	30	7	29	34	7	85	100									

Subject: VISUAL ARTS												Level: SL			Subject option: VISUAL ARTS			Timezone: 0		
COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL											
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To									
1	0	4	1	0	4	1	0	3	1	0	12									
2	5	9	2	5	8	2	4	7	2	13	25									
3	10	14	3	9	13	3	8	11	3	26	40									
4	15	18	4	14	17	4	12	16	4	41	53									
5	19	22	5	18	22	5	17	22	5	54	70									
6	23	26	6	23	26	6	23	27	6	71	84									
7	27	30	7	27	30	7	28	34	7	85	100									

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Grade Boundaries, 2019. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2019) The IB. Diploma Programme Grade Boundaries for Diploma Programme Coordinators, May 2019 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_0_dpyyy_eas_1905_1m_e.pdf. p. 36.

Figure 5. DP VA Grade Boundaries: 2020 May Examinations

COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL		
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To
1	0	5	1	0	3	1	0	4	1	0	11
2	6	11	2	4	7	2	5	8	2	12	24
3	12	17	3	8	12	3	9	12	3	25	38
4	18	23	4	13	16	4	13	17	4	39	52
5	24	29	5	17	21	5	18	23	5	53	69
6	30	35	6	22	25	6	24	28	6	70	83
7	36	42	7	26	30	7	29	34	7	84	100

COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL		
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To
1	0	4	1	0	3	1	0	3	1	0	10
2	5	9	2	4	7	2	4	7	2	11	24
3	10	14	3	8	12	3	8	11	3	25	38
4	15	18	4	13	16	4	12	16	4	39	52
5	19	22	5	17	21	5	17	22	5	53	69
6	23	26	6	22	25	6	23	27	6	70	82
7	27	30	7	26	30	7	28	34	7	83	100

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Grade Boundaries, 2020. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2020) The IB. Diploma Programme Grade Boundaries for Diploma Programme Coordinators, May 2020 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_0_dpyyy_eas_2005_1m_e.pdf, p. 36.

Figure 6. DP VA Grade Boundaries: 2021 May Examinations

FINAL		
Grade	From	To
1	0	7
2	8	17
3	18	33
4	34	47
5	48	62
6	63	76
7	77	100

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Grade Boundaries, 2021. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2021) The IB. Diploma Programme Grade Boundaries for Diploma Programme Coordinators, May 2021 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_0_dpyyy_eas_2107_1e_e.pdf, p. 33.

Figure 7. DP VA Grade Boundaries: 2022 May Examinations

Subject: VISUAL ARTS			Level: HL			Subject option: VISUAL ARTS			Timezone: 0		
FINAL											
Grade	From			To							
1	0			9							
2	10			20							
3	21			36							
4	37			50							
5	51			64							
6	65			78							
7	79			100							

Subject: VISUAL ARTS			Level: SL			Subject option: VISUAL ARTS			Timezone: 0		
FINAL											
Grade	From			To							
1	0			10							
2	11			21							
3	22			33							
4	34			48							
5	49			64							
6	65			79							
7	80			100							

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Grade Boundaries, 2022. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2022) The IB. Diploma Programme Grade Boundaries for Diploma Programme Coordinators, May 2022 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_0_dpyyy_eas_2207_2m_e.pdf. p. 42.

Figure 8. DP VA Grade Boundaries: 2023 May Examinations

Subject: VISUAL ARTS			Level: HL			Subject option: VISUAL ARTS			Timezone: 0		
COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL		
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To
1	0	5	1	0	3	1	0	3	1	0	10
2	6	11	2	4	6	2	4	7	2	11	21
3	12	17	3	7	12	3	8	12	3	22	38
4	18	23	4	13	16	4	13	17	4	39	52
5	24	29	5	17	20	5	18	21	5	53	65
6	30	35	6	21	24	6	22	27	6	66	80
7	36	42	7	25	30	7	28	34	7	81	100

Subject: VISUAL ARTS			Level: SL			Subject option: VISUAL ARTS			Timezone: 0		
COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL		
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To
1	0	4	1	0	3	1	0	3	1	0	10
2	5	9	2	4	6	2	4	6	2	11	21
3	10	14	3	7	10	3	7	9	3	22	33
4	15	18	4	11	15	4	10	15	4	34	50
5	19	22	5	16	19	5	16	20	5	51	64
6	23	26	6	20	24	6	21	26	6	65	80
7	27	30	7	25	30	7	27	34	7	81	100

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Grade Boundaries, 2023. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2023) The IB. Diploma Programme Grade Boundaries for Diploma Programme Coordinators, May 2023 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_0_dpyyy_eas_2307_1e_e.pdf. p. 41.

Figure 9. DP VA Grade Boundaries: 2024 May Examinations

Subject: **VISUAL ARTS** Level: **HL** Subject option: **VISUAL ARTS** Timezone: **0**

COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL		
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To
1	0	5	1	0	3	1	0	3	1	0	10
2	6	11	2	4	6	2	4	7	2	11	21
3	12	17	3	7	12	3	8	12	3	22	38
4	18	23	4	13	16	4	13	17	4	39	52
5	24	29	5	17	20	5	18	22	5	53	66
6	30	35	6	21	24	6	23	27	6	67	80
7	36	42	7	25	30	7	28	34	7	81	100

Subject: **VISUAL ARTS** Level: **SL** Subject option: **VISUAL ARTS** Timezone: **0**

COMPARATIVE STUDY			EXHIBITION			PROCESS PORTFOLIO			FINAL		
Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To	Grade	From	To
1	0	4	1	0	3	1	0	3	1	0	10
2	5	9	2	4	6	2	4	6	2	11	21
3	10	14	3	7	10	3	7	9	3	22	33
4	15	18	4	11	15	4	10	15	4	34	50
5	19	22	5	16	19	5	16	20	5	51	64
6	23	26	6	20	24	6	21	26	6	65	80
7	27	30	7	25	30	7	27	34	7	81	100

Note: Retrieved from IB DP Grade Boundaries, 2024. International Baccalaureate Organization. (2024) The IB. Diploma Programme Grade Boundaries for Diploma Programme Coordinators,, May 2024 Examination Session, https://resources.ibo.org/data/d_0_dpyyy_eas_2407_1e_e.pdf. p. 43.

Appendix J: Phase 1: Selected Art Teaching Journals

U.S.A.: National Art Education Association

Founded in 1947, the *National Art Education Association* (NAEA) defines themselves as the leading professional membership organization exclusively for visual arts, design, and media arts education professionals in the US. On their website¹⁷, they share that their members include all facets of the art education field. From their site, they claim to champion creative growth and innovation by equitably advancing the tools and resources for a high-quality visual arts, design, and media arts education throughout diverse populations and communities of practice, harnessing the power of the VA, design, and media arts to educate and enrich the lives of all learners and communities. (NAEA, n.d.)

Art Teaching Journal: Art Education

Art Education is the official journal of the *National Art Education Association*, with the first issue published in 1948 under the guidance of editor Italo L. De Francesco and has been under the tutelage of 22 editors. For the issues focused on this study, there have been five editors : Art Education professor at Ohio State University, Christine Ballengee Morris (2012), Art Education professors at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Robert Sweeny (2013-14) , Dual Professor of Art Education and Teaching and Leadership in the College of Visual and Performing Arts and the School of Education at Syracuse University, and chair of the Art Education programs, James Haywood Rolling Jr. (2015-17) , Art Education Professor at University of Arizona, Amelia M. Kraehe (2018-20), and adjunct faculty member in the Art and Art Education Program at Teachers College, Columbia University, Ami Kantawala (2012-2023).

Art Education is published bi-monthly (6 issues a year) in full colour. Each issue features an editorial, six articles, and instructional resources available for members on their website. Their annual membership fees for a student from Canada (Canada/Institutional) costs \$270 USD. For this study, I accessed all issues of Art Education through Tan and Francis online through the Concordia proxy.

Researcher Positionality Relevance

I was a member of NAEA from 2021-2023 and attended their annual NAEA conference in New York City (2022).

¹⁷ <https://www.arteducators.org/research/art-education-journal>

U.K.: National Society for Education in Art and Design

National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD) was established in 1888 by a group of art school principals, who recognized the need to raise the standard of VA teaching and improve the status of VA teachers, originally founding the Society of Art Masters (SAM). In 1899 HRH (then) Edward Prince of Wales became the Honourary President of the Society. In 1940 The Art Teacher's Guild amalgamated with the New Society of Art Teachers to form the Society for Education through Art (SEA) with a key objective to explore new ideas in art and education, proposed by Henry Moore, Eric Gill, Sir Herbert Read and Alexander Barclay Russell. In 1944 the Society adopted the title of National Society for Art Education (NSAE), as art and crafts became part of general education, and full-time specialist art teachers were appointed in schools. In 1982 NSEA launched the *Journal of Art & Design Education* (now *The International Journal of Art & Design Education*) with Henry Moore as its founding patron. In 1988 SEA and the NSAE merged their interests to become the *National Society for Education in Art and Design* (NSEAD). NSEAD is a membership community, working to represent art, craft and design educators across the UK (NSEAD, 2025).

Art Teaching Journal: AD Magazine

AD Magazine began in Spring 2011 with Sophie Leach as editor; who also served as Assistant General Secretary for NSEAD, as well as an External Examiner for PGCE Art and Design and a Lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London. AD Magazine is for art, craft and design teachers and lecturers, gallery and museum educators, advisors and consultants, and anyone involved in or passionate about VA and design subjects. AD Magazine publishes three issues a year (spring, summer and autumn) and is available online through the NSEAD website¹⁸. For this study, I accessed all issues of AD online through their membership portal. An annual membership fee is required for access to all issues of AD. Cost for a Professional Associate is \$106 UKD.

Researcher Positionality Relevance

I have been a member of NSEAD since 2022 and have attended and presented at iJADE conferences online in 2023 and 2024.

¹⁸ <https://www.nsead.org/publications/ad-magazine/issue-01/>

Canada: Canadian Society for Education through Art

The *Canadian Society for Education through Art /Société Canadienne d'éducation par l'art* (CSEA/SCEA) is the national art education association representing art educators within Canada. It is a voluntary association founded in Quebec City in 1955 and is the only Canadian national organization that brings together visual art educators, gallery educators and others with similar interests and concerns. Membership represents all levels of education: elementary, secondary, college/university, ministries of education, art galleries/museums, and community education as shared through their CSEA/SCEA website.¹⁹ The CSEA/SCÉA is a Canadian Registered Charity. Their annual membership fee is \$70 CDN (regular member) (CSEA, n.d.).

Art Teaching Journal: Canadian Art Teacher / Enseigner les arts au Canada,

The *Canadian Art Teacher/Enseigner les arts of Canada* (CAT) is peer-reviewed and/or peer mentored and published semi-annually by CSEA/SCEA. The goal of the journal is to enable the exchange of exciting teaching ideas, to disseminate novel art education research, and to discuss pertinent issues in the field. Readers and contributors include artists, educators, and researchers interested in teaching and learning in VA.

CAT began in 2001 under the guidance of creator and editor Art Education professor at University of Victoria, Michael J Emme. Since their inception, the journal has been guided by three editors; Michael J. Emme, Art Education assistant professor at NSCAD University, April Mandrona and current co-editors (since issue 19.1) myself with Art Education Instructor at University of British Columbia, Marie-France Berard. CAT publishes digitally one to two issues a year. For this study, CAT issues 17.1, 17.2, 18.1 and 18.2 (2020-2022) were accessed digitally from the CSEA/SCEA website (for no cost). Issues 11.1 - 16.2 (2012-2019) were published only in print form and visually archived on the website. Print versions were obtained through a request to CSEA/SCEA secretary Mary-Jane Emme and sent via Canadian Post.

The Relevance of my Positionality Relevance

I have been a member of CSEA/SCEA since 2022 and have attended and presented at annual conferences (Encounters, 2021, Emergence 2023, Prepositioning, Propositioning and Positioning, 2024). In 2023, I took on the role of co-editor of CAT with Marie-France Berard with Issue 19.1 (currently working on 20.2). For the purposes of this study and to avoid conflict of interest, only journals prior to my appointment of co-editor (2012-2022) were included in the study.

¹⁹ <https://csea-scea.ca/>

Appendix K: Phase 1: Literature Review Themes

Themes revealed from Phase 1: Literature Review Thematic Coding sorted in order of prevalence across all three journals from 2012-2023

Themes	<i>Art Education</i>	<i>AD Magazine</i>	<i>Canadian Art Teacher</i>	Average Percentage
Inclusive and Accessible Practices	41.1%	22.14%	37.37%	33.3%
Fostering Student Agency	18.49%	19.29%	17.27%	18.43%
Curriculum and Pedagogy	13.01%	15%	20%	15.66%
Advocacy for Art Education	6.16%	10%	5.45%	7.32%
Community Engagement	3.42%	5%	4.55%	4.29%
Technology	5.48%	3.57%	2.73%	4.04%
Art-Making Process	0	11.43%	1.82%	3.60%
Interdisciplinary	2.05%	5%	2.73%	3.28%
Creativity	2.74%	2.86%	1.82%	2.53%
Assessment and Feedback	4.11%	0.71%	0.91%	2.02%
Materials and Space	0	2.14%	3.64%	1.77%
Environment (Sustainability)	1.26%	1.43%	0.91%	1.26%
Global Connections	0	1.43%	0.91%	0.76%
New Materiality	0.51%	0	0	0.51%
Mindfulness	0.25%	0	0	0.25%

Appendix L: Phase 2: List of Survey Questions

PAGE ONE: CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

PAGE TWO: CONSENT FORM

(Yes/No)

Q1 I acknowledge reading and understanding the study up to this point

(Yes/No)

Q2 I have read and agree to the above information and consent to proceed to the online survey

(LOGIC (Situating/End Survey))

(Yes/No)

PAGE THREE: SITUATING ONESELF

Q3 Which of the following options most closely aligns with your gender?

(Multiple Choice)

Q4 What is your age?

(Multiple Choice)

Q5 What is your country of birth?

(Multiple Choice)

Q6 What was the primary language spoken in your childhood home?

Q7 Are you a Visual Arts teacher? (LOGIC (**Situating IB DP VA**/End Survey))

(Yes/No)

Q8 Are you currently teaching the IB DP VA course?

(Yes/No)

Q9 If no, do you have past experience teaching the IB DP VA course?

Q10 What language do you use to delivery the IB DP VA course?

(Multiple Choice)

- English
- French
- Spanish
- Other

Q11 How many years experience do you have of teaching Visual Arts in total? This may include classroom teaching but could also apply to tutoring, studio workshops or other organized ways of teaching Visual Arts.

(Multiple Choice)

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 year
- 2-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-20 years
- More than 20 years
- Other

Q12 How many years experience do you have teaching specifically the IB DP VA course?
(Multiple Choice)

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 year
- 2-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-20 years
- More than 20 years
- Other

Q13 What is your current level of education?
(Multiple Choice)

- Bachelors Diploma in Concurrent Education
- Bachelors Diploma with Additional Teaching Certification Degree
- Maters Degree
- Ph.D. Degree
- Other

Q14 What education have you completed in order to teach Visual Arts?
(Multiple Choice)

- Majored in Fine Arts (BFA) or Art Education at the University Level
- Minored in Fine Arts, Studio Arts or Education at the University Level
- Studied Creative Subjects
- Self Taught
- No Education Specific to Visual Arts
- Other

Q15 Besides the IB DP VA curriculum, what other VA curriculums do you have experience teaching?

(Multiple Choice)

- Local/Province/Stated Defined Curriculum
- AP (USA)
- IGCSE (UK)
- None, I have only taught IB DP VA
- Other

Q16 In your current position, do you solely teach the IB DP VA course, or do you teach other classes or subjects?

(Multiple Choice)

- Solely IB DP VA
- IB DP VA and other art classes
- IB DP VA and other subjects
- Other

PAGE FOUR: SITUATING SCHOOLTYPE

Q17 Do you teach in a public, private or international school? (LOGIC (**Situate International School/Exploring Resources**))

(Multiple Choice)

- Public/State
- Private/Independent
- International School
- Other

PAGE FIVE: SITUATE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Q18 According to ISC Research (2022), most teachers who teach in international schools do not teach in their country of birth. Does this apply to you?

(Yes/No)

Q19 What region is the international school you are currently working at located?

(Multiple Choice)

- Asia
- Americas
- Europe
- Oceania
- Africa
- Other

Q20 What country is the international school you are currently working at located in?

(Small Text Answer)

Q21 According to ISC Research (2022), most teachers who teach in international schools acquired their education in the following 10 countries. Please select the country you acquired your education. If your country is not listed, please add your country in the text box below.

(Multiple Choice)

- USA
- Canada
- UK
- Australia
- Sweden
- Japan
- South Korea

- Germany
- Finland
- France
- South Africa
- Other

Q22 ISC Research lists the following as the top reasons for teachers to choose to teach in international school. Select the option that is most relevant for you.

(Multiple Choice)

- Financial Opportunities
- Travel Opportunities
- Opportunities to teach the IB DP Curriculum
- Lack of Employment in Birth Country
- Other

Q23 How many years experience do you have specifically teaching in international schools?

(Multiple Choice)

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 year
- 2-5 year
- 5-10 year
- 10-20 year
- More than 20 year

PAGE SIX: RESOURCES

Q24 Where do you source your teaching resources for teaching the IB DP VA course

(Multiple Choice)

- From colleagues
- From resources in school
- Online search (e.g. Google)
- My IB - Visual Arts Resource Centre
- In-Thinking Website
- Art Teacher Journals (e.g. Art Education)
- Museum Sites (e.g. MOMA, TATE)
- Social Media
- Other

Q25 Where do you source ideas and information for creative projects for your IB DP VA class?

(Multiple Choice)

- Social media
- Pin interest
- Online Searches (e.g. Google)
- In-Thinking Website
- Art Teacher Journals (e.g. Art Education)

- Museum Sites (e.g MOMA, TATE)
- Other

Q26 Where do you source artists to share with your IB DP VA course?

(Multiple Choice)

- Social media
- Pin interest
- Online Searches (e.g Google)
- In-Thinking Website
- Art Teacher Journals (e.g. Art Education)
- Museum Sites (e.g MOMA, TATE)
- Other

Q27 Are you a member of a National Art Education Association? (LOGIC: Art Education/)

(Yes/No)

Q28 Which Art Education Association are you a member of?

(Multiple Choice)

- NAEA (U.S.A)
- CSEA/SCEA (Canada)
- UK
- Australia
- INSEA
- Other

Q29 Which Art Education Journal do you access?

(Multiple Choice)

- Art Education (from U.S.A.)
- Canadian Art Teacher Journal (from Canada)
- AD (Art and Design Education Journal) (from UK)
- Teaching Artist Journal (from UK)
- Art Education (from Australia)
- INSEA (International)
- Other

Q30 According to National Art Education Journals, the most relevant discussions in Art Education are listed below. Rate the topics in accordance with your personal opinions of relevance when considering what aspects to teach within the IB DP VA course^{SEP} (Matrix/ Rating Scale)

- Technology
- Social Justice
- Art Vocabulary (e.g Elements of Art/Principles of Design)
- Visual Culture
- Post Modern Principles

- Critical Investigations of Artists
- Student Agency
- Skill Development
- Student Well Being
- Creativity

Q31 Based on the topics highlighted in the previous questions, which topics do you find as the most relevant 3 to focus on in teaching the IB DP VA course
(Short Answer)

PAGE SEVEN: KNOWLEDGE OF IB DP VA

Q32 As an IB DP VA teacher, I feel knowledgeable to teach the IB DP VA course
(Slider:Not at All /Completely)

Q33 As an IB DP VA teacher, I feel most knowledgeable about:
(Ranking)

- Planning the Course
- Assessment Components
- Sourcing Artistic Resources
- Sourcing Mediums and Art materials
- Teaching technical skills
- Developing activities to support Assessed Components
- Unpacking Assessed Components for Students
- Supporting students well being

Q34 In terms of assessing of the 3 components, I feel confident in determining a student's work that is assessed at a 7
(Slider:Not at All /Extremely Confident)

Q35 In terms of assessing of the 3 components, I feel confident in determining a student's work that is assessed at a 3
(Slider:Not at All /Extremely Confident)

Q36 I feel confident in recognizing the difference between a student's work assessed at a 6 and one that is assessed at a 7.
(Slider:Not at All /Extremely Confident)

Q37 I feel confident in recognizing the difference between a student's work assessed at a 5 and one that is assessed at a 6.
(Slider:Not at All /Extremely Confident)

Q38 I feel confident in recognizing the difference between a student's work assessed at a 4 and one that is assessed at a 5.
(Slider:Not at All /Extremely Confident)

Q39 I feel confident in recognizing the difference between a student's work assessed at a 3 and one that is assessed at a 4.

(Slider:Not at All /Extremely Confident)

Q40 Specifically in regards to the three assessed components, I feel most confident in my knowledge of:

(Multiple Choice)

- Comparative Study
- Process Portfolio
- Exhibition
- Other
- None of the Above

Q41 I feel confident in recognizing a student's Comparative Study that will be assessed by an IB DP Examiner as a 7

(Slider:Not at All /Extremely Confident)

Q42 I feel confident in recognizing a student's Process Portfolio that will be assessed by an IB DP Examiner as a 7

(Slider:Not at All /Extremely Confident)

Q43 I feel confident in recognizing a student's Exhibition that will be assessed by an IB DP Examiner as a 7

(Slider:Not at All /Extremely Confident)

Q44 Based on initial research, assessment within the IB DP VA course is cause for discussion, do you have any comments or reflections to share about your assessment process with the IB DP VA course?

(Comment Box)

Q45 Have you attended training specifically for IB DP VA from the IBO. (LOGIC: Yes:

Q46/No: Q47)

(Yes/No)

Q46 What IB DP VA training for IBO have you participated in?

(Multiple Choice)

- IBO CAT 1
- IBO CAT 2
- IBO CAT 3
- Other

Q47 Have you done other training to support teaching the IB DP VA course?

(Yes/No/Text Box)

PAGE EIGHT: QUALITY IN THE IB DP VA

Q48 The IB DP VA guide (2016) mentions the IB courses are ‘high quality’, do you think this is an important attribute of the course?

(Yes/No)

Q49 I understand how ‘high quality’ is defined within the IB DP VA course

(Slider:Not at All /Completely)

Q50 I understand how ‘high quality’ is realized within the IB DP VA course

(Slider:Not at All /Completely)

Q51 What do you interpret as ‘quality’ in regards to teaching in the IB DP VA

(Short Text Answer)

Q52 In your opinion, what contributes to ‘quality’ (related to teaching practices) within the IB DP VA course

(Short Text Answer)

Q53 In your opinion, what contributes to quality (related to student learning) within the IB DP VA course

(Short Text Answer)

Q54 In your opinion, what contributes to quality (related to classroom environment/resources) within the IB DP VA course

(Short Text Answer)

PAGE NINE: PLANNING WITHIN THE IB DP VA

Q55 In your planning, do you approach the IB DP VA course as a two continuum or do you plan each year individually?

(Multiple Choice)

- 2 year continuum
- 2 individual years
- Other

Q56 As you conceptualize and plan your IB DP VA units, do you focus more on the medium, artist or conceptual idea that you want to explore?

(Multiple Choice)

- Units determined by medium choice
- Units determined by artist choice
- Units determined by conceptual idea
- Other

Q57 In an average week, how much time do you spend planning for the IB DP VA course

(Multiple choice)

- Less than one hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-5 hours
- 5-10 hours
- More than 10 hours
- Other

Q58 During your IB DP VA class time, how do you find that you spend your time?

(Matrix/Rating Scale)

- Lecturing the whole class
- Demonstrating techniques and art-making skills to the whole class
- One-on-one discussion with students during the art-making process
- One-on-one technical assistance with students during the art-making process
- Assessing and reviewing students work
- Giving feedback on submitted work

Q59 In your IB DP VA class, what mediums do you find used and/or explored the most?

(ranking)

- 2D
- 3D
- 4D

Q60 In your IB DP VA class, what 2D mediums do you find that you use most?

(Short Text Answer)

Q61 In your IB DP VA class, what 3D mediums do you find that you use most?

(Short Text Answer)

Q62 In your IB DP VA class, what 4D mediums do you find that you use most?

(Short Text Answer)

Q63 In your IB DP VA class, do you create your own artworks alongside your students?

(Yes/No)

Q64 Do you find yourself spending extra time (outside classroom time) working with students?

(Yes/No)

Q65 Do you plan for an extra art-making class - perhaps a regular Saturday or after school class

(Yes/No)

Q66 Do you expect students to work on their IB DP VA work on their own time (beyond scheduled classroom time)?

(Yes/No)

Q67 If yes, how many hours (approximately) do you expect students to work on their IB DP VA work on their own time?

(Multiple Choice)

- Less than 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-5 hours
- 5-10 hours
- More than 10 hours
- Other

PAGE TEN: UNDERSTANDING OF IB COMPONENTS/PRACTICE

(Yes/No and Short Text Answer)

Q68 In the IB DP VA Guide (2014) the focus of the IB DP VA course is divided into 3 core areas: Theoretical, Art Making and Curatorial. Rank the focuses in terms of how relevant they are in your IB DP VA class.

(Ranking)

- Theoretical
- Art Making
- Curatorial

Q69 In terms of planning your own IB DP VA class, do you specifically allocate focused class time for specific practices or components?

(Yes/No)

Q70 Do you allocate time based on practices or components? Referencing the IB DP VA Guide (2016) practices are divided into 3: theoretical practices, art-making practice, curatorial practice, while components refer to the specific assessed outputs: comparative study, process portfolio, exhibition^[1]_{SEP} (Multiple Choice)

- Practices
- Components
- Other

Q71 If Practice, what is the percentage of time (approximately) that you allocate for each practice over the 2 year course

(Multiple Text Boxes)

Theoretical Practice:

Art-making Practice:

Curatorial Practice:

Q72 If Components, what is the percentage of time (approximately) that you allocate for each component over the 2 year course

(Multiple Text Boxes)

Comparative Study:

Process Portfolio:

Exhibition:

Q73 The following questions will refer specifically to the 3 assessed components (check wording). Which component do you feel most confident to teach?

(Multiple Choice)

- Comparative Study
- Process Portfolio
- Exhibition
- I feel equally confident teaching all 3 components
- I really don't feel confident teaching any of the components
- Other

Q74 Which component have you found the most resources to teach?

(Multiple Choice)

- Comparative Study
- Process Portfolio
- Exhibition

Q75 Which component have you had the most training for?

(Multiple Choice)

- Comparative Study
- Process Portfolio
- Exhibition

Q76 From your perspective which component do your students most engage with?

(Multiple Choice)

- Comparative Study
- Process Portfolio
- Exhibition

Q77 Which component do your students tend to score the highest in?

(Multiple Choice)

- Comparative Study
- Process Portfolio
- Exhibition

Q78 Which component do your students tend to struggle the most with?

(Multiple Choice)

- Comparative Study
- Process Portfolio
- Exhibition

PAGE ELEVEN: UNDERSTANDING OF TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

Move the scale to the point which best describes your feelings and experiences teaching IB DP VA

(Slider: never,- always)

- Q79 I approach teaching the IB DP VA in a holistic way.
- Q80 I create a learning environment that centres on learners
- Q81 I interpret the IB DP VA syllabus creativity according to my local circumstances and the context of my individual school
- Q82 I work comfortably within global contexts
- Q83I help my students understand different languages and cultures
- Q84 I explore significant content within my IB DP VA classroom
- Q85 I understand the required components for the Comparative Study
- Q86 I understand the required components for the Process Portfolio
- Q87 I understand rigorous international standards
- Q88 I understand the required components for the Exhibition
- Q89 Within the IB DP VA classroom, I am a risk taker
- Q90 I am really enthusiastic about teaching the IB DP VA course
- Q91 My students are empowered to become autonomous
- Q92 I develop disciplinary and interdisciplinary understanding that meets rigorous international standards
- Q93 I expose my students to unfamiliar traditions around the world
- Q94 I organize visits to exhibitions
- Q95 I develop effective approaches to teaching and learning
- Q96 I know where to find answers for any questions I have about the IB DP VA course
- Q97 I provide students with sufficient breadth of experiences and experimentations
- Q98 I enable students to develop proficiency in their own preferred media
- Q99 I am able to evaluate the overarching impact of the IB DP VA course on my students
- Q100 I teach practices with which I am familiar
- Q101 My students are empowered to become informed artists
- Q102 My students are empowered to become skills artists
- Q103 I organize workshops with practitioners
- Q104 I feel really uncomfortable when I am asked to assess my student's comparative study work
- Q105 I feel really uncomfortable when I am asked to assess my student's process portfolio work
- Q106 I feel really uncomfortable when I am asked to assess my student's exhibition work
- Q107 I have the necessary training required to be effective at teaching the IB DP VA
- Q108 I invest in my own artistic pursuits
- Q109 I have the resources I need to adequately teach the IB DP VA course
- Q110 The academic competitiveness in my classroom and/or my school is a barrier to my ability to develop the IB DP VA course
- Q111 I feel very encouraged by my leadership to develop the IB DP VA course
- Q112 I completely understand how I am expected to teach the IB DP VA course

PAGE TWELVE: PERMA-Profiler and Authentic Happiness Inventory (Butler and Kern, 2015)

Move the scale to the point which best describes your feelings and experiences at work.
(Slider: Never,- Always)

Q113 When teaching the IB DP VA course, how often do you feel you are making progress towards accomplishing your work-related goals?

Q114 When teaching the IB DP VA course, how often do you feel joyful?

Q115 When teaching the IB DP VA course, how often do you feel anxious?

Q116 In general, to what extent do you feel that what you do as an IB DP VA teacher is valuable and worthwhile?

Q117 Within the IB DP VA classroom, how often do you lose track of time while doing something you enjoy?

Q118 To what extent do you feel excited and interested in your work?

Q119 As a IB DP VA teacher, how often do you feel positive?

PAGE THIRTEEN: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Q120 Rank the following expectations of the IB DP VA course in order that you is prioritized by you as a teacher

(Ranking)

- Empowering students to become autonomous, informed and skilled visual artists
- International mindedness
- Understanding the conceptual qualities of art
- Interdisciplinary understanding
- Knowledge of diverse art history
- Proficiency in art stills and techniques
- Breadth of artistic experiences and experimentations
- Student well being
- Adhering to internal deadlines
- Adhering to external deadlines
- Final IB grades

Q121 Rank the following expectations of the IB DP VA course in order that you is prioritized by your school

- Empowering students to become autonomous, informed and skilled visual artists
- International mindedness
- Understanding the conceptual qualities of art
- Interdisciplinary understanding
- Knowledge of diverse art history
- Proficiency in art stills and techniques
- Breadth of artistic experiences and experimentations
- Student well being
- Adhering to internal deadlines
- Adhering to external deadlines
- Final IB grades

Thank you for completing the survey!

Following is space for you to share your opinions on the survey and/or your experience teaching the IB DP VA course within international schools

Q122 What do you think is important for an IB DP VA teacher to know?
(Comment Space)

Q123 What do you think is important for an IB DP VA teacher to do?
(Comment Space)

Q124 What is most important for students to learn during the IB DP VA course?
(Comment Space)

Q125 What would be useful for you to improve as an IB DP VA teacher?
(Comment Space)

Q126 What would be useful to know as a beginning IB DP VA teacher?
(Comment Space)

Q127 Other comments you would like to share
(Comment Space)

PAGE FOURTEEN: FOLLOW UP

Thank you for your time in completing this online survey. Your responses are much appreciated.

You are now invited to participate further in the Case Study; either as a solo participant in a series of 3 individual interviews or as a member of a 3-5 member panel in a series of focus group discussions interviews.

Both individual interviews and focus group discussion interviews will be conducted in a series of 3 x 30-45 minute online interviews using the zoom platform scheduled at key points throughout the 2023/2024 school year (beginning/mid/end :September/January/April).

The focus of the Case Study (both individual interviews and focus group discussion interviews) is to explore your perspective as an IB DP VA teacher on quality teaching within the IB DP VA program relevant to your own teaching practice.

Q128 If you are not interested in participating in the Case Study, but would like a copy of the research report when the study is complete, please provide your email address

Name (Small Text Box)

Email Address (Small Text Box)

Q129 Please select the option of the Case Study that you would be most interested to participate in: (LOGIC: Transfer: Interview/Focus Group/Exit Survey)

(Multiple Choice)

- Individual Interview
- Focus Group
- None of the Above

PAGE FIFTEEN: CASE STUDY: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Q130 Expression of Interest

I have read and understood the information about the Case Study and I am interested in participating in the **Individual Interviews**
(Yes/No)

Q131

Contact Information(Small Text Boxes)

PAGE SIXTEEN: CASE STUDY: FOCUS GROUP

Q132 Expression of Interest

I have read and understood the information about the Case Study and I am interested in participating in the **Focus Group**
(Yes/No)

Q133

Contact Information(Small Text Boxes)

Appendix M: Phase 2: Call for Participation

TITLE: An Exploration of Quality in Visual Art Teaching of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Visual Arts Program within International Schools

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled An Exploration of Quality in Visual Art Teaching of the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IB DP) Visual Arts (VA) Program within International Schools. The purpose of the research is to gain a better understanding of quality; defining, encouraging and supporting it within the teaching of Visual Arts in the International Baccalaureate's Diploma program in International Schools. The results of this study will inform recommendations for IB DP VA teacher professional development.

A secondary purpose of the research is to collect data to inform a work of Research-Creation which will be a creative fictional work of writing (novella). The intention, is to allow for this work to evolve through the culminating research, collected data, combined with the principal researchers own creative self-reflections. Relevant to this form, is that the work of Research Creation will not include an identifying characteristics to the participants in the study.

As an IB DP VA teacher currently teaching the IB DP VA course within International schools, you have relevant, critical and important perspectives about defining, encouraging and supporting the pursuit of quality within your IB DP VA classroom.

As principal researcher, I would be most grateful if you would be willing to share your thoughts and experiences as an IB DP VA teacher by completing an online survey and then participating in either a series of individual interviews or focus group discussion interviews as your perspective as an IB DP VA teacher is integral to my research.

There are two components to this study.

Part One: An Online Survey: If you consent to participate, participation in the online survey should take 30-45 minutes. The focus on this survey is for Secondary VA teachers currently teaching the IB DP VA curriculum within International Schools to share their perspectives on the teaching of the IB DP VA course. Please note that participation in this survey/questionnaire is anonymous except for those who opt into the follow-up Individual Interviews and/or Focus Group Interviews.

Part Two: A Case Study

At the conclusion of the survey, you will be invited to participate further in the Case Study; either as a solo participant in a series of 3 individual interviews or as a member of a 3-5 member panel in a series of focus group discussions interviews.

Both individual interviews and focus group discussion interviews will be conducted in a series of 3 thirty minute online using the zoom platform scheduled at key points throughout the 2023/2024 school year (beginning/mid/end : September/January/April).

The focus of the Case Study (both individual interviews and focus group discussion interviews) is to explore your perspective as an IB DP VA teacher on quality teaching within the IB DP VA program relevant to your own teaching practice.

For more information, please follow this link (TBD) to access the Letter of Information.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact the principal researcher, Amy Atkinson (amy.atkinson@mail.concordia.ca) or supervisor Dr. Lorrie Blair (lorrie.blair@concordia.ca)

Appendix N: Phase 2: Numerical Responses for Teaching Resources

When considering resources for teaching DP VA, respondents shared that they sourced resources for teaching mostly from online searches (e.g. Google), the In-Thinking website, My IB and from colleagues. Also noted was museum websites, social media and school resources. Other responses shared were Art of Education Online(AEOU), IBPDVAwithMissa.com, and Art21. Art teacher journals were noted as the least popular choice.

Table 1. Survey Responses for sources of resources for teaching DP VA with selected numbers/percentages of choice.

Sources	Numbers	Percentage
Online Searches (eg. Google)	18	81.82%
In-Thinking Website	16	72.73%
My IB	15	68.18%
From Colleagues	14	64.64%
Museum Website	13	59.09%
Social Media	12	54.55%
From School Resources	11	50%
Other	7	31.82%
Art Teacher Journals	5	22.73%

Table 2. Survey Responses for sources of creative ideas for teaching DP VA with selected numbers/percentages of choice.

Sources	Numbers	Percentage
Online Searches (eg. Google)	16	72.73%
In-Thinking Website	15	68.18%
Social Media	14	63.64%
Museum Websites	12	54.55%
Pinterest	7	31.82%
Other	7	31.82%
Art Teacher Journals	6	27.27%

Table 3. Survey Responses of sources of artists to share while teaching DP VA with selected numbers/percentages of choice.

Sources for Artists	Numbers	Percentage
Online Searches (eg. Google)	20	90.91%
Museum Websites	20	90.91%
Social Media	16	72.73%
Pinterest	4	18.18%
Other	4	18.18%

Appendix O: Phase 3: In-depth Interviews Interview Question Plan

Phase 3: In-depth Interviews Interview Question Plan for three-part thematic qualitative interview series

INTERVIEW ONE (Fall 2023, Focus: Beginning of IB DP VA School Year)

Situating the Participant:

Gender/Ethnicity/Cultural Background

Initial/Current Motivations for being a VA teacher

Education

- Undergraduate Subject/Location
- Professional Development
- Specifically for IB DP VA (IBO Training)

Personal Artist Practice

- Possibilities
- Challenges

Knowledge/Confidence with IB DP VA Curriculum

- Resources
- Ideas
- Inspirations
- Perceived Challenge
- Perceived Benefits

Planning

- Prior to Year
- During Year
- Units/Medium/Artists

Resources/Facilities

Schedule

- Class Size/Skill/Knowledge Level

Component Support Discussions

- Comparative Study
- Process Portfolio
- Exhibition

General Discussion on Efficacy of:

Teaching Practice Strategies for IB DP VA class
Past Experiences (informed from previous year)
Future Goals (for end of year)

General Discussion on Quality

What is quality

- As related to teacher/teaching strategy
- As related to student output/experience
- As related to environment
- As related to school direction/perceived opinions
- As related to IBO direction/perceived opinions

INTERVIEW TWO (Winter 2023/24, Focus: Middle of IB DP VA School Year)

Knowledge/Confidence with IB DP VA Curriculum

- Resources
- Ideas
- Inspirations
- Perceived Challenge
- Perceived Benefits

Planning

- Progress during Year (Challenges/Successes/Adjustments)
- Units/Medium/Artists

Resources/Facilities

Schedule

- Class Size/Skill/Knowledge Level (Challenges/Successes/Adjustments)

Component Support Discussions (Challenges/Successes/Adjustments)

- Comparative Study
- Process Portfolio
- Exhibition

General Discussion on Efficacy of Strategies for IB DP VA class
(Challenges/Successes/Adjustments)

General Discussion on Quality (Revisited for changes in answers)

What is quality

- As related to teacher/teaching strategy
- As related to student output/experience
- As related to environment
- As related to school direction/perceived opinions
- As related to IBO direction/perceived opinions

INTERVIEW THREE (Spring 2024, Focus: End of IB DP VA School Year)

Knowledge/Confidence with IB DP VA Curriculum

- Resources
- Ideas
- Inspirations
- Perceived Challenge
- Perceived Benefits

Planning

- Progress during Year (Challenges/Successes/Adjustments)
- Units/Medium/Artists

Resources/Facilities

Schedule

- Class Size/Skill/Knowledge Level (Challenges/Successes/Adjustments)

Component Support Discussions (Challenges/Successes/Adjustments)

- Comparative Study
- Process Portfolio
- Exhibition

General Discussion on Efficacy of Strategies for IB DP VA class (Challenges/Successes/Adjustments)

General Discussion on Quality (Revisited for changes in answers)

What is quality

- As related to teacher/teaching strategy
- As related to student output/experience
- As related to environment
- As related to school direction/perceived opinions

- As related to IBO direction/perceived opinions

Reflection on Year

- Progress
- Challenges/Successes (What to Change/What to Keep)
- Recommendations for Teacher Training (What would a new teacher need to know)

Appendix P: Phase 3: Interview Participant Information and Schedule

Phase 3: In-depth Interviews: Interview Participant Information and Schedule

	PARTICIPANT	LOCATION	TIME ZONE	INTERVIEW ONE	INTERVIEW TWO	INTERVIEW THREE
1	1_1	Hong Kong IBAP	HKT Same	Thursday October 12, 3:45 HKT	Wednesday February 7 11:30 AM HKT	Friday May 10, 2:30 PM HKT
2	1_2	Turkey IBAEM	HKT 5 hours +	Wednesday October 11 11AM(Turkey) 4PM HKT	Wednesday February 14 11AM Turkey 4PM HKT	Wednesday May 29 CANCELLED 11AM Turkey 4PM HKT
3	1_3	Bahrain IBAEM	HKT 5 hours +	Tuesday October 17 12PM BAH 5PM HKT	Tuesday January 23 12PM (Bahrain) 5PM HKT	Tuesday June 4 12PM Bahrain 5PM HKT
4	1_4	Hong Kong IBAP	HKT Same	Wednesday October 25 4PM HKT	Wednesday January 31 4PM HKT	Friday May 17 1:30 PM HKT
5	1_5	Bahrain IBAEM	HKT 5 hours +	Friday October 19th 5PM (Bahrain) 10PM HKT	Tuesday February 20 3PM (Bahrain) 4PM HKT	Tuesday June 18 5PM Bahrain 9AM LA time
6	1_6	Thailand IBAP	HKT 1 hours +	Monday December 4 3 -3:30 (Thai) 4 - 4:30 PM HKT	Thursday January 25 CANCELED 3PM (Thai) 4PM (HKT)	Thursday May 16 1:15 (Thai) 2:15 HKT
7	5_1	Ethiopia IBAEM	HKT 5 hours +	Thursday November 9 4PM PM HKT	Wednesday February 7 2PM Ethiopia 6PM HKT	Monday May 20, 11AM Ethiopia 4PM HKT
8	5_2	Thailand IBAP	HKT 1 hours +	Monday December 4 10-10:30 AM	Thursday February 1 8AM 9AM HKT	Monday May 20, 8AM THAI 9AM HKT
9	5_3	Thailand IBAP	HKT 1 hours +	Monday December 4 3:30 - 4PM	Friday January 19 3:30 PM (Thai) 4:30 PM HKT	Monday May 13 3:30PM (Thai) 4:30 HKT
10	5_4	China IBAP	HKT Same	Thursday October 26 4:30PM	Monday February 5 4PM HKT	July 4, 2024 12 PM (TO time)
11	5_5	China IBAP	HKT Same	Friday October 20 8AM Changed 4:30 PM	Tuesday February 6, 3:45PM (I was late)	Wednesday May 29, 10AM

					4PM	
12	5_6	India IBAEM	HKT 2.5 +	Tuesday October 10, 2PM Mumbai (4:30 HKT)	Tuesday January 23 12noon (Mumbai) 2:30PM HKT	Tuesday May 13,Maybe 2:30 Mumbai 5PM HKT
13	5_7	France IBAEM	HKT 6 hours +		Thursday February 2 5PM HKT	Thursday May 30 10 AM Geneva 4PM HKT
14	5_8	Turkey IBAEM	HKT 5 hours +		Monday February 5, 5PM HKT	Monday 13 12:30 (Istanbul) 5:30 (HKT)
15	5_9	China IBAP	HKT Same	Tuesday October 31, 1:40-2:10PM	Friday February 2 1:30 PM	Thursday May 16, 1:50 PM
16	5_10	Italy IBAEM	HKT 7 hours +	Monday December 4 10:30 AM (Italy)	Monday February 12, 10:30 AM (Italy) 5:30 PM HKT	Tuesday June 11 5PM (HKT)

Appendix R: Phase 3: In-depth Interviews, Emergent Codes

Phase 3: In-depth Interviews - List of emergent codes from analysis of 3 combined interviews

Key Themes						
DP VA Curriculum Dynamics	DP VA Assessment Complexities	DP VA Management Complexities	Professional Growth	Educational and Institutional Art Challenges	Holistic Art Education Practices	International Art Education Dynamics
2 Year Planning	Assessment Uncertainty	Time Management Challenges	Career Evolution with Motivations to be VA Teacher and Relevance of Degree	Studio Access Time	Mindful Teaching Practices with Modelling	Cultural Navigation incl art, language, relationships
Assessment Strategies	Program Reputation Issues	VA Medium Preferences	DP VA Training and Examining Experience with PD/Teacher Collaboration	Scheduling Issues incl. teaching workloads	Individualised Instruction	Professional Isolation
Scaffolding Learning (Pre DP VA)	Professional Impact	Exhibition Logistics	Personal Artistic Practice	School Resources with Budget ad Team Delegation	VA as Personal Growth	Achievement Expectations incl portfolio
CS Focus		External Learning	Work-Life Balance		Student VA Themes	
PP Focus		Digital Integration		Space Complexities	Student Autonomy and Engagement	
EX Focus		Upload Process Complexity		VA Program Marginalization with Public Facing Views	Inclusive with Gender Disparity in VA Education	
VA Journal		Navigating World Exams				
DP VA Program Benefits						

Appendix S: Phase 3: In-depth Interviews, Coding Phase 2

Phase 3: In-depth Interviews - Example of second Phase of coding (Screenshots of PDF Expert highlighting with colour codes and added notes)

The screenshot displays the PDF Expert interface with several tabs open: 'INTERV...mbined', 'AD_20...15 copy', and 'AD_2016_2019'. The main document content includes the following text and annotations:

[00:06:22.210] - Speaker 2
Yeah. There's like an ISS. I think it is somewhat. Yep. I think they're definitely kids. That want to go into the sciences, for sure. I think we also, it's very popular economics and we just started business. And so that has really grabbed a lot of kids attention. I think it's the population. A lot of these kids, if they're local, local to the region, they're likely going to be running their parents business at some point. And so they are attracted to those courses. When I taught in Moscow, there was much more of a deeper appreciation for visual arts. And so that's something that I had 1314 students in that class every year. And so, you know, there's pros and cons to small classes and big classes, so you can kind of roll with both.
Handwritten note: choosing science

[00:07:17.090] - Speaker 1
And so how do you set up your DP courses? Like, what are the, like between the three components? What do you tackle in grade eleven? What do you tackle in grade twelve?
Handwritten note: add this

[00:07:26.370] - Speaker 2
Yeah, well, often, as you can imagine, you walk in and somebody else has started your grade twelve for you because they're now in grade twelve and you're coming in. But what I, best case scenario, if I start them fresh in grade eleven in the fall, I start with a very specific look at photography, both digital and analog, and we take a look at composition, different photographers, we go through all different ways to print photography, and we do that really to get them in the making, in the concept of making. During that time, I'm scaffolding the process portfolio pages and we're building our understanding of that alongside. Likely, those pages will not be the ones the students choose to put in their final portfolio. But we're talking about, you know, how do we, how do we attract our audience's eye? How do we explain our process, all those basics that are not necessarily intrinsic in an 11th grader's mind when they're making art. So we get right into the making, we get right into the process pages. And around the end of the first semester, we
Handwritten notes: this happens a lot of 1/2 courses, scaffolded + planing

start talking about the comparative study, and that's in 11th grade, so we started talking about it, discussing it in December.

[00:08:47.850] - Speaker 2
My students have just now chosen their three artworks to focus on, and they've begun writing their pages, their screens. And so we will have, hopefully by May, they will have a full draft of their comparative study because I also run it alongside. Now we've switched to printmaking as our genre of, I guess, investigation. And so we're doing all different types of printmaking and alternating days of the week where we focus on comparative study, focus on, sorry, printmaking, and then throughout that, we're completing works that they would be interested in putting in their show, their exhibition. And then once I get to 12th grade, they generally edit their comparative study. Well, supposedly over the summer. That doesn't always happen, but they come back in with a few artworks that they've completed, and we get into sculpture in the fall of their senior year. It's generally a very stressful time where they're writing applications and they're finishing their extended essay at our school here. That's how they do it. So I don't want them focused. I want the comparative study completely done by mid September and put away. And then they work throughout the fall, pulling together more exhibition works, starting their exhibition text, curatorial rationale.
Handwritten notes: CS

[00:10:19.360] - Speaker 2
And now we're starting to, I mean, we're a month away from their show, so we are going to be. We are. They've developed their exhibition poster. They're planning out what supplies they need for their setup. And we're really fully focused on the show at this point because it comes very fast in mid March.
Handwritten note: final focus

[00:10:39.320] - Speaker 1

Phase 3: In-depth Interviews - Example of second Phase of coding (Screenshots of PDF Expert highlighting with colour codes and added notes)

The screenshot displays the PDF Expert interface with a transcript document. The transcript is divided into segments by speaker and time. The text is highlighted in various colors (green, orange, blue) and includes handwritten annotations in black ink.

[00:07:39.600] - Speaker 2
 Yeah, yeah. He was working on, like, one artwork at home, which he shared, like, biweekly, and one artwork in school at a time. And then there, I want to show you the artwork that he was working at home. Yeah. So it's really big. And there it is.

[00:08:05.330] - Speaker 1
 Oh, my God, I love that oil painting.

[00:08:09.540] - Speaker 2
 And his whole exhibition was about himself, and he's, like, a real introvert. And so I used that as my talking point for his letter of recommendation. So just how he has shined through his artwork and how he uses his artwork to express himself. But his whole exhibition is about displacement and being too Chinese to be western and too western to be Chinese, and going to international school, going to this school for 15 years and just coming from a very traditional Chinese family and finding his way and just finding his place and figuring out his identity in that. And he said his English is better than his Chinese, which is true for a lot of our students. He's going to art school. He was hoping for Cal arts the whole time, their animation

student engaged
**short work on zoom*
VA here
unexpected VA as growth

program, and he didn't get in, but he got scholarship to all the other schools that he applied to, even though he didn't need it. But where is he going to go? He's going Usc.

[00:09:08.030] - Speaker 1
 Oh, nice. Yeah, that's pretty close to Calarts. Just walk over, check it out.

[00:09:15.910] - Speaker 2
 Yeah, And he's going for animation. And he didn't include any animation in his exhibition, so he was working on his animation portfolio completely separately. So I also talked about that in his letter of recommendation. So just how, you know, he's. He loves animation so much, and then he wanted to push himself, which is just. It's just so true how he wanted to push himself in, like, every media. And so he did. Like, he's. He's very talented and skilled, like, fine artists you can see in the oil painting, but also he has another self portrait. But he pushed himself to think more conceptually. Like, he did, like, a hand sculpture that had, like, um, like, acupuncture needles in it and stuff, and then tried photography and printmaking and did a found object, yin and yang of, like, the Chinese culture on one side, and then the western culture on one side with a little bit of Chinese culture in it and the Chinese culture with a little bit of western in it and with all found objects. And the way he arranged the chopsticks in the first layer is just fascinating. And the other side it was like forks and then all the other found objects were like around and it was.

media

[00:10:26.630] - Speaker 2
 He pushed himself really hard like this year to grow before going to university. Yeah, yeah.

[00:10:32.210] - Speaker 1
 Good for him.

[00:10:32.870] - Speaker 2
 I mean he really motivated himself. So I feel like I was just like pushing him but really motivated himself. I think I mentioned to you before that our school administration last year set up the calendar so that our students are not receiving enough hi hours. So I kept trying to push to get more time and I couldn't. So that was a struggle. He was under hours by I think three months like of every other day, 80 minutes.

child construction

[00:11:02.510] - Speaker 1
 Yeah.

fine