# Title: 'Before life drawing I never knew a figure drawing can show so many things': An exploration of the impact of life drawing on young people's creative voice in Fine Art.

Research Question: 'In what ways does life drawing support international school students of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Visual Arts course in developing communication of their artistic intentions in their practical artwork?'

14978 words

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'Before life drawing I never knew a figure drawing can show so many things': An exploration of the impact of life drawing on young people's creative voice in fine art.

## Abstract

The aim of this project was to meet an established key learning need in the international schools Fine Art teaching sector to better inform provision for Fine Arts students, specifically their communication of artistic intentions in the International Baccalaureate Visual Arts Diploma Programme via a sequence of life drawing classes. There is a professional development priority in international schools to provide learning activities that are inclusive of multicultural groups. The research design was informed by social constructivist learning theory and qualitative research methods were taken to gather data in an attempt to shed light on the precise elements of life drawing that make it a useful learning activity for young artists. Significant benefits were had from the learning experience, including universal increase in student confidence and significant increase in student ability to generate original ideas for visual communication. Results indicated that the group learning environment had a profound impact, with some suggestion that engaging with the model and a specific technical practice were also powerful factors in the success of the learning activity.

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*To facilitate ease of reading and participant anonymity in this dissertation, all names, including interviewees and participants in quoted personal conversations, are invented pseudonyms.*

## Introduction

There is limited availability of literature or information guiding the teaching of Fine Art with multicultural groups of participants in international schools. Students of the International Baccalaureate (hereon referred to as 'IB') Visual Arts course need to demonstrate effective communication using visual language in order to succeed (ibo.org, 2014), an ability which can be impacted by varying levels of experience of cultural ephemera (Booth, 2023). There is a key learning need in the international school Fine Art teaching sector for increased research into precisely which activities contribute to multicultural students' Fine Art learning.

Further to the situation, there is a perceived Western hegemony in the Fine Art industry in this region (Gaupp, 2020) and a suggestion that 'the more successful Fine Art students at Thai universities tend to be those who come from abroad' (personal conversation with university professor S. Jirawut, 2022 19 November 2022). Although impossible to generalise based on this statement, it does indicate that there may be a gap in provision for local students in the IB age group. This unequal experience potentially exacerbates existing divisions between cultural groups (Booth, 2023, Singhalampong, 2020, Waters and Day, 2022) and leaves students underprepared for future study and work (Schoonmaker, 2014). If educators are to nurture effective communication, they need to know their teaching context well (CIS, 2023), their students better (Nisbett, 2020) and to ensure that students all receive equal opportunity to succeed both in their school studies and as independent creative agents by providing them with useful learning experiences (Booth, 2023). Therefore, it is a professional development priority that learning experiences are created that foster diverse student groups' effective communication of artistic intentions.

Despite the generally boundless resources available to international school students, life drawing has been hereto unexplored in this context due to its reputation as potentially problematic (Dey and Tripathi,

2022); however, as an activity consistently requested by art school admissions teams, in the interests of

supporting student progression, it deserves exploration. Life drawing is a controversial mainstay of Fine

Art education, seen by some as a powerful teaching tool for empowering students via imagery that is

inherently interesting to them and a passport to the symbolism of the art canon (Bey, 2011, Graham,

2012, Mercer, 2018) and by others as the last bastion of outdated traditions and hierarchy (Lang, 2017),

which in this context could pose additional problems of reinforcing an existing cultural hierarchy (Gaupp,

2020).

This project aims to investigate the potential implications of learning through life drawing and shed light

on precisely why this activity is so often recommended to young art students (Gale, 2021) and whether

this is for any reason other than that arts teachers are considered more likely than some to use teaching

strategies based on their own learning experiences (Sharkey, 2023). This will be carried out by evaluating

the literature pertaining to the subject and conducting a case study life drawing activity accompanied by

appropriate assessment methods to generate data to further elucidate the precise nature of the benefits

that may be enjoyed by students.

## Literature review

The International Baccalaureate Visual Arts Diploma (hereon referred to as IB Visual Arts) acknowledges

an ability to utilise practical processes to meet conceptual goals as a skill essential to the development of

young artists (ibo.org, 2014) and accordingly, a significant portion of the assessment specification in IB

Visual Arts requires an ability to evidence this skill. The phrase used to communicate this is 'artistic

intentions' (ibo.org, 2014, p. 56). In this case, in accordance with a school of thought that if the artwork is

successful, then the audience will be able to appreciate whatever the artist was trying to communicate[1]

(Wimsatt and Beardsley,1946). The phrase 'artistic intentions' is a term specifically used by the IB Visual

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[1] : Generally, Western art schools and Fine Art assessment criteria follow Wimsatt and Beardsley's 'Intentional Fallacy' theory, in that for an artwork to be successful, the audience should be able to comprehend the intention of the artist (1946): possibly a stance that somewhat favours a representational approach in art-making.

Arts course to signify students' creative voice though the concept is regularly used as an assessment method in post-16 art education (Bianchi 2011, Logan, 2013).

In Western culture, life drawing is considered a practice traditional, typical, perhaps even essential, for both current and aspiring art school students (Gale, 2021, Lang, 2017) and often makes an appearance in popular culture to this effect (Eck, 2001, Waterton, 2022). The Western canon features so many nudes (especially female), thanks to life drawing classes being so widespread, that the Guerrilla Girls famously asked, 'Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?' (Guerrilla Girls, 1989). The term 'life drawing' should be understood as classes where a group of students sketch from a live model, present in the room, who is generally nude. Students are expected to sketch from observation and props or poses may be used to suggest a narrative. Given the challenge it may pose a young person to seek out a life class in a non-Western setting (Gude, 2004), it is pertinent to understand the precise nature of the impact of life drawing on a young person's art practice over other observational drawing methods. This literature review aims to explore the relevance of this Western tradition in contemporary Thai learning contexts.
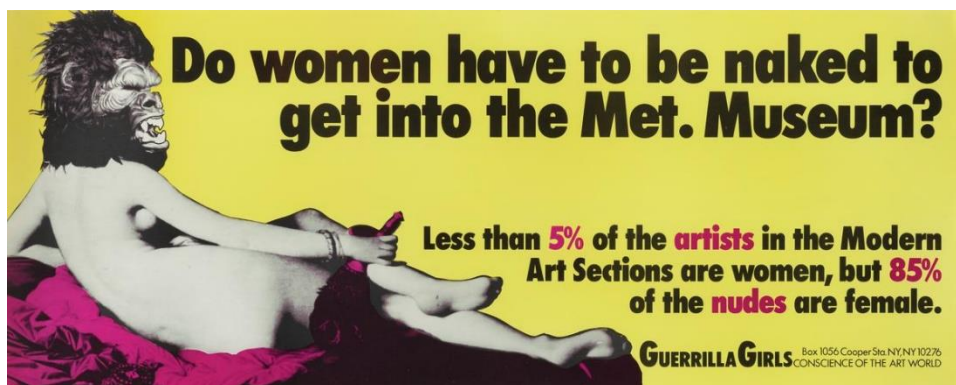


**Figure 1:** Guerrilla Girls (1989) *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?*

In embarking on a review of the research conducted into life drawing and its potential impact on developing 'artistic intentions' within the target age group, there is an initial vacuum. Generally speaking, pedagogy in the art classroom tends to be an under-researched topic (McKenna Salazar, 2013) and when it does occur, it tends to be responding to issues on a government educational policy level, rather than to the students' experience (Kenning, 2019). In fact, the lack of attention to students' needs is a

more commonly occurring theme within what is written about fine art learning at a university level, which is the more common context for life drawing to be conducted. In order to draw on what has been researched at a student and practice level, three categories were chosen from the existing research around available research on life drawing activities to create a picture of the potential benefits to be had from the practice: its effects on student confidence, its effects on student ability to communicate themes and ideas and its potential for supporting students in developing a reflective practice.

The connection between life drawing and artistic intentions is not a well-researched field and tends to occur as a sidenote to the much more commonly discussed criticism of imbalance (Willer, 2018) between conceptual and technical fine art teaching, which first became a topic of debate in the UK following the Coldstream Report (Coldstream, 1960, Westley, 2013). It was at this time in UK art schools that a transition was made from discipline-specific vocational training in visual arts towards a more conceptual curriculum and the debate about how to teach art became a discussion open to different interpretations, initially about class-based inclusivity, although this grew to include economic, gender, ethnic and cultural concerns (McKenna Salazar, 2013, Knight and Deng, 2016). There has been no real resolution to this argument and it continues to be a highly contentious topic, hence an awareness of it is essential to remaining cognisant of potential bias, even in international contexts, when many foreign universities and schools use the West as a model for effectiveness (Verkaik, 2019).

The IB, like the art schools, follows an art industry model, as opposed to a traditional education model, where students' ability at each process (I.e. technical skill) would also be assessed (Belluigi, 2018).  In the IB Visual Arts, students are assessed based on an ability to communicate their 'intentions' effectively (ibo.org, 2014, p. 46 and 56), matching practical techniques to concepts they wish to communicate to the viewer. Although this arrangement meets calls within art education to better prepare students for industry (Thom, 2015), this can create extra competition (Belluigi, 2016) and there are concerns about the inclusivity of this practice (Hudson-Miles and Broadey, 2022, Kenning, 2019). Therefore, it is critical that the context in which this research is undertaken is understood, although selecting research sampling the group with the nearest age range may seem like the most robust approach, the few articles that explore Higher Education in art schools represent a scantily-researched and polemic field, and are written by

those with a keen interest in the subject, personal experience or a political agenda, which in qualitative research leave ample room for subjectivity.

*How much does life drawing improve student confidence in practical skills?*

Skills-first learning increases confidence.

There are two major opposing theories in the art education field about the role of practical skills and, therefore, the stage at which the teaching of specific techniques should occur in a young artist's learning: skills-first or concept-first. Life drawing tends to sit within the skills-first school of thought, as classes are often begun with some instructions to students about how to use measuring tools and techniques to capture the human form with some accuracy (Blegvad, 2020). Given this stance, it is thought that research pertaining to practical skills learning may shed some light on potential gains to be made via life drawing.

The two opposing doctrines are somewhat representative of East vs West perceptions of art-making. It is an erroneous belief that the far-reaching influence of Chinese Confucianism makes Asian learners more likely to conform rather than experiment (Nisbett, 2020). In fact, the belief of Confucianist practice is that students should learn about traditional practice first, then use this informed stance to determine their own way (Sigurðsson, 2017). Although there is no clear-cut East/West division, in some art schools, especially outside or on the fringe of the Western tradition, skills are taught first and concept is expected later (Belluigi, 2016), with the justification that, for students in post-colonial[2] contexts, there is little community or financial support for artists after graduation.

Belluigi's study is particularly informative because it makes a direct comparison between the two perspectives, skills-first or concept-first, and is based on both observations and interviews with a broad group of students and teachers at both UK and post-colonial institutions which comprise student bodies of a similar age group to those in this study (2016). However, the great limitation is that it does not explore life drawing specifically, rather skills workshops on a more general level. In fact, there was a significant

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[2] Despite the fact that Thailand is not strictly post-colonial, it is considered to embody a similar cultural profile (Singhalampong, 2020). The more precise nature of this and its effect will be discussed later in the literature review.

dearth of any specific studies into the effectiveness of life drawing, other than one (Graham, 2012) which was conducted with the target age group.

Skills-first pedagogy is thought by some to produce confident and skilled artists (Belluigi, 2016, Cooke, 2012, Willer, 2018). When students make their own artwork, they already have a strong foundation in practical skill (Belluigi, 2016) and it has been suggested that this is because technical practice leads to increased student confidence, key to the development of creative agency (Thuketana and Westhof, 2018). Once skills have been practised and are embedded, students have the confidence to take more risks in experimental learning (Graham, 2012, Thuketana and Westhof, 2018).

Further to the argument for skills-first art teaching, there is a case for promoting technical learning to improve student confidence and wellbeing by reducing the status of the ubiquitous 'critique'[3]. The crit assessment procedure can be a highly impactful pedagogy tool (Belluigi, 2016, Harwood, 2007) and it forms an integral mode of assessment within the interpretivist positionality of Western art schools. It is proposed that making the experience more inclusive by allowing a practical discipline to provide some framework for success (Cooke, 2012, Thuketana and Westhof, 2018), especially for students who may have had less exposure to the arts and, therefore, have a less developed grasp of conceptual language (Booth, 2023) or according to some, business acumen (Kenning, 2019) allows for it to bolster, rather than undermine student confidence. There are examples as well of discursive activities, such as crits, leading to dramatic improvement in student creative thought, though this has been shown to largely follow clear modelling from the teacher and extensive practice (Kong and Fitch, 2002).

A limitation to the skills-first approach in Belluigi's study is that this can lead to students' work stylistically conforming to a canon that she describes as imperialistic (2016), a highly relevant concern in Thailand, given its cultural profile (Singhalampong, 2020). Marxist critique also suggests that any domain-specific art education is 'stifling' (Hudson-Miles and Broadey, 2022, p. 325) and neoliberalist critics object to a standardised curriculum (Hudson-Miles and Broadey, 2022) on the basis that it creates '...deskilled worker[s] on the Fordist production line.' (Hudson-Miles and Broadey, 2022, p. 325) rather than artists.

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[3] 'Critiques' or 'Crits' are an assessment process common to schools of the arts, where students are assessed by their peers and lecturers in front of an audience of their peers.

Other sources agree with this stance; skills-based learning inevitably provides a model of what the finished artwork should look like (Lang, 2017), which is avoided if the student has a pre-conceived idea of their own aesthetic goal for the finished product. A note, though, that this criticism becomes irrelevant if we consider that for many art teachers of the Western school, the primary learning intention in the life room is not to adopt a specific drawing technique, but merely to use it as a vehicle to generate a creative response to the stimuli (Crippa and Williamson, 2013).

Certainly in Graham's study, the findings strongly link the practical activity of life drawing to increased student confidence, both in drawing itself but also in visual conceptual language for his students (2012). Although his study was conducted over a course of eight weeks, it was on a small scale of preselected, 'AP'[4], high ability students (though admittedly slightly younger than those in study), which may distort the image of its effectivity, especially if compared with a more diverse class group. However, the case presents the activity as being particularly effective at galvanising students' production of new artworks and for providing a context where skill and confidence became mutually perpetuating (2012) and, given the current gap in research in this area, this presents a very exciting area to build on.

<u>Students develop confidence based on interaction within the specific life drawing environment</u>

Factors unique to the life class are credited by some with improving student confidence, with a view to developing communication of artistic intentions (Graham, 2012). Given its workshop-like format, where specific routines, behaviours and often settings are observed (Graham, 2012, Josefowski, 2015, Mercer, 2018), there is an argument for life drawing as a social constructivist educational activity. As students independently use practical skills to meet conceptual problems (Akpan, 2020), their lessons begin to more closely resemble the studio spaces of art schools and beyond, where peer interaction is organic and less structured (Harwood, 2007) and they begin to have more autonomy in their choices of creative activity.

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[4] Advanced Placement Programme or 'AP' is an extra-credit option offered to students of the American high school curriculum, which provides the opportunity to undertake college level studies while at high school.

Life drawing classes often occur outside of timetabled school lessons, hence this may be one of the few occasions where students can observe older art students at work, creating a model of the expected behaviour which can increase confidence (La Follette, 2017). Observation of colleagues being creative, even if indirect, has been demonstrated as a factor in the increased confidence of students in their ability to take risks (Blegvad, 2020, Damperat, Jeannot and Jongmans, 2016, Goodman et al., 2021, Thuketana and Westhof, 2018). Creating a different social mix in this respect also disrupts any social hierarchies that may have been in place in another class setting (Graham, 2012), giving each student an unfettered potential for developing confidence in their own ability (Damperat, Jeannot and Jongmans, 2016). In this respect, life drawing becomes a more inclusive practice because a prescribed approach is generally demonstrated at the start of the class (Booth, 2023, Kong and Fitch, 2002), which enables all students to feel confidence, rather than privileging those who have existing exposure to the arts (Booth, 2023). It has been suggested by some that closely observing a less hesitant peer can be particularly powerful for less confident learners (Thuketana and Westhof, 2018). In some respects, this is furthered with the target age group because, due to their age, the experience sketching from the nude is a new experience for all in the room. Sources also describe the ideal learning scenario as featuring collaboration and communication and the social constructivist climate of a life drawing class has been said to have instigated a range of conversations linking the practical activity with conceptual considerations (Graham, 2012) by providing informal discussion opportunities within the breaks and by enabling students to draw on an area they feel confident in, their existing lived experience with the image of the human body (Graham, 2012).

In some cases, the physical configuration of the space seems to be a driving force in the increased confidence of students (Josefowski, 2015, Schady, 2020), or the change of location, which is particularly pertinent to life drawing, which often necessitates a secluded room with specific furniture or with fewer windows. For some students, it is the theatre of life drawing that inspires them (Mercer, 2018), or the unfamiliarity of the situation, removed from students' prior experience which may dictate preconceptions of their own ability (Josefowski, 2015).

Limitations to the idea that life drawing may enhance students' confidence due to its social constructivist nature are that life drawing can be preconceived by some as a rite of passage, which may lead to

students entering the class with the expectation that they should mirror the style of other group members (Lang, 2017), although based on the reading available, it seems that much of the student experience is based on how the activity is presented by the teacher (Josefowski, 2015 and this is estimated to contribute to both successful and less successful versions of the activity.  Although the evidence that student confidence may be inspired by the behaviour of others is derived from a variety of empirical sources, this depends largely on the personality and the prior experience of the participant (Blegvad, 2020) making effectiveness impossible to predict with any accuracy in any specific setting (Damperat, Jeannot and Jongmans, 2016).

It should also be noted that there was very little research around the nature of life drawing as a group activity and how this dynamic might hinder or promote student confidence. Damperat Jeannot and Jongmans' study is with adults and Thuketana and Westhof's is with younger children, which is particularly problematic because Booth states that many adolescents have embedded preconceptions about their ability, which can be developed as early as nine years old (2023), therefore limiting the relevance of their study to this one. Mercer and Josefowski's articles are, however, based on experience within Higher Education fine art establishments. Josefowski's is a peer-reviewed article and Mercer's is based on her experience as a life drawing specialist working in a drawing school, predominantly with the target age group. Based on the experience of the researchers with the target age group, both articles should be somewhat reliable, but the potential for subjectivity is increased as confirmation bias may influence them positively toward the practice (Hegelund, 2005, Sharkey, 2023).

 Student Autonomy leads to increased confidence.

Several sources attribute increases in student confidence to the dissolution of the typical classroom hierarchy (Booth, 2023, Graham, 2012, Josefowski, 2015). In the life room the teacher generally stands behind the students, rather than in front. There are a few examples which credit the spark of inspiration generated in students to the transaction of knowledge from teacher to student and specifically to the student's rejection of some parts of the skill set being taught; the growth in confidence happens when students produce their own creative response (Belluigi, 2018, Josefowski, 2015). It is suggested by some that the teacher becoming a co-creator, rather than an instructor, can create environments where

students learn creative skills particularly well (Booth, 2023, Goodman et al., 2021, Graham, 2012, Massouras, 2013).  This allows for a less firmly established image of the correct modus operandi, as students need to practise working independently after briefly seeing a modelled response (Willingham, 2021). It is suggested that this is a somewhat self-perpetuating spiral in some literature: students that work independently develop confidence, then are more willing to work independently and so on, all the time improving skills through repetition (Akpan, 2020, Willingham, 2021).

This concept provides an argument that it is perhaps the transfer of responsibility and initiative, or 'flipped learning' model (Sams et al., 2016), where students are given the support and independence to work in a more student-led environment (Booth, 2023), that inspires student confidence rather than the life drawing activity itself. The sources cited here are, for the most part, peer reviewed articles so built on a sound body of empirical evidence; however, it is important to be aware that some students will respond very positively to this scenario, but its success may vary broadly depending on delivery. Every teacher needs to be aware of their students' prior experience and self-confidence, so autonomous activities can be effectively scaffolded (Knight and Deng, 2016, Lo Bianco and Slaughter, 2016, Oluo, 2018) to actively create a confidence-inducive environment.

There were thought to be a number of factors within the sphere of practical art teaching that might contribute to increased student confidence. The major problem in the research is a lack of specificity to life drawing, which means that there is considerable room for subjective interpretation of this literature. However, there was consistent indication that confidence, especially that of young people, seems to be positively affected by workshop environments which provide a balance of instruction and freedom.

How much does life drawing help students communicate themes and ideas in their artwork?

Even in radical changes to young artists' curricula, the practice in the life room was rethought, though never removed (Crippa and Williamson, 2013). In fact, many artists and teachers (Cooke, 2012, Mendelsohn, 2016, Crippa and Williamson, 2013, Willer, 2018) would credit life drawing's major positive product as generating new ideas. For example, the now famous Robert Rauschenberg being inspired to draw something completely removed from the human form while in a life class at art school (MacFarlane, 2011) or even in illustrations of early life drawing classes in Paris, students drawing the room and facing

away from the model (Figure 1), suggesting that the main objective of the class is not to replicate the figure in the most accurate way, but to stimulate artistic production.
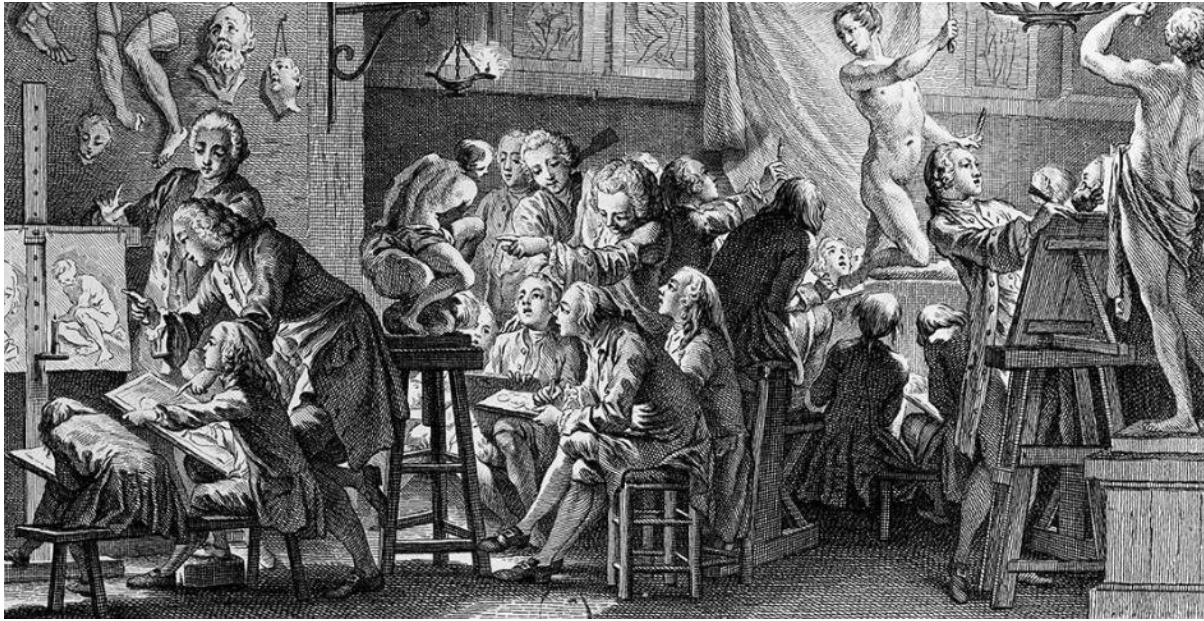


**Figure 2:** Prevost, B. L. (1751-77) *Ecole de Dessin*

<u>Embodiment as an avenue for developing visual literacy</u>

Some voices advocate that life drawing's major benefit to students is equipping them with access to the visual language of the Western canon (Graham, 2012), which helps them communicate their own ideas more effectively. It is suggested that, by observing the human form live, students begin to situate it as a cultural cornerstone alongside their existing experience of the body in popular culture, advertising and other media (Eck, 2001) and that this can potentially increase their engagement with imagery on a holistic level (Bey, 2011, Dunne, 2018, Frey, 2020). The fact that the body as a symbol is somewhat representative of themselves is thought to enable them to engage better with art than they previously would not have been able to fully understand and this theory is referred to as 'embodiment' (Bey, 2011, Graham, 2012, p. 10, Frey, 2020). This concept of embodiment is supposed to add to the body of evidence that justifies life drawing as a social constructivist process; the thinking is that students empathise with the model, engage with the group and ultimately take part in some collective meaning-making that is developed from the sketches they make during the class (Graham, 2012, Frey, 2020),

which is thought to be all the more powerful because artistic practice can be deeply entwined with the artist's sense of self (Sharkey, 2023, Bey, 2011, Booth, 2023, Graham, 2012). A limitation of this theory is that some student groups may find it easier to engage with the model than others. Even in Graham's highly successful study, it was the female student that empathised more keenly (2012, p. 8) and was seemingly criticised for it by her male counterpart. An unfortunate item of life drawing's baggage is that if a climate of respect is not actively cultivated by the teacher (Bey, 2011), it can reinforce existing social hierarchies (Chadwick, 1990) and consequently can be damaging to the creative potential of some students (Knight and Deng, 2016).

The concept of embodiment certainly appears viable and powerful in Graham's study, but it is significant to consider the more informed picture we have on how to ethically manage a multi-cultural classroom since his time of writing. Responsible teaching practice demands that, for all students to feel safe and valued in their learning environment, introducing Eurocentric art practices in global classrooms be justified (Adejumo, 2002), as there is considerable evidence in this part of the world of European culture and values being perceived as the norm (Gaupp, 2020) and superceding the vernacular (Jackson, 2004). The ensuing lack of clarity can lead to a stagnation of both cultures (Singhalampong, 2020). It is recommended that in order to free students to take ownership of visual stimuli, the teacher should own her own positionality[5] (Knight and Deng, 2016) as much as possible, without drawing distinctions between what counts as 'Western' or 'Eastern' art practice, which serves to benefit neither, as it has been proven both inaccurate and conducive to perceived superiorities (Singhalampong, 2020). Hence, in order to empower students (Knight and Deng, 2016) with ownership of their art practice, it is important not just to recognise but actively engage with different cultural perspectives in the classroom (Knight and Deng, 2016, Lo Bianco and Slaughter, 2016, Oluo, 2018). How this directly translates into practice in the Thai

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[5] Knight and Deng and Oluo (2018) write extensively about 'positionality' (Knight and Deng, 2016, p. 106) which is acknowledgement and disclosure of the stance from which we approach cultural content.

teaching context is respectfully exploring the host culture in an informed way[6] (Jackson, 2004,

Singhalampong, 2020).

<u>Life drawing yields creative results because students are bored</u>

There is a perspective which attributes the strict discipline or perhaps 'boredom' of practising skills to the inspiration of artists (Wilf, 2019, p. 41, Josefowski, 2015, Ruskin, 1857), whereas others attribute their ability to create to the meditative state induced by very close focus on attaining accuracy (Graham, 2015). This suggests that a more structured pedagogical method generates confidence in practical skills en route to the real objective, which is enabling student communication of their intentions.
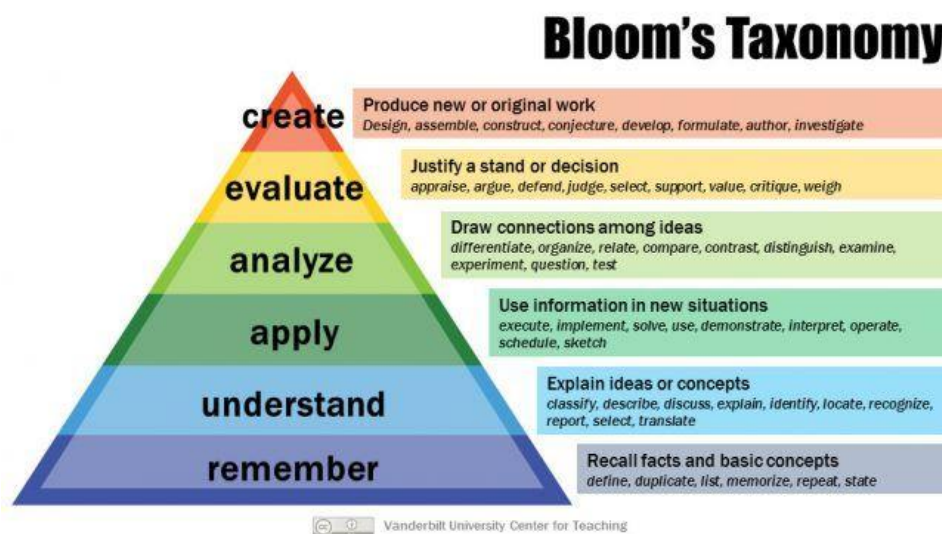
Wilf's anti-Romantic notion of the repetition of activities as a method for achieving inspiration is one that can find some support from other sources, such as Josefowski's theory that the structure of the workshop 'demands' artistic rebellion (2015, p. 57). Graham's experimental drawing practices work on a similar level to life drawing: they comprise repetitive marks based on shapes or responses to external stimuli. For example, a metronome is used to create time-based structures for drawing that enable him to explore philosophical concepts via the drawing activity, making him the test-subject for a localised experiment (2018). Despite the slightly different nature of the drawing situation and the very small sample size in Graham's study, he describes a similar focus on the present-ness inherent in the act of drawing as part of the timed activity, where the artist's mind can surpass objective considerations normally unavoidable in the creation of visual art (2015) and begin to move into what could be simply called, 'boredom' (Wilf, 2019).

An alternative explanation for the student ability to pass from a realistic sketching activity to the creation of a unique artwork is from a more conventionally pedagogical stance. Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow' principle

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[6] It is a view held by some and widely perpetuated that any Thai art with a visible 'Western' influence is a response to Western demands made to 'civilise' Thailand (Hall, 2018, Jackson, 2004, Jackson, 2008, Singhalampong, 2020) and therefore not true Thai art (Rojanaphruk, 2021), which by that logic would be seen as that inspired both in terms of subject and style by Thai and Hindu epics or Buddhist imagery (Ministry of Culture, 2009). This limited view of what 'Thai' art looks like homogenises the diverse cultural groups that make up contemporary Thailand (Hesse-Swain, 2011, Lo Bianco and Slaughter, 2016) on a social level, informs hierarchies that are played out throughout the educational field (Waters and Day, 2022) and prevents integration (Hesse-Swain, 2011)

(Oppland, 2016) suggests that if students encounter an activity that perfectly balances challenge with their existing ability, then they will encounter 'flow', a state where time passes quickly and they are absorbed in enjoyment of the task (Oppland, 2016). Bloom's Taxonomy diagram (Figure 3) places the ability to create at the top of the pyramid as the most difficult skill, which aligns with anti-Romantic theory that practical skills development is a means to improving (Mottram and Whale, 2001), rather than restricting, creative output (Lang, 2017). From a pedagogical stance, there are also established links between the repeated practice of techniques, such as the quick sketches practised during a life class, where students continue to use the same, somewhat basic, technique to capture the proportions of the form, challenged by changes of the pose and strict time constraints, until students reach an 'automatic' state (Willingham, 2021, p. 120). It is a commonly held belief that it is the strictness of the parameters of the workshop; for instance, the timings for each pose, what can be seen or not from each student's physical relation to the model and the limited range of materials commonly available that fire students' imaginations (Frey, 2020, Mercer, 2018).

## Bloom's Taxonomy

**create**
Produce new or original work
*Design, assemble, construct, conjecture, develop, formulate, author, investigate*

**evaluate**
Justify a stand or decision
*appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, critique, weigh*

**analyze**
Draw connections among ideas
*differentiate, organize, relate, compare, contrast, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test*

**apply**
Use information in new situations
*execute, implement, solve, use, demonstrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch*

**understand**
Explain ideas or concepts
*classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate*

**remember**
Recall facts and basic concepts
*define, duplicate, list, memorize, repeat, state*

Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching

**Figure 3:** Blooms Taxonomy (2001) *The Revised Taxonomy*

Willingham also suggests that the repeated practice of the technique can enable students to access higher order thinking skills, which enables them to surpass considerations about accurate recording and start to adapt their embedded skills to create (2021). The appeal of a flow state theory from a Thai perspective is its inherent similarity to the concept of meditation; a simple task is repeated until a more

complex level of thought or sentience is achieved, in the one, this is enlightenment (Dhamma.com, 2023), in the other, just conceptual thought. The sources for this theory are educational theorists whose studies are informed by large sample testing with the target age group, making them relatively robust. However, given the limitations on funding available for these authors, their pedagogical theories are often centred around core curriculum subjects, such as English and Mathematics, and rarely include any testing from the Arts. It could be argued that, out of the three possible explanations for students' increased ability to communicate themes and ideas after life drawing, flow is perhaps the most effectively supported by empirical evidence, though this is arguably because it is a theory informed by research in other subject areas. It is possible that the lack of research around where creative ideas come from is because it is quite a nebulous topic to grasp and explore.

How much does life drawing promote reflective practice for students?

A variety of factors inherent to the life drawing class can instigate and habitualise reflection in students, which can lead to extended development of their artistic intentions. For school age students, even simple changes like working standing rather than sitting at school desks can promote better reflection, as they see their work from a physically removed stance and can recognise areas for improvement (Leigh, 2020). In Leigh's study, students' movement between locations and colour tools seemed to catalyse an improved ability to reflect on and further conceptualise their artworks (2020). Admittedly, Leigh's study was undertaken with young children, but it can be the case that younger age groups have a more staunchly absolutist approach to art-making based on a lack of experience with different alternative art forms (Leigh, 2020).

There is inevitably casual observation and reflection on students' own work and that of peers during the frequent model's breaks (Dunne, 2018), while students restock materials, therefore lending itself to social constructive learning theory (Akpan et al., 2020, Howarth, 2018, Logan, 2013), which can help students organically co-construct conceptual interpretations through casual or teacher-led conversation; for example, Link's example specifically used the act of standing up and reflecting on the setting of the furniture as a metaphor for the hierarchy of the classroom, leading all students to use creative interpretation skills and one to publicly create an installation sculpture as their response to a prompt

(2022). The same applies to moving around the room: seeing their work from a distance will instigate reflection as they see amendments to make in accuracy and proportion (Link, 2022). Leigh's study is undertaken with pre-service teachers, somewhat older than the target age group; nevertheless, at a comparable point in time where they have chosen to specialise in Fine Art and are potentially more open than some learner groups to actively developing the way they work. By forcing the students to interact with physically different surroundings, they automatically began to make links between the unexpected scenery and their own ideas (Mercer, 2018).

A perceived limitation within co-constructed learning environments, where students have greater input into deciding the parameters of success, is their reduced effectiveness compared to a teacher-led classroom and it has been suggested that this approach can become overly subjective (Harwood, 2007, Pujol, 2009). It is important to note that these sources primarily deal with groups of teenagers or young adults and the implications of having fully student-led environments is that the potential for increased confusion about learning expectations and social issues is dramatically increased. In some cases, it has been said to even have a detrimental effect on student learning, where some may lose confidence or find it difficult to continue work, due to a lack of clarity in expectations and end goals (Belluigi, 2016, Cooke, 2012). In fact, even the keenest advocates of student-led reflection urge that this should be modelled thoroughly by the teacher for students to use the tool effectively (Kong and Fitch, 2002), in which case, leaving the results open to being perhaps overly sculpted by the teacher with a resulting loss of authenticity on the part of the student (Leigh, 2020).
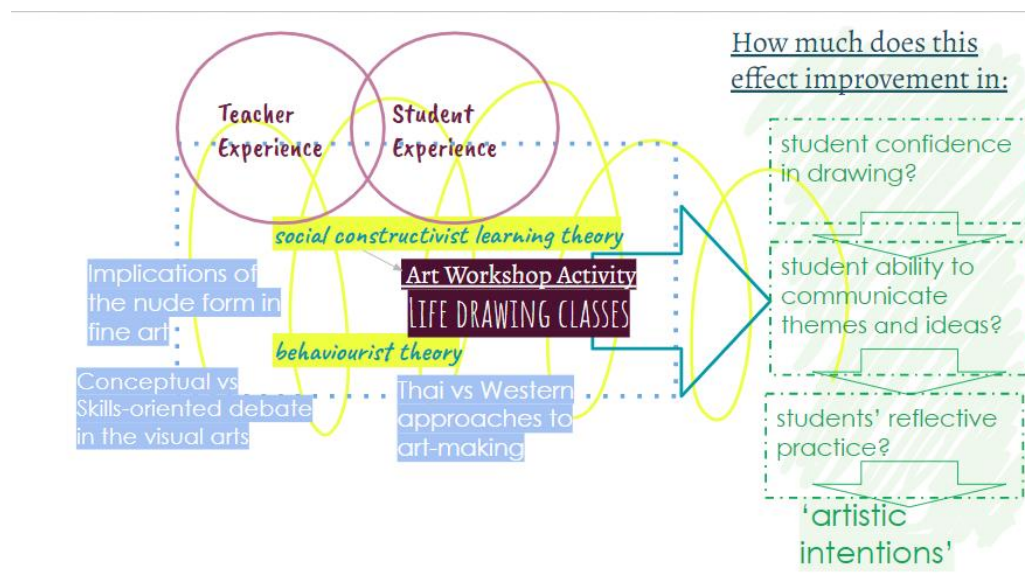
**Figure 4:** Conceptual Framework Diagram

## Research Question

This study aims to investigate whether traditional life drawing practice improves the coursework of students of Visual Art at an international school in Thailand, with a focus on their ability to communicate their 'artistic intentions' (ibo.org, 2014), with the research question '*In what ways life drawing support international school students of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme Visual Arts course in developing communication of their artistic intentions in their practical artwork?*'. In order to approach the somewhat nebulous term, 'artistic intentions' the research questions are as follows:

1. In what ways does life drawing increase student confidence in practical tasks?
2. In what ways does life drawing help students communicate themes and ideas in their artwork?
3. In what ways does life drawing help promote reflective practice for art students?

The reason that these three subcategories have been elected is that a student's ability to express their artistic intentions is dependent on how complex their intentions might be and also their ability to express those intentions either verbally within an interview setting or written in their coursework, as opposed to just via practical artworks, which may leave a significant area for subjectivity and interpretation on the part

of the researcher. Markers for student confidence can be latently identified as well as being a topic that students may understand how to communicate better themselves (Belluigi, 2016), which leads to autonomy for making creative choices (Thuketana and Westhof, 2018) and they may also find it easier to discuss the concept of their artworks via the terminology 'themes and ideas', terminology they are familiar with from previous studies (Pearson Qualifications, 2014). Reflection tasks are embedded across the IB curriculum for students of this age group, so they are familiar with this activity. However, an ability to proactively reflect in the autonomous setting of the life classroom indicates that they are starting to use their own incentive to improve communication skills, rather than merely following teacher instructions (Iordanou, 2022).

## Methodology.

**Methodology**

Given the geospecific nature of this study into the relationship between life drawing classes and students' artistic intentions, a constructionist paradigm, which examines how events and meanings are effects of surrounding social discourses (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was appropriate. An interpretive stance was relevant for this project, because social conditions are particularly influential in participant responses, particularly in the Thai context, where participants may be more comfortable communicating their opinions in a non-explicit way (Jackson, 2004). Participant responses were analysed at a latent level, which is useful when working with teenage groups, as they may use language incorrectly or have difficulty verbalising higher-order responses (Hsu, 2021). However, there was an element of critical realism (Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2016), as all themes that appear to be present are in fact a product of the researcher themselves (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This reflexive stance (Braun and Clarke, 2006) is essential to preserve throughout the study because, although the students are a product of a multicultural learning and social environment, they are also influenced by the teacher and researcher, and although the wider social environment may have an impact (Jackson, 2004), they may also feel compelled to say what they perceive the researcher as wanting to hear (Leigh, 2020).  Given that the aim in this case was not to create a theory, but rather develop a currently limited subject area, the researcher

took an inductive approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to avoid fitting the data too closely to the researcher's preconceptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The ideal practice in this context is ethnography and thematic analysis was selected as an appropriate method because there is less expectation that the findings will necessarily lead to a concrete theory, rather than just shedding light on a little-researched topic, compared to grounded theory for example (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 80). Within a relatively small sample size, there is the opportunity to use multiple criteria to assess data's 'prevalence' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82); for example, the frequency of its instance within the data set, time spent focusing on it by an individual or any particular relevance it may have to the research question. This is ideal because, as stated previously, students' verbal communication may be distorted by their perceptions of authority (Leigh, 2020). The focus that thematic analysis creates on individual, rather than universal responses is also more relevant to English Curriculum teaching; differentiation is deemed so important, it is named in UK Teacher Standards (Department for Education (2011).  This less rigid approach is especially suitable given that in this study, the sample is particularly niche; the groups are entirely female by coincidence and it is possible that the findings may be different if male or mixed groups were sampled after participating in a similar activity.

**Research Design**

The context for this research proposal is an international school in Thailand offering the English Curriculum until age 16 and the International Baccalaureate Diploma course for post-16 students. The nationality of the student body is 24% Thai and 15% British, the remaining 61% of the student population comprising 51 other nationalities (School's Student Nationality Report, 2021), often with one Thai parent and one foreign. Each year, roughly 48 students study Art and Design at GCSE and between 10 and 20 go on to study Visual Arts. A steep learning curve for students is the IB's increased requirement for interpretation and demonstration of artistic intentions, as conceptual fluency is not an explicit requirement in the GCSE Assessment Criteria (Pearson Qualifications, 2014). The teacher is a painting specialist in a department of four Art teachers and has been teaching GCSE Fine Art for six years and IB Visual Arts for three years. The students sampled are the entire cohort of Year 12 Visual Arts students, coincidentally all

female and mixed ability groups, which are determined by students' election of the subject and timetabling. They meet three times a week for blocked classes of 1 hour and 20 minutes. There are 10 girls in total, from two blocked groups of 4 and 6 respectively. Within the group, there are 3 students with Special Educational Needs, one of whom also speaks English as an Additional Language. There is one further student with EAL support needs. For the school in question, this is a typical group size and needs profile.

The case study activity comprised a series of traditional life drawing classes with a nude model. This was a new experience for all students, so the classes involved a brief demonstration of techniques at the start of each session and students were given figure sketching exercises to practise before the first class. Each session planned to follow the same format: students completed quick sketches to warm up, which developed into sustained sketches as the lesson progressed. In the third session a visiting artist introduced a painting technique. The design was formed on the basis that practical tasks can promote the development of Higher Order skills (Harden and Stamper, 1999).

To gauge the effectiveness of the strategy, three methods of data collection were used to triangulate data: observations, which took place during the life drawing classes; semi-structured interviews, which happened after the learning activity and examination of student coursework, in line with ordinary marking procedure as dictated by school policy (once per week for IB students, using IB Process Portfolio Assessment Rubric (ibo.org, 2014, p. 46), which happened throughout the course of the study. This was partly to 'crystallize' data (Hegelund, 2005, p. 649), ensuring that the researcher was as objective as possible, but also because this form of ethnography is proven effective for researchers working within a culture which is not their own, as combining various methods of data collection helps to develop a more nuanced understanding of the participants' experience, rather than 'othering' (Reeves et al., 2013, p. e1367) the subjects. However, a reflexive stance is taken; the researcher cannot prevent some of their own bias or interest to affecting the data gathered, rather than assuming that the themes are already present and merely found within the data sets (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Whole group observations during the activity were conducted by the normal class teacher (researcher), in person on school campus, throughout its running (Appendix 1). This can create some bias in findings, as students will potentially respond to the teacher as an authority figure and try to please them with their responses rather than being totally honest (Leigh, 2020). However, the triangulation technique should limit the impact of this. The writing up of observations inevitably blurs the line between the researcher's observation and analyses (Coles and Thomson, 2016) and for this reason, a fieldnotes framework was developed before the activity (Appendix 2) which was intended to ensure thoroughness in observation, whilst also limiting subjectivity on the part of the researcher (Agar,1980). Some questions in the observation schedule (Appendix 2) are called 'Correct Running Checklist' to ensure robustness, because the effectiveness of educational activities can be reduced if students do not use resources correctly (Choi et al., 2005) which may bias the findings. Writing up of field notes happened throughout the process and structured field notes gathered generated a rich description which was triangulated with interview and coursework data to create a fuller picture (Reeves et al., 2013). An interpretive theory model of ethnography was appropriate because its basis in 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973, p. 9) helps to contextualise people's statements and actions to avoid misunderstanding. It is also a model which stresses reflexivity, the researcher's consciousness of how their own experiences dictate their understanding of the behaviour of study participants (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005, Reeves et al., 2013), much in the same way that a teacher might recognise indicators of their students' learning from their own learning experience (Sharkey, 2023) which are particularly observable in a visual subject such as art.
 Audio-recorded, individual, semi-structured interviews after the life drawing activity (Appendix 1) were used to gather data on students' experience. Conducting post-interviews following the creation of observational fieldnotes during the activity was deemed an effective technique in ethnographical studies (Reeves at al., 2013) because the former explains the phenomena in the latter but can also mitigate misunderstanding on the researcher's part. In post-interviews, questions using language similar to that used in classes employed reflection skills that students are familiar with and adept at, so should have yielded meaningful responses, but also benefitted their creative practice (Yang, 2017), whilst the semi-structured format still allowed some room for an inductive approach, because this can give a more thorough data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006, Hegelund, 2005).

Throughout the study period, student coursework was read as normal and any links between commentary therein and case study data were noted. Using this third method of data collection enabled the researcher to observe any other elements of the phenomenon that that may be present in the coursework produced outside the life drawing sessions; for example, the adoption of visual techniques the student may not describe during interview (Reeves et al., 2013).

## Ethics

This study was designed and took place in accordance with ethical approval from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Ethics Committee. It was recognised during the Ethical Approval process that the element of nudity in this study may have been a problematic issue for some students, so a Risk Assessment form was completed and protocol was put in place for additional student support in line with school policy and Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's recommendations.

## Results

Analysis of the findings suggests that there were many benefits to be had from taking part in the life drawing activity, as perceived by students, and these were indicated at both a latent and semantic level. The researcher identified many subthemes (Appendix 5); however, for relating succinctly back to the research question and existing literature, these will be roughly grouped under the categories outlined previously: in what ways does life drawing increase student confidence, ability to communicate themes and ideas, and reflective practice at IB level. It should be noted that, whilst the researcher established these questions before the data was gathered and they did inform the Interview Schedule (Appendix 3) that was used to guide the semi-structured interviews, the researcher did not actively seek these broader themes out within the data, in order to retain an inductive approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006), though was aware that they were more likely to be found due to innate researcher bias (Braun and Clarke, 2006). There were also a number of unexpected subthemes that the researcher identified in the results that were

thought to enhance understanding of the ways in which life drawing might support students' communication of artistic intentions, so these are included.

<span style="color:#3a5a8c">In what ways does life drawing increase student confidence in practical tasks?</span>

It was anticipated, based on existing research, that increased confidence in practical tasks may have led to a greater fluency in artistic intentions for students (Leigh, 2020, Thuketana and Westhof, 2018). There were many references considered to refer to the category of confidence, or lack of, within the students' interview transcriptions and these pertained to a range of factors.

Nervousness

Student nervousness prior to the life drawing activity seemed to be linked to their expectation that their ability would improve with practice and hence, as beginners, they would have little ability and all but one described this as only lasting until the class began. Most students mentioned that they were nervous in the first class: some in advance of the experience itself, some in anticipation of working with a different group of students. It was observed that lower ability students verbalised this explicitly, whereas higher ability students tended to allude to nervousness more subtly; for example, Maria says that she regretted not doing the practice activity prior to the first session (Maria, interview, 2023) rather than admitting explicitly to being nervous. Teresa, another high ability student, uncharacteristically admits to choosing an 'easier' (interview, 2023) location to stand to work in, though she also does not express nervousness verbatim. It should be noted that subthemes identified based on the researcher's knowledge of student personality can be unreliable, as it is impossible to predict how individuals will react in new situations (Damperat, Jeannot and Jongmans, 2016). However, her 'easier' choice is backed up by observation data, which also indicates a declining trend in safe choices as learning progressed.

More practice leads to an increase in confidence

All students noticed an improvement in their skill level over the course of the sessions which led to an increase in confidence, from Sara who states that, although mixing with a new group of different students in future classes will still be 'intimidating' (Sara, interview 2023), she attributes her increased confidence and ability to group learning and will 'definitely' seek out future opportunities to take part in life drawing

(Sara, interview, 2023). Tammy can reflect on the tools that have helped her confidence improve, such as the 'step-by step' technique and how this helped her progress on to more confident and experimental drawings (Tammy, interview, 2023) and Teresa goes one further to make a link between quantity and increased ability and confidence,'... you know how like people say that if you make more artwork, it turns out to be even better than when you make one good artwork... the more I make, the more I like.' (interview, 2023) This is in accordance with the idea that increased practice should lead to increased skill (Willingham, 2021). It is arguable that this is a benefit that could have been brought about by any practical skill activity, but it was interesting to see in coursework analysis that improvement was not solely focused on practical skill but also composition ideas and combinations of different symbols. Viewed through another lens, Teresa's statement could also allude to practice that leads to idea generation, either by students eventually happening upon successful ways to transmit their ideas by chance, as suggested by Wilf (2019), or that somewhere in the process of repetition, the student feels an increased ability to communicate effectively.

Confidence increases when students are appropriately challenged

Students overall showed varying levels of confidence throughout the activity, which loosely matched their ability levels and clearly met their challenge limits accordingly. Some found that just producing loose drawings quickly gave them sufficient challenge to feel a sense of progress, 'I liked the timings actually... it helps me speed up my drawing time and … practise drawing quicker.' (Sara, interview, 2023).

 Although lower ability students found it more difficult to elucidate why they felt this was a useful activity, Sara did express that taking part in the life drawing class had made her less likely to 'stress out' (interview, 2023) about having to produce work under pressure. Others required the short timings in order to feel challenge; for example Yasmina says,'... the best work I did is always at the beginning and the end of it... So maybe... I'm like the COSINE curve... it was like one minute sketch at the beginning right, so I had to do it really quickly and accurately...' (interview, 2023). Yasmina was observed to be very experimental during the longer poses, using various colours and media to produce multiple sketches instead of just one, which she does not say specifically in her interview, though she does say that, '...

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everything in the end just kind of flows naturally so that's when I feel like I can draw the best.'(interview, 2023).

 From this evidence it is possible to observe that consciously or not, Yasmina has some metacognitive ability and is self-setting challenging tasks to improve her learning experience; it is possible that she feels the drop-down in her own skill in the medium length poses as, at around 10 minutes, they are not giving her optimum challenge in terms of recording but the time provided is currently too short for her to use colour media. She goes on to further reinforce that, like the other high ability students, the first lesson is where she felt the greatest increase in her own ability because it was more challenging for her, due to the newness of the experience. The phrase, 'rushing through the work' is one that she consistently uses in her interview when she is both being challenged and enjoying herself. It was interesting to observe that all students, regardless of confidence level on entering the class, responded positively to activities that they found challenging; which supports an argument for life drawing as a technique which utilises challenge to induce flow (Oppland, 2016), supporting student confidence and potential for communicating their artistic intentions effectively.

In what ways does life drawing help students communicate themes and ideas in their artwork?

In what ways does life drawing promote reflective practice for students?

There is a developing body of research which makes connections between active reflection, development of critical thinking skills, and a resulting increase in creative problem-solving in students (Iordanou, 2020) and so it seemed like a logical progression to connect the increased reflection stimulated by the life drawing class to an increase in independent creative ideas for students as the results were identified. Across the data gathered, reflection was observed and referred to by students on a scale much more universal and larger than anticipated, so this section focuses on the subthemes that were thought to contribute to both reflection and the seemingly resulting student communication of themes and ideas.

Independent Creative Choices

Whilst observing the classes, it was notable that students were completely absorbed in the activity and were not asking the teacher for direction or help at any point and it was anticipated that this theme would be less evident in the interviews, given that it is challenging to estimate how creative ideas are generated

and a typical student response would be to avoid discussing a subject area they are unsure of. However, in response to the question, 'How do you think this exercise has made you work differently?', a majority of students identified the activity as having improved their ability to make independent creative choices; though some found this easier to express than others. Tara states that, 'It really made me feel like I can start a new piece because I just go with it, not overthinking, just starting...' (interview, 2023) and Nadja develops this further with, '... maybe in the way I start my art... it's made me have more ideas for compositions as well...' (interview, 2023). It is possible that this could be a result of observation of others in the group, which can prompt more confident communication of ideas (Thuketana and Westhof, 2018, Damperat, Jeannot and Jongmans, 2016). It was observable that students who experimented with different colour and tools seemed to multiply at an exponential rate, which would suggest that they were observing and mimicking experimental behaviour in each other, in line with social constructivist theory. It was also observed that there was a direct influence from the life class in student coursework, as body imagery appeared as both main subject matter and was used in a symbolic way alongside other inspirations.

All students made some latent reference to the concept of flow within the activity, which could be a byproduct of the process described by Graham as, 'meditative' drawing (Graham, 2015, p. 54), as alluded to by Zahra as 'emptyheaded' or 'pure concentration' (interview, 2023), where it is repetition itself that can develop a more profound understanding or different perspective regarding figurative imagery. An element which may be contradictory to this is students' use of the word, 'perspective' to express their interpretation of the subject. It was first thought that they were referring to their physical view, though later understood that they were in fact using the term as they learn to in their other IB subjects, to mean critical stance, which demonstrates that they are in fact interpreting and creating their own meaning in their creative responses to the poses, hence a hypnotised state becomes less likely.

From a high school pedagogical stance, Oppland describes flow as striking a perfect balance between boredom and stress. Amaya's experience perhaps relates to this more coherently; the timings are what makes the activity demanding but they encourage focus, 'We didn't really have time to think about it, we just had to like, do it...' (interview, 2023). Although Amaya's first response was the more typical of the

group, she also referred to the direct impact on their confidence, '...it helped me be more brave...' (interview, 2023) and others recall that, '... when I continue to observe and then draw, everything in the end just kind of flows naturally so that's when I feel like I can draw the best.' (Yasmina, interview, 2023). This relates to how students can use the flow process to quite seamlessly progress through more challenging tasks without feeling boredom or stress (Willingham, 2021). They have made these adaptable skills automatic through application and are able to create something. In this sense, it is perhaps possible to interpret life drawing as an activity which, via establishing challenge through pace, can help students develop more advanced skills, such as creation, more quickly.

<u>Students demonstrate understanding of how life drawing might help them address their own learning needs</u>

A surprising result was that in their own reflections, some students recognised elements unique to life drawing that helped them work or '... get into the zone...' (Tammy, interview, 2023). Tammy goes into greater depth in describing how her Obsessive Compulsive Disorder normally prevents her from concentrating without listening to music; however, in the life class, she describes being able to focus without distraction (interview, 2023). Yasmina recognises that she needs to feel more challenge to do her best, '...I kind of like the first session because the feeling of rushing through the work and trying to see how can I get better... rushing through the work actually helped me draw better...' (Yasmina, interview, 2023).

Life drawing seemed to add to students' visual repertoire; for example, Danni speaks about the activity as being useful from a technical perspective, '... I feel like an important part to artists should be able to like capture what they're looking at and build sort of a visual library of the images... so I guess figure drawing is also helpful...' (Danni, interview, 2023), whereas Nadja links technical practice to idea generation, '... it's made me have more ideas for compositions... I can create different compositions and choose which ones I want.' (interview, 2023) and she explains this with, '... you have a more deep understanding of objects and space, so it makes making compositions a lot easier.' (interview, 2023). This links to the idea that students already have an innate relationship with the subject of the nude (Bey, 2011), perhaps due to the theory of embodiment (Graham, 2012), but instead of being a barrier to learning, exposure to the

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nude in an art context seemed to open up new avenues for making artwork for multiple students who expressed a lack of confidence in attempting to convey the human form previously. Although Bey suggests that interest in the human form is universal (2011), his study is largely based on his experience as a life drawing specialist, hence he speaks from a position of positive bias: perhaps just art students tend to be interested due to the nude's ubiquity in the Western canon.

## Higher Ability students[7] reflect more

Quantitatively, there was an observable relationship between student ability and counted reflections within the interviews, though reflection was consistently evident in all student interviews, both during the sessions and afterwards. Higher ability students appeared to reflect more and it is suggested that the more students reflect, the faster they progress in skill development (Iordanou, 2020). There is also a positively increasing trend in the observations, where reflection is noted as increasing each session and in the coursework scrutiny there is more reflection on conceptual strategy in each consecutive record. This pattern would imply that the life drawing activity did have a positive effect on students practising and, therefore, improving their reflection skill. However, it remains possible that this trend is also a result of further practice making coursework slides, observation of model student coursework examples or the result of teacher feedback on coursework during other weekly lessons. There is a discussion of how the physical nature of the life drawing workshop may have prompted increased reflection in the workshop section below. It is worth noting that observations and coursework scrutiny are not fully reliable as indicators of increasing levels of reflection, as increased reflection could be a result of increased student confidence and the increase in reflection in coursework could purely be down to student ability in coursework increasing, which is expected in any taught curriculum, as students receive further instruction.

## Reflecting on a conceptual level

It was evident in some student interviews and coursework that the newness of the experience of life drawing prompted them to reflect and engage with the subject on a conceptual level, as Nadja says, '...

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[7] By the school's definition, Higher Ability students have been identified by high scores on school baseline assessments which are provided by data monitoring systems (Cambridge Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM,2023 ) and should be proactively provided for within faculties and lessons to give extra challenge.

it's like in front of us... it's a primary reference' (interview, 2023) rather than purely observing and copying, '... there was a moment where I thought... there's like this naked adult.' (Tammy, interview, 2023) and that they considered this as they were sketching, '... I forgot that she's an actual person... I was like, oh wow, that's kind of deep.' (Tammy, interview, 2023). This stduent response indicated that they were conscious of the wider experience of life drawing, hence, unlikely to be feeling bored (Wilf, 2019).

Reflecting on the purpose of the class

A perhaps more surprising result of students' conceptual reflection was how they, as a group, reviewed their own ideas of what the purpose of the life drawing session was. Many students began with the intention to record reality with accuracy, 'You're more studying things than you are imagining from your head and guesswork' (Nadja, interview, 2023); however, the same student discusses a '... more deep understanding of objects and space.... how they work together and move...' (Nadja, interview, 2023) which suggests a perception shift in what she aims to capture in her sketches and perhaps a divorced relationship from the figurative purpose she perceived at the start of the session, which is reminiscent of the 'Drawing as a process of selection...' described by Graham (2019, p. 7). Zahra says, '... how you draw yourself, but not yourself...' (interview ,2023) or Yasmina's reflection, 'Before life drawing I never knew a figure drawing can show so many things and I kind of wanted to use that, as a part of telling or conveying stories in my artwork...' (interview, 2023), demonstrating that students began to engage with the depiction of the form on a conceptual level.

Anatomy class conception

Some students arrived with the misconception that they were attending a class in 'anatomy', which is a stronger focus on the generic or perhaps idealised human, used in scientific studies (Glasgow School of Art, 2023). This idea seemed to stem either from students' experience online, where the term is often used synonymously with 'figure drawing' or potentially as a way that students perceived the class as being elevated above normal art class activities. In this sense, the confusion could have led to student work developing in a rigid, prescriptive style overall and in earlier classes resulted in an approach that prioritised the accurate depiction of the human form above all else and resultingly some students' misconception of one 'right way' approach, which relates back to the concerns expressed in the literature

review regarding the ethics surrounding the import of Western art doctrine as the accepted superior approach (Gaupp, 2020), but also the limiting effect that this can have on students' ability to express themselves creatively (Leigh, 2020).

Many students misused this specific term within their interviews; however, it was particularly higher ability, who initially thought that anatomical drawing skills were the primary learning objective and it is the researcher's opinion that this may be in part a result of some students' prior research into Renaissance artists. Maria was particularly expressive of how the class linked to her research on Vesalius, who '… used to go to cemeteries and catacombs to look at human figures...' (interview, 2023). Consequently, the major increase in confidence cited by these students was in relation to their technical ability, '... it did help me quite a lot because now I'm a lot more confident in drawing faces and bodies and all that.' (Nadja, interview, 2023) and for some of them, this surpassed their expectations 'I really didn't expect to learn as much as I did... it really gave me a much better understanding of the body...' (Maria, interview, 2023) and although quantitatively, references to the concept of anatomy were made inconsistently with student ability, higher ability students seemed to emphasise this more as a desirable takeaway from the class.

 Despite the frequent use of the word 'anatomy' (interviews, 2023), many students reflected on their conceptions of the significance of accuracy in their artwork. Although it was clearly important to them to produce a recognisable and somewhat attractive image, multiple students in the class explicitly attributed the best quality work they produced during the sessions to when they moved past a stage where they were constantly reviewing their work and striving for perfect accuracy (Amaya, Maria, interviews, 2023) or 'focusing too much on getting it to look perfectly like a body' (Teresa, interview, 2023); as Tammy states, 'I don't need to be so fixated on fixing something' (interview, 2023). Tammy alludes to beginning the class with an ambition to record as accurately as possible but then changing her stance; '... being too precise isn't going to get me anywhere' (interview, 2023) and even the more anatomy-focused students alluded to the fact that there was something more than accurate sketching that they learned during the sessions, 'Not like, kind of taking them for what they are, but I guess looking at them in a more arty way...' (Maria, interview, 2023)..

As Zahra said, '... there's more to be learned here than technique...' (Zahra, interview, 2023). This seemed to align with a development of the student conception that the techniques for accurate sketching they learnt were means to an end, rather than the desired learning objective. Tara alludes to the fact that, '... there might be a preferred method in the art community but I don't think there's a right way and a wrong way...' (interview, 2023) and certainly this agrees with some other perceptions in the group; even Maria whose transcript attributes significant value to accuracy, states, '... for me, in art the sense of understanding is the most important because it helps me convey what I want to convey'(interview, 2023), which implies that although accuracy has its place, it's the communication of meaning that she is going to use in her coursework. These statements could refute Lang's claim that taking part in life drawing classes enforces conformity in art students (2017).

**Workshop Factors**

Positive Social Interaction

As a group, students with increased drawing ability, such as Teresa, Nadja and Yasmina, seemed to begin the class with more confidence and this contributed to a different perception of the learning experience. Quantitatively, they made the most mentions of group learning experience and had the least concerns about peer judgement and low self-confidence in the group. Teresa discusses this the most extensively, '... I think it's kind of a community thing in a way, like a social... it's really nice to have the same people who are interested in the same thing in one room... there's kind of a connection with people... even if you don't talk to each other...'.(Teresa, interview, 2023) Given the lack of awareness students seemed to have of the ubiquity and nature of life drawing classes, it was surprising to the researcher that the majority of the group seemed to engage on some level with the community element of life drawing and the idea that they were part of a tradition (Graham, 2012). Within the interview, this is a topic that Teresa returns to four times in responses to different questions, each time seeming to develop her response, as if she is using the conversation to figure out why she found it so enjoyable, (Phillips Galloway,2020) and by the last mention she starts to link it to her developing practical ability, 'I feel like it's educational to see other people work the same subject that you do... you could learn different tactics and how to approach the same subject.' (Teresa, interview, 2023).

Other higher ability students express particular enjoyment of observing the work of other students, '...

having more students would be really nice as well... in the other one I liked seeing everyone else's work...

I like to see their different styles...' (Nadja, interview, 2023) and then goes on to say that, '... so if anyone

wants to look at mine then I don't really mind. Because if I'm not judging then I assume they're not judging

either.' (Nadja, interview, 2023). This would suggest that both students are benefiting a little more from

the flow generated by the activity because they are particularly conscious of the group (Oppland, 2016).

However, it is worth noting that these two students possess some of the top sketching ability in the entire

group and for one of them, the life class provides her interaction with a group of more able peers, which is

also said to augment the flow experience (Oppland, 2016). It is reasonable to expect that this entirely

positive experience is not universal (Damperat, Jeannot and Jongmans, 2016), nevertheless, it was

encouraging to see that Amaya, who had the highest count of concerns about peer judgement and low

self-confidence, also reflected positively on the experience of being able to observe others, '...I feel like I

was comparing a lot with- like I'm able to do this and they're able to do this, I feel like... it's helped me

learn.' (interview, 2023).

<u>Empathy and Embodiment</u>

Most students demonstrated what could be perceived as empathy or embodiment during the sessions

and began to link it with developing concepts in their artworks. This subtheme did not seem to form a

pattern with student ability and was, as suggested by Graham (2012), almost universal. Amaya, who

demonstrated more counts of empathy than any other student, reflected on the concept of realism and

societal pressures on women,

'... you can't really perfect a body because even if you got the proportions wrong, it's still... a body, there's
so many different types and shapes of bodies... which is actually quite a positive thing, especially for
teenagers... I think in Art, artists like embrace it more.' (Amaya, interview, 2023).

 She compares a fashion drawing class she attends, where she is pressured to convey an idealised

female form, with life drawing, '... even when I was working, they were like, is it wrong then if I don't make

the waist smaller?' (Amaya, interview, 2023). These reflections link back to some source material that

suggests that students start to develop their own creative voice in art via embodiment, which can be

learned during life class (Bey, 2011, Dunne, 2018, Graham, 2012), and certainly Amaya was not the only

student to develop the empathy she felt for the model into some conceptions of how meaning can be communicated through figurative image,

'... I vaguely felt like the first model... is kind of like shy at the beginning of it, she's kind of like hiding her boobs away from us and crossing her legs really tightly and I don't know what does it actually means [sic] or how can I show this, but after meeting Phupa I like started you know, he kind of uses the colours like that to show this...' (Yasmina, interview, 2023).

It is interesting that, as some research suggests, this subtheme seems to be linked to the age of the group (Graham, 2012), but it remains problematic to use these examples as evidence to recommend the practice, as it is debatable whether another group of students would have had the same response. Firstly, it is possible that the group related strongly to the model because they were all female, with a female model and teacher. Furthermore, the model was particularly personable, had prior experience working with the age group and was observed as actively making connection with students during the breaks and putting them at ease.

## Discussion

To an extent, the results of the study elucidate a picture of the ways in which life drawing can support high school aged students in the development of their artistic intentions and shed some light on relationships between practice and reflection that could contribute to the limited field pertaining to Fine Art learning in international schools, therefore meeting the key established learning need.

Some of the subthemes that were found did relate to the categories that were thought to contribute to improved artistic intentions: increased confidence, ability to convey themes and ideas visually and increased reflection. However, rather than these themes presenting themselves as separate categories within the results, they seemed to be quite universal and interdependent, with students' increased ability to communicate themes and ideas largely being a result of increased confidence and reflections. What became clear through the investigation of student responses in coursework, interviews and observations was a significant level of active and purposeful reflection, which clearly continued throughout the life class, between sessions and afterwards. Reflection was expected in the group, as it is something that is reinforced and practised throughout the subjects they study but it was, firstly, not expected to be as

universally proactive and focused and, secondly, not as effective at developing the other two areas of interest.

Consistent with existing research (Belluigi, 2016), the students found that their confidence increased as they became more experienced in using the technique; for example, when Tammy mentions the 'step-by step' (Tammy, interview, 2023) and how this helped her progress on to more confident and experimental drawings. At this point, it could be seen that she is alluding to the fact that she has gained confidence due to using an effective technique and this enables her to experiment. Based on observation and coursework scrutiny, it is possible to see that students generally work in a similar style to begin with as per Lang's criticism (2017), but this quickly diversifies as they all begin to gain confidence and branch out into more personal styles. The 'theatre' (Mercer, 2018) of the life drawing is something less referred to by students as a contributing factor to increased confidence and this was difficult to pick out from observation evidence. If anything, using easels and having their work more visible seemed to have an initially detrimental effect on student confidence, as Amaya says, 'I kept flipping it so no-one could see' (Amaya, interview, 2023). This may be a more effective factor when students enter life classes with strangers though, rather than other students from their year group, due to social issues among teenagers. It is believed that the transition into more independent art-making was a hugely effective factor, based largely on coursework scrutiny since the first session. Having reduced access to teacher help gave students the experience of being successful in their own decision-making (Thuketana and Westhof, 2018) and it is thought that this may have increased their confidence and, therefore, made them more likely to execute their own ideas to fulfil their artistic intentions, of which there was some indication within coursework evidence.

The relationship between independence and challenge was another recurring theme within student interviews, as all students seemed to respond most positively to points in the sessions that were most likely to trigger stress: the very short, timed drawings and the unfamiliar painting technique introduced by the visiting artist. It was interesting to observe that as student ability level progressed, different elements of the session provided challenge; at the beginning, timings were a universal source of challenge, then in following sessions higher ability students began to find challenge in trying different drawing techniques

and possibly some competition with each other and, by the last sessions, they are analysing how they can use colour and create compositions to communicate more effectively, which is in line with the theory that the creation of flow is what improves student fluency in their artistic intentions. The creation of challenging environments in an effort to stimulate creative response is a technique cited by Crippa and Williamson (2013) in life room practices which were designed to induce sensory overload in students, demonstrating that this approach, although risking stress, has been used in life drawing classrooms before. However, this is an area in which there has been very little research conducted, so it is difficult to draw robust conclusions based purely on the evidence from this small-scale study.

Students' increased ability to communicate themes and ideas seemed to be a tendency largely dependent on their increases in confidence, with many students commenting on their transition from focus on drawing for accuracy to drawing to communicate, which is particularly evident in statements from Tara and Tammy respectively, when they talk about moving past a 'right way' or 'fixating on fixing something' (interview, 2023). These statements both support a theory that increased confidence led students to experiment with visual language to communicate their artistic intentions, in line with flow theory (Oppland, 2016). However, there was some data that was more in line with alternative theories. Data collected could support views that students can derive some conceptual benefit from the process of deep reflection prompted by life drawing (Graham, 2012), though it is arguable that perhaps other practice-focused activities conducted in a quiet environment might enable deeper thought for students of this age range. This question links back to the skills-based debate in Western art schools; schools of thought that agree with the phenomenological potential of the act of drawing (Graham, 2019) would be at odds with those who believe that life drawing is access to the language and, therefore, a developed understanding of the Western art canon (Graham, 2012). This study provided little further clarity on this point. Some students, like Nadja (interview, 2023), engaged with the abstract nature of constructing an image in her discussion of line and shape; however, many more students engaged significantly with the human element of the life class, suggesting that a similarly structured workshop without a human model may not have had the same results. Many students referred to how they were interpreting the model's pose on a semantic level and it was evident that they were making links between the symbolic language of the human form and topics such as female body image, which lends itself to Graham's theory (2012).

Some related to their interaction with the model in a technical sense; they discussed how physically being in the space with the model instead of a photograph helped them to understand drawing the human body better and how they could refer back to this experience in future artworks. Others engaged with their inferred meaning of the pose, linking to the embodiment theory (Dunne, 2018, Graham, 2012) and this seemed to influence how they portrayed the model in their artworks, suggesting an increased level of conceptual analysis as a result of the class. This evidence would seem to refute theories that creative ideas are simply a bored or mindless response to repetition (Graham, 2015, Wilf, 2019), as students seemed to be highly engaged and reflective during the activity. It is possibly also questionable whether the required level of mental distance to facilitate meditation could be achieved during a high school life drawing session (Graham, 2015). It is necessary to remember, though, that in interviews with this age group, they still relate to the researcher (also a class teacher at school) as an authority figure and so may be compelled to give answers that they think will please them (Leigh, 2021), hence possibly not wanting to admit to being bored.

The other element of Graham's embodiment theory that does seem to bear some relation to student response was the idea that life drawing gives teenage students a better-informed visual vocabulary, in line with the key established learning need, in a topic that they are inherently interested in anyway (Bey, 2011) and although life drawing as a practice is not without its problems (Bey, 2011, Chadwick, 1990), it can give students egalitarian choice in their visualisation of the human body, as we can see with Amaya when she compares the 'real' bodies from life drawing to the idealised forms she is encouraged to create in her fashion drawing class and begins to challenge the way women are represented in visual imagery (Amaya, interview, 2023). It is also necessary to note here that each group of students brings their own experience to the classroom and, as a teacher, to be cognisant that not all students will respond to these exercises in the same way (Damperat, Jeannot and Jongmans, 2016). As previously mentioned, this was an entirely female class, model and teacher, other than the visiting artist, and this may have made some students more comfortable with the experience than they would have been otherwise. A good relationship with their teacher and the support of conceptual and analytical conversations in class may have supported a particularly mature student response.

Explicitly, it was found that the major element of life drawing that supported students' ability to communicate their artistic intentions was an environment which forced them to produce work quickly and overcome their own internalised judgements and barriers to learning, giving the experience of many different approaches to art creation and therefore experience to construct future learning. In terms of occurrence frequency, the experience of interacting with and observing each other across the year group, as well as working with the visiting artist, seemed to be a significant positive impact in students' interviews and, although this was not referred to verbatim in the coursework, it was observed as integral to the positive experience created. Across ability levels, students referred to the experience of being able to observe each other work as helping them learn (Amaya, Teresa, interviews, 2023), making it possibly the most impactful factor of the life drawing activity, which supports existing research around the positive effects of social constructivist teaching practices in supporting student communication of artistic intentions. It was found that the activity did have a substantial positive effect on communication confidence levels, though ultimately it is still not certain how much this may produce the same effect if a slightly different class activity, for example still life, was undertaken with similar timings and emphasis on student autonomy, as although students reflected positively to this effect, the sample size is small. It is felt that further activities of this type could elucidate the precise qualities of the life drawing exercise that were most beneficial for student learning.

In terms of how well the life drawing exercise suited the international school context as a Western art practice in Thailand, it was positive to see that students felt safe and that their behaviour was conducive to a respectful and mature learning environment throughout the sessions. Parents were comfortable with their children taking part in the activity and were supportive of the activity as an opportunity for increased art learning. It remains possible that their reception may not have been so positive if a male model had been used, in accordance with Eck's theory of bounded space, where we are more comfortable with images that we identify with a specific context (Eck, 2001).

There was something to note in the approach that some students had at the start of the classes; for example, higher ability students making an effort to conceal their nervousness, which relates interestingly to the qualities that Kenning indicates are encouraged in art school students to promote themselves as

investment options (2019) rather than indicate any less attractive qualities like nervousness or low self-confidence. This seems especially noteworthy given that Schoonmaker remarks on the significant importance attached to the pursuit of a professional image in Thai culture (2014). Rather than specifically shed light on the effectiveness of the life drawing activity, it is possible that this small potential indicator of high society behaviour further informs the researcher of potential barriers to art learning in this context; that perhaps those who choose to study art feel the need to demonstrate an outward appearance of success which may make them less likely or more hesitant to take creative risks, a factor which could make activities like this either less effective or all the more critical to student development in this context.

There was also a tendency to confuse life drawing with anatomy classes and, for some, this was a factor that potentially biased the findings, as they tended to focus on this rather than other potential learning benefits they may have been able to identify. This stance that values scientific, realistic study over creation and imagination would be in line with the theory put forward by Schoonmaker, which suggests that creative subjects are consistently undervalued in Thai pedagogy and Nadja certainly seems to attribute her increased confidence to working from observation, 'You're more studying things than you are imagining from your head and guesswork.' (2023). Other testimony of specialists working between art outreach and Thai schools suggest that value in Thailand may rest on the technical ability in the work, rather than any conceptual content conferred by the student (Waters and Day, 2022), meaning it is possible that the link between student ability and the anatomy class conception may be coincidental and the real cause is in fact an existing predisposition towards more scientific doctrines, perhaps instilled by their parents. In terms of answering the research question, this response did seem to be one that students overcame within the activity, but it is worthy of note that in future delivery or studies, the distinction between anatomy and the proposed learning objective for the class be made clearer in order for students to benefit more from the activity from the start.

## Conclusion

The objective of this project was to meet a key established learning need in the international schools sector by augmenting literature around teaching and assessment of IB Visual Arts students, specifically, developing their visual communication skills. The study addressed this need by generating research that

will inform the pedagogic development in this specific context, as well as providing insight that will be relevant to teachers of the IB curriculum in a range of global contexts.

The professional development priority was to use life drawing classes to investigate the ways in which such learning experiences could support students' communication of artistic intentions and, in this respect, the study was successful. The categories that were thought to feed into the overarching theme objective of developed artistic intentions, student confidence and communication of themes and ideas were more closely married than anticipated, especially around student reflection on their process of creation. There seemed to be a clear case of one leading directly into the other, with the visual language chosen by students to convey themes being informed by confidence generated through practice and reflection. A combination of all three categories was seemingly the best way for students to develop their communication of artistic intentions and this was evident in both their interviews and physically, in coursework examples.

Dissemination was a key intended outcome for this project, given the key established learning need in both Fine Art teaching and international school teaching for increased literature to inform practice. Therefore, any findings that are deemed reliable will be disseminated first via immediate colleagues at the host school and in the following academic year to colleagues within the international school teaching community local to Bangkok via talks, professional development workshops and informal sharing of practice. It is believed that the impact will be a mutually beneficial cycle between learning activities of this type and progressively enhanced understanding of how to best develop visual communication skills in multicultural class groups, therefore meeting the key established learning need in this sector.

It is felt that this case study was able to contribute to a highly specific field and can go someway towards addressing the preconceptions and misgivings that some, especially expatriate, art teachers in international schools may have in delivering life drawing classes with their students. Students were inherently interested in this subject as a communication symbol in the Western art canon and, in taking part in the exercise, they seemed to feel validated and empowered in their new visual arsenal, fulfilling the professional development priority.

As previously mentioned, the sample size is small and this is a major limitation in impact that this study poses. It is particularly noteworthy that the small group size, nature, personalities and existing relationships within the group were conducive to what was possibly an unusually supportive and respectful learning environment. It is possible that, if any of the factors just listed were altered, then both student learning experience and benefits may have been different or reduced.

In order to further develop and shed light on this under-researched area, it would be ideal to deliver more sessions as observation, interview and coursework data combined seem to suggest that, although higher ability students began to use the activity to experiment with communication early on, all students were moving from practising figurative art skills towards developing their conceptual communication skills. It was somewhat unexpected by the researcher that this transition would happen so quickly, hence in future research, this may prompt a different emphasis when constructing the interview schedule. A clear pathway for developing this knowledge base further would be to repeat the experience with different student groups, but also to create courses with longer duration, which could investigate the benefits of increased familiarity with the practice. It would also be fruitful to deliver the activity with student groups with a broader variety of academic backgrounds; for example, by meeting an identified need in local Thai schools for education which effects improved communication of artistic intentions (Schoonmaker, 2014). In further delivery, it is expected that an improved understanding of the more effective elements of life drawing may develop; for example, how life drawing classes can further support student communication of artistic intentions and how life drawing class activities can be refined to nurture this development more effectively. Therefore, a rolling programme of dissemination that can be built on over time may be the most effective method to add in a meaningful way to the limited research around this potentially very impactful strategy. It is considered that, based on the findings generated in this study, future learning activities of this type should further empower students to be effective and responsible cultural communicators.

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# Appendix

<u>Appendix 1: Data Gathering Schedule</u>

| Case Study Activity | Duration | Participant/s | Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| Life Drawing Class observation | 2 hours | Whole Group | 1 February 2023 |
| Writing up of observational fieldnotes | 20 minutes | Researcher | 1 February 2023 |
| Life Drawing Class observation | 2 hours | Whole Group | 8 February 2023 |
| Writing up of observational fieldnotes | 20 minutes | Researcher | 8 February 2023 |
| Life Drawing Class with Visiting Artist observation | 2 hours | Whole Group | 1 March 2023 |
| Writing up of observational fieldnotes | 20 minutes | Researcher | 1 March 2023 |
| Individual Interview | 20-30 minutes | Danni | 3 March 2023 |
| Individual Interview | 20-30 minutes | Yasmina | 6 March 2023 |
| Individual Interview | 20-30 minutes | Tara | 8 March 2023 |
| Coursework Scrutiny | 30 minutes | Whole Group | 9 March 2023 |
| Individual Interview | 20-30 minutes | Zahra | 10 March 2023 |
| Individual Interview | 20-30 minutes | Amaya | 13 March 2023 |
| Individual Interview | 20-30 minutes | Sara | 15 March 2023 |
| Coursework Scrutiny | 30 minutes | Whole Group | 16 March 2023 |
| Individual Interview | 20-30 minutes | Nadja | 17 March 2023 |
| Individual Interview | 20-30 minutes | Maria | 20 March 2023 |
| Individual Interview | 20-30 minutes | Tammy | 22 March 2023 |
| Coursework Scrutiny | 30 minutes | Whole Group | 23 March 2023 |
| Individual Interview | 20-30 minutes | Teresa | 24 March 2023 |

**Correct Running Checklist**

Are all students behaving appropriately? (e.g. not laughing or talking while the model is posing, following

instructions, independently preparing their materials)

Are students using the techniques provided in the resource pack?

How accurately are they using the techniques provided?

Is everyone on task?

Are students finding it easy to stay focused, e.g. working quickly, not taking breaks, not getting distracted or talking

What do student drawings look like?

**Fieldnotes Framework**

Setting: how is the room set up? Is this significant to the practice? E.g. furniture, where is the model. Also, how are students using the room?

Participants: how are different groups of students positioned? (Types of learner and needs), e.g. SEN, EAL

Ends: What are the goals of the participants and teacher, both implicit and explicit? E.g. short term to long term

Acts: What's happening in the room, how can I describe the action? E.g. is the activity running correctly

Key: Is there any mood in the room? How do students seem to be responding to the activity? E.g. non-verbal communications, expressions

Instrumentalities: Are students making use of any specific techniques or strategies in their learning? E.g. either taught by teacher or learnt elsewhere

Norms: How does what is happening compare to students' 'normal' classroom behaviour? E.g. listening, talking, working style

Genre: What is the style of what is produced? How do I perceive student sketches, how do they perceive them? e.g. composition, stylised or not, demonstrating skill.

## Interview Schedule for Student Participants

First:

*Explanation of my research study, make sure that they understand their rights within the exercise, as per*

*the information sheet*

*Procedure: consent, confidentiality*

*Clarify that the interview will be audio-recorded*

The following themes/questions will be explored:

**Q1 What did you know about life drawing already?**

Prompts: Did you read/hear about it, e.g. TV shows,

Probes: curiosity, interest, perceptions about art traditions

**Q2 What were you expecting it to be like?**

Prompts: learning opportunity,

Probes: apprehension, excitement, expectations

**Q3 Did you complete the practice activity before the session?**

Prompts: it was optional

Probes: this might flag up any hesitation or preconceptions they had about the activity, if the student doesn't share those above for Q2

**Q4 Describe the life drawing session to me.**

Prompts: E.g. sensory observations in the room, feelings, events

Probes: What were you thinking about as you worked, did you deliberately take time to reflect? Did the

experience meet your expectations? How was it different/similar? Was there anything that surprised you?

**Q5 Please describe what you made during the session.**

Prompts: Roughly how many sketches, what media, furniture (e.g., easel or chair) and equipment did you use?

Probes: Do you feel like this was a useful exercise? Why?, Can you identify an area of your work you thought was successful and describe it?

**Q6 How do you think you can use this learning in your coursework?**

Prompts: Is there anything you think that you could have done better?

Probes: What learning will you take with you into the next sessions?


**Q7 How do you think this exercise has made you work differently? (ideas, reflection)**

Prompts: firstly in observational sketching, secondly in beginning large artworks

Probes: patience, resilience, problem-solving, reflection, independent practice


**Q8 Why do you think artists study life drawing? (ideas, reflection)**

Prompts: Do you think that you would come to a life drawing class again, why?

Probes: How do you know or understand what the different poses mean?


*Thank you very much for your time and cooperation in this interview.*

*Do you have any other comments to add or questions? These can be about the life drawing class or the case study.*

**Semi-structured Interview Transcript**

*different compositions can create different meanings.*

MC AI
CS

the same perspective and feel to it, it would be- perhaps i maybe wouldn't have gotten it right either because it feels like a difficult position to do.

A AA IC
MC CIR
AA MC
EE

**Q6 How do you think you can use this learning in your coursework? (confidence, ideas, reflection)**

Prompts: Is there anything you think that you could have done better?

*she indicates that this has opened up potential for new subject matter & therefore conceptual avenues.*

Probes: What learning will you take with you into the next sessions?

Well I think definitely in my process portfolio to show a development in anatomy and an understanding of how to draw that and show my improvement in that as well and also it opened up a lot more things I could do with my art, like when I did iGCSE I just did landscapes and all that because that what I was comfortable with but now that I'm more comfortable with anatomy and human dynamic I can open up to that as well.

*← what does s/he mean by this?*

**Q7 How do you think this exercise has made you work differently? (ideas, reflection)**

IC CC i
TS ST XP

Prompts: firstly in observational sketching, secondly in beginning large artworks

Probes: patience, resilience, problem-solving, reflection, independent practice

Um I think it has, maybe in the way that I start my art because obviously in life drawing I have to sketch out the main big shapes and I think I incorporate that into my artworks as well that I sketch out all the main big shapes first and then go into it, whereas before I just to just do, from a corner, I'd get all the details down in that corner and then kind of move up, sort of do it that way, where now I block in colours more and do it that way. Yeah, it's made me have more like, ideas for compositions as well, like it's given me- because I now know a lot more about composition and how to frame it I can create different compositions and choose which ones I want and which ones I like, I can like have different ideas, more original ideas.

*basically it had the effect intended*

*transferable skill*

CC CC CC
CC CC CC
CC R M
CI CI

*creative problem-solving*

R CC i TS ST ST ST TS AA IC MC AI ST AA XP

I think it's cos you have to use, like the way you draw in life drawing, you have to be like, have to improvise a lot sometimes as well so like, the use of negative space in the drawing. You're more studying things than you are imagining things from your head and guesswork. So I think that makes it easier as well, because you have a more deep understanding of objects and space as well, and how they like work together and move, so it makes making compositions a lot easier. *← meaning/concept can be communicated through use of imagery*

*a hint at the perceived hierarchy of learning activities.*

**Q8 Why do you think artists study life drawing? (ideas, reflection)**

Prompts: Do you think that you would come to a life drawing class again, why?

*trend:*

Probes: How do you know or understand what the different poses mean?

*Perceived 'hierarchy of learning' @ BPS:*
*- student testimony suggests that Sciences are the courses that require the most intelligence, therefore the most scientific form of art must be the most important or indicative of skill/ability. Demonstrates*

*a bit of a misconception, especially amongst Hi-AI students - especially when they use the word 'anatomy'.*

**Fieldnotes generated from classroom observation**

circumstance) respond differently to her because she's Asian. Princess also identified Asian culture as being particularly damaging when it comes to female body image. She also mentioned that the conceot if 'purity cults' similar to body shaming, though I don't know the term- she related it to judging (girls) based on what they are wearing/ consent issues. We also discussed another life class (adult) run elsewhere in Bangkok, where she had some inappropriate advances made by the (male) session teacher- he wanted to come to her apartment and also treated her differently after she modelled for the group - she said that the way he spoke to her and his perceived expectations made her feel very uncomfortable. We also talked a little about her experiences teaching sex-ed and the different approaches used by different schools- she gave the example of her current context (she works as a middle school counsellor) and how, instead of using biological terms, they refer to sexual organs as fruit, e.g. penis becomes banana. We discussed how this can lead to a damaging sexualisation of ordinary objects.

*Chat with ROCO:* He shows his daughters rugby and football and sees how much more interested there are when women are playing. They sak, 'what's happening' 'how do you play the game?' He used words like 'aggressive' and 'powerful' when he described watching women's rugby, 'crashing into each other' 'there was blood', they found it shocking (his daughters). Perhaps because they aren't used to seeing women behave like that/exhibit that type of behaviour. He also mentioned when Women's England won the Euros that she whirled her shirt around her head the way men do and 'it was good to see her being proud of her body'.

**Key:** The room is quiet and students are focused on their drawings. They are talking quietly when they move to gather equipment but not losing focus. During the model breaks the model circulates and although students were quite shy to speak to her at the start of the class, when she compliemnts them on their work, it gives them confidence to discuss and they ask her questions about what it is like to model. She makes some jokes with them and they laugh together. By the time we take a break the less confident students mentioned earlier are feeling a little more confident about their work and smiling. They did stop the teacher and ask for some advice and said that they were finding the activity difficult but fun.

**Instrumentalities:** Mostly the students are using the taught technique. After the reminder to the class, the teacher does not stop them again, though she does notice that the standing EAL student is not using the technique. She knows the student's level of understanding of English language, so she knows this is not a comprehension issue because she has worked with the student before and knows that the student is adept at picking up new techniques. She assumes that this is a stylistic choice, especially as she has seen examples of the student use technical drawing techniques before. It is interesting to see with this student that in the life class, her style is much looser and she works very differently to the style in which she has made observational sketches before. There is another student who is not using the technique, who has spent a lot of his time sketching figures from the internet and from youtube tutorials. He is using a slightly different technique, one that the teacher is familiar with, similar to the wooden mannequin method, which dictates students should use ovals to suggest areas of muscle structure. The teacher speaks quietly to him to suggest why the recommended technique is more appropriate for the current task, it is more accurate at depicting 3D forms within space and the student tries it for a while before lapsing back into his own technique. This student is planning to study animation rather than a fine art course at university so has some outside motivations for working differently.

*Handwritten margin annotations (left):* PSI / CW / PSI IC / IC / FF CW / CS PSI / FF / i CC / student / see life / room as / somewhere / to experiment / ce E / SZ ce / 'there is / not a / 'right' / way / ST / CC i / AA / SZ

*Handwritten annotations (bottom/right):* some students were more open to leaving their comfort zone than others. ST? AA student / me or mis conceptions / around the right way / to sketch anatomy / can lead to stylised / & inaccurate forms - / formulaic sketching.

**Coursework Scrutiny**

LC, LC, LC, LT,
LT, LT, CC, i, IC,
CI, PC



The making the sun shade below the yellow is different to how every people perceive this. The light is also in the wrong direction
In addition, I need to spend more time figure out how to arrange scenery beside the main building



Darken the entire background, lights will be painted on top of the background.

Not satisfied with the figure as its does not show how "peculiar" this floating was





Influenced by a technique I experimented during life-class drawing. I decide to continue with the usage of strong colour in this figure

| | | Instances | | | | | | | | | | | | Observations | | | Coursework Scrutiny | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Semi-Structured Interviews | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Code | Code Descriptor | Tammy | Teresa | Nadja | Sara | Amaya | Zahra | Tara | Maria | Yasmina | Danni | | Class 1 | Class 2 | Class 3 | Session 1 | Session 2 | Session 3 |
| NP | nervousness as a result of preconceptions of the activity | 8 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 0 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| i | demonstrated independence | | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 10 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 7 |
| CC | independent creative choices e.g. composition, use of colour, stru | 11 | 10 | 12 | 12 | 4 | 14 | 11 | 11 | 10 | 13 | 16 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 7 |
| XP | expectation that more experience and repetitive practice leads to | 6 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 11 | 6 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 7 | 13 |
| AA | anatomy' class conception: a scientific perception of the role of th | 3 | 0 | 9 | 9 | 12 | 7 | 10 | 5 | 24 | 11 | 11 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 7 | 13 | 9 |
| PJ | low self-confidence and perceived peer judgement | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 10 | 0 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| IC | increased confidence during and after the sessions | 10 | 8 | 12 | 12 | 6 | 10 | 8 | 12 | 10 | 9 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| FF | achieved 'flow' or focus | 8 | 10 | 13 | 13 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 11 | 9 | 12 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| EE | expressed empathy or embodiment | 5 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 15 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| PSI | expressed positive social learning interaction | 5 | 16 | 11 | 11 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 11 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 11 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| MC | demonstrated awareness of meaning and concept in imagery | 7 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 10 | 14 | 10 |
| M | demonstrated understanding of metacognition | 6 | 10 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 9 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| T | expressed time spent as a factor that affects artwork | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| ST | demonstrated belief in a specific technique being 'the right way' | 2 | 0 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 10 | 5 | 15 | 11 | 17 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 8 | 13 | 8 |
| TS | demonstrated use of transferrable skills or techniques learnt previ | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| R | demonstrated reflection either during or after the session | 15 | 16 | 15 | 15 | 7 | 12 | 12 | 11 | 15 | 20 | 11 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 12 | 17 |
| CI | demonstrated belief that concept is the most important factor in a | 6 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 5 |
| AI | demonstrated belief that accurate audience interpretation or an a | 4 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 10 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 4 |
| CS | demonstrated extreme challenge or stress | 1 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 8 | 8 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| SLE | expressed response to specific learning environment | 5 | 6 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 7 | 10 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| PC | identified connections between repeated skills practice and idea g | 6 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 0 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| CW | compared own work with others | 6 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 5 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| E | described experimentation | | | | | | | | | | | | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 7 | 20 |
| SZ | student deliberately made 'safe' choices or did not experiment | | | | | | | | | | | | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| PF | independent peer feedback was observed or indicated | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| IT | demonstrated improvement in technical skill | | | | | | | | | | | | 0 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 12 | 11 |
| LC | life class subject included in coursework | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 8 | 13 |
| LT | life class technique included in coursework | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 5 | 14 |