Speaking through a Dead Bird: Using Art for Emotional and Communicative Accessibility in an A-level Classical Literature Classroom

Emily Rushton ⓘD
University of Cambridge, Cambridge

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Contact author on: e.rushton@cantab.net   105

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University of Cambridge

Abstract
This paper explores how the viewing and creating of art improved accessibility for students with emotional and communicative learning needs in an A-Level classical literature classroom. Motivated by my own classroom, a review of the literature reaffirmed concerns that students with special education needs/disabilities (SEND) - in particular autism spectrum condition and anxiety - are at a disadvantage in being able to demonstrate the key skills required by the A-Level Classical Civilisation exam board. The literature review also demonstrated that although art therapy has seen great success in improving accessibility, this success has not yet been integrated as part of a curriculum-based intervention. This small-scale, action research project realised a teaching sequence developed by both participant and researcher, that saw students examine Homer's *Odyssey* through active engagement in visual art. Findings suggested that using art as an exploratory mode improved accessibility for students with emotional and communicative learning needs, and henceforth improved their ability to demonstrate their understanding in line with the exam specification. However, the findings also raised further research questions of how educators can allow for emotional differentiation in the classroom. The project champions the inclusion of people with disabilities into the discussion of accessibility, sharing the experience of participants with SEND and myself as an author with disabilities.

Resumen
Este artículo explora cómo la visualización y creación de arte mejoraron la accesibilidad para estudiantes con necesidades de aprendizaje emocional y comunicativo en un aula de literatura clásica de nivel medio superior avanzado (*A-Level,* de acuerdo con el sistema educativo británico). Motivada por mi propia salón de clases, una revisión de la literatura reafirmó preocupaciones acerca de la desventaja en que se encuentran los estudiantes con necesidades/discapacidades educativas especiales (NEE) – en particular con desórdenes del espectro autista y transtornos de ansiedad- en cuanto a su capacidad para demostrar las habilidades requeridas para aprobar el examen *A-level* de Civilización Clásica. La revisión de la literatura también demostró que, aunque la terapia artística ha tenido un gran éxito en la mejora de la accesibilidad, este éxito todavía no ha sido integrado como parte de una intervención basada en el currículo. Este proyecto de investigación-acción a pequeña escala, consistió en una secuencia de enseñanza desarrollada tanto por el participante como por el investigador, en la que los estudiantes analizaron la Odisea de Homero mediante la participación activa en artes visuales. Los resultados sugieren que el uso del arte de un modo exploratorio mejoró la accesibilidad de estudiantes con necesidades de aprendizaje emocionales y comunicativas, y por lo tanto mejoró sus habilidades para demostrar su comprensión, en línea con las especificaciones del examen. Sin embargo, los resultados también plantean nuevas preguntas de investigación acerca de las formas en que los educadores pueden fomentar la diferenciación emocional en el aula. El proyecto aboga por la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad en el debate sobre accesibilidad, al compartir las experiencias tanto de los participantes con NEE como las mías propias como autora con discapacidad.

مُلخَّص

تسعى هذه الدراسة لبحثِ كيفيةِ استخدام الفن كطريقةٍ لتحفيز الطالب ذو الاحتياجات العاطفية والتواصلية الخاصة على دراسة الأدب في امتحان المرحلة الثانويّة العامّة بالمدرسة. بالاستعانة بخبرتي في التدريس وكما تنصُ المصادر العلميّة الخاصة بالطالب ذو الاحتياجات التعليمية الخاصة (وخصوصاً الطلبة الذين يعانون من التوحّد أو غيرها من الاحتياجات الخاصة الشبيهة والتي تعوق التعامل الاجتماعي الطبيعي)، فقد تبيّن أنّ النتائجَ الدراسيّة للمواد الأدبية لفئة المتعلمين السالف ذكرها ضعيفةٌ جداً. ورغم الدور الفعّال الذي يقدمه المزج بين الأدب والفن في تحسين إمكانيّة الوصول إلّا أنَّ هذا المزيج لم يكن مدموجاً ليكونَ جزءًا من المنهج الدراسي. يُقدّم هذا المشروع البحثي دراسةً صغيرة لمشروع يمزج ما بين الأدب والفن حيث يقدّم للطالب الفرصة لدراسة أعمال هومر أوديسي من خلال المشاركة في العمل الفني المرئي. لقد أشارت النتائج إلى فاعلية استخدام العمل الفني كنافذة لدراسة الأعمال الأدبية وكوضع استكشافي يمكن من خلاله تحسين إمكانيّة الوصول إلى الطلاب ذوي الاحتياجات التعليميّة العاطفيّة والتواصليّة، ومن ثَمَّ تحسين قدرتهم على إظهار فهمهم بما يتماشى مع مواصفات الاختبار. ومع ذلك، فقد أثارت النتائج أيضًا المزيد من الأسئلة البحثية حول إمكانيّة المعلمين بالسماح بالتمايز العاطفي في الصف. يدعو المشروع إلى دمج الأشخاص ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة (SEND) في النقاشات التي تدور حول زيادة وصولهن للتعليم، ومشاركة تجاربٍ وخبرات ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة، وخبرتي وتجربتي الشخصية كؤلفة تنتمي لذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة.

Introduction

Rationale and research questions

The motivation for this project originated in my own A-Level classroom, and the teaching of Homer's *Odyssey*. The poem sees brutal murder, deception and manipulation, and the protagonist coming face to face with friends he had lost to suicide. Within the class, there were varying levels of SEND, and high proportions of ASC (autism spectrum condition; known medically as autism spectrum disorder) and anxiety. Students found it difficult to access the content of the epic, with some accustomed to simply leaving the room when the class discussed topics they found challenging. Homer's *Odyssey* tells the story of the protagonist, Odysseus, finding his way home to Ithaca. The epic poem is a set text within the OCR specification for the two-year Classical Civilisation course, which states that students are required to "understand, interpret, evaluate and analyse a range of evidence" within the epic whilst "demonstrating a deep, complex understanding of the literature" (OCR, 2016, p. 7). The distressing encounters throughout the epic can be not only emotionally triggering to students with anxiety (DfE, 2016, 1.1-1.2), but can also be difficult for any student to comprehend. Students with ASC must process Odysseus being able travel to the Underworld, consider how he could interact with people who are no longer of the mortal world, as well as "relate empathetically" (Baron-Cohen, 1988b, p. 83) to why other students in the class may find this upsetting.

A review of the literature highlighted the success of art therapy interventions in alleviating the difficulties associated with ASC and/or anxiety for young people. However, these interventions were seldom integrated into the classroom and at no time explored through a curriculum subject. I considered the predetermined expectations of how someone *should* be able to

demonstrate their understanding, which is dictated - and limited - by different subject choices. Therefore, this paper explores the following research question: *Does the creating and viewing of art positively impact the emotional and communicative accessibility of classical literature?* Through exploring this question, this research seeks to bridge the gap between art therapy intervention and the classroom curriculum. The paper also addresses how conventional methods of knowledge demonstration can be exclusive to showing true understanding, as well as the importance of a holistically inclusive classroom.

Definitions

'*Emotional and communicative accessibility*': when I initially established the motivations for this project, it was to focus on the needs of students with ASC and/or anxiety in the classroom. I was concerned, however, that this would isolate the needs of the other students. Informed by the concept of universal design over reasonable adjustment (Milton, Martin and Melham, 2017, p81), I hope that the phraseology I have finally arrived at includes the range of considerations within this project, and gives due diligence to the varied and unique challenges of ASC, anxiety, and other less visible additional educational needs.

'*Creating and viewing of art*': following Waller's (2006) fundamental principles of art therapy, this study focuses on the creating and viewing of visual art as an accessible, teaching approach. Within this paper, 'art' refers to still and moving visual images, as images can be a "bridge…between the conscious levels of information processing" (Lusebrink, 1990, p219).

Literature Review

ASC and Anxiety in the A-Level Literature Classroom

ASC is a neurodivergent condition that can alter the way that someone participates and interacts with the outside world (Kanner, 1943; Wing, 1996; 2016). Within the classroom, students with ASC can particularly struggle with "language, communication and imagination" (DfE, 2015, 6.27-29). This causes challenges in a classroom environment that is often reliant upon discussing and debating the irreality of the ancient texts, as well as disordered narrative plots and dialogues that are often based entirely in the abstract. Many students with ASC also experience heightened feelings of anxiety through trying to manage daily activities (Ring, 2018; *Understanding Anxiety at School,* 2017). The spectrum of anxiety disorders ranges widely in their manifestation for all students - with or without ASC - but affect a growing number of young people, with 10% of 5-16 year olds now diagnosed with a mental health condition (*Children's Society*, 2008). Anxiety can cause students to experience extreme fear, intense feelings of worry and even panic attacks (*Anxiety and Panic Attacks*, 2017). For students experiencing anxiety, the fear and excitement that the *Odyssey* invites, can trigger past experiences which are often the root causes of their socio-emotional mental health (henceforth SEMH) needs (DfE, 2016, 1.1-1.2). Similarly, Bellini argues that the fear of embarrassment in

social situations that can be experienced by someone with anxiety causes great hindrance on their progress and ability to demonstrate their understanding (Bellini, 2006, p138). A student's ability to analyse character arcs and recognise links to the behaviours in others can often be the most important part of their ability to understand its relevance to cultural context, a key component to achieving the highest levels of the A-Level mark scheme.

Theory of Mind and Fictional Narrative

Many students with ASC struggle to demonstrate "theory of mind" (henceforth ToM) and relate empathetically to fictional characters (Baron-Cohen, 1988; Colle, 2008). Conversely, individuals with anxiety can often experience an excess in empathy which causes distress or hyper-inference (Hezel and McNally, 2014). Although scholarly opinion varies on whether ToM is necessary for accessing fictional literature (Palmer, 2004; Whalen et. al, 2012; Zunshine, 2006; 2008), I would argue the debate follows a wider discussion surrounding medical vs. social views on ability and demonstration of knowledge. A cyclical dilemma emerges wherein ToM is 'required' to access the fictional narrative, but the skill of empathy and identification with fictional characters can only be improved with greater exposure to literature. The findings of Djikic et. al (2013) on the empathetic benefits of reading fiction - although demonstrated as 'mixed success' by the study - could be seen as a very successful method to reduce anxiety, while increasing engagement in accessing literature. The reading of fiction improved cognitive empathy (seeing, imagining and understanding another's perspective), but did not influence affective empathy (feeling emotion and/or distress for another's situation). If different approaches to accessing the literature were established initially, this could generate long-term gain on successfully accessing a greater breadth of narrative in the future.

Using Art Therapy to Inform Subject-Based Teaching

Much research has shown the well-noted positive effects that art can have on improving accessibility for adolescents with ASC and anxiety (Reynolds, Nabobs and Quinlan, 2011; Slayton, D'Archer and Kaplan, 2010). Comparatively, Beauregard's review of this concluded mixed results when used as classroom-based intervention (Beauregard, 2014). Despite the vast amount of case studies looking at art therapy, a gap in the literature appears when searching for classroom-based art approaches that are integrated into a subject curriculum. From a practitioner perspective, I would suggest that there are several beneficial aspects to using aspects of art therapy within a classroom environment. As Cooper and Widdows have argued, art therapy suits students with ASC, as it utilises their strengths as visual and concrete thinkers (Cooper and Widdows, 2004). In addition, the 'conversation, structured activity, unstructured activity' program structure that Epp successfully used to increase assertion for children with ASC (Epp, 2008, p31) closely echoes the customary teaching model of using paired and group discussion to develop a working exemplar, before encouraging students to try an independent task. Although Dolphin's discussion of ASC can, on occasions, read with more of a medical

than social tone, he highlights the importance of art therapy and visual image giving a "tangible focus" to abstract concepts (Dolphin, 2014, p5; p8). This would be especially beneficial for engaging with Homer's *Odyssey*, which is often driven by a character's emotions.

Emerging Accessibility Projects in Classical Education

In recent years, more focus has been placed on the importance of increasing accessibility to the study of Classics. The *Classical Tales* website, produced by the Cambridge School Classics Project, has begun to explore how alternative teaching methods can make classical literature more accessible (http://classictales.educ.cam.ac.uk). The *Return From Troy* collection (based upon Homer's *Odyssey*) was successfully piloted in primary and secondary schools, and provides educators access to modern interpretations of classical literature that can be differentiated for different access requirements. In addition, an image-based programme for children with ASC is currently being developed by Susan Deacy as part of the wider *Our Mythical Childhood* project (http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-autism). The programme draws parallels between the labours of Hercules with the difficulties faced by neurodiversity. Informed by these projects, this research aims to combine their respective interests of increasing the accessibility of literature and using image-based approaches.

Research Design

Theoretical framework

Informed by emancipatory disability theory (Oliver and Zarb, 1992), this research uses a postmodernist lens to follow a smaller-scale transformative research methods framework (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2003; 2010). Using a definition coined by Zeeman et. al (2002, p. 96), the postmodernist lens aims to "dismantle" customary methods of exploring knowledge and demonstrating understanding by exploring whether presentation through art gives a more veritable picture of a student's ability. The work also aims to be transformative as an emancipatory action for those with disabilities, to promote an inclusive space for both the participants, and myself as a disabled author. This framework particularly champions the social model of disability (Goodley, 2014; Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare 2006), and actively focuses on the experience of the participants and their perceptions of how they can access the text. This is also informed by Vygotskian theory, and the importance of the zone of proximal development in aiding SEND learners in demonstrating their true ability. In this research, the artistic approach acts as the 'teacher' or 'helper' that scaffolds the learning.

Research Context

This research took place at one of the largest, mixed comprehensive schools in greater London, with students hailing from a rich diversity of ethnic and economic backgrounds. The action-research class was a Year 12 Classical Civilisation A-Level class of fourteen students, with

high proportions of ASC and/or anxiety. Out of fourteen students, six were indicated on the school's SEND register, as identified by the school SENCO (special educational needs co-ordinator). All students in this class elected, with parental permission, to be part of the case-study via a consent form.

Methodology

The methodology behind this research project bridges the integration of theory into practice. The nature of the research question lends itself to *doing,* and the self-reflective and unfixed stance of action-research (McNiff, 2002). As McNiff later argues, successful action-research must acknowledge and respect the person, knowledge, and values within the research (2016), which supports the research interest of improving universal accessibility. The participants within this study also contributed to the research design to promote the inclusive practice of knowledge creation and to explore the successful employment of this approach in a previous arts therapy-centred case study (Christensen, 2010).

Data Collection Methods

This project analyses data produced through a mixed methods approach, that focuses primarily on qualitative phenomena. In this context - a project that focuses on improving narrative accessibility, rather than attainment scores - qualitative phenomena are defined as the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that participants demonstrated throughout the project, as well as their self-perceptions of improvement. The combination of using qualitative observations with quantitative questionnaire data ensured that different levels of understanding could be elicited from a small-scale project and improve the likelihood of reliability (Creswell and Clark, 2007).

Observations of both lessons and student work were essential in generating qualitative data for this research project. Simpson and Tuson outline that for a successful observation, you must consider your study and observation focus throughout (Simpson & Tuson, 2003). The study generated observation data from myself as an observer, from the participants as observers of each other's interactions, as well as other triangulated staff observations with myself as a participant to avoid an unnecessary interpretation (Bryman, 2008, p. 71). When working with emotional experience, it was essential that observations were planned in a way that nothing could be externally inferred. Questionnaires were also used to assess the students' perception of their participant in the project. The length, clarity, and signposting of the questionnaires - for example, inclusion of a Likert scale - were designed to encourage thorough answers and reliable data.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data and the phenomena I had observed, the data was triangulated and discussed by the two teachers with whom I shared the class, who are hereafter referred to as 'critical friends'. The students were used to being taught and receiving feedback by these teachers and were very used to us team-teaching or observing each other's

teaching. This meant that the students were less likely to behave differently in their presence or be unsettled by the presence of two teachers. The students were briefed before the study, and again before each lesson if there would be another teacher in the room. All students were given the option to speak privately to myself or another trusted adult if they did not want the teacher to observe, or for their data/classwork to be viewed by another member of staff.

Teaching Sequence

The teaching sequence took place over 90 minutes of lesson time per week over two weeks (table 1). Students were asked to write down or verbally suggest themes within Homer's *Odyssey* that they wanted to revisit during an action-research planning plenary. It was heavily emphasised at this point that when the lesson came along, the students were under no obligation to tackle the topic if they did not feel ready. The resulting teaching sequence was built upon the students' choice to review the theme of women and gender within the *Odyssey* and incorporated the viewing as well as the creating of images through various activities.

Table 1: Lesson Planning Sequence		
Lesson	Lesson content	Types of data collected
i	Action research planning plenary.	• Written data from participants. • Observations of content (by myself). • Verbal responses (transcribed at time of lesson within the observations).
1 and 2	• Identifying visual culture inspired by the *Odyssey*. • Selecting key passages for the theme. • Free use of artistic materials to recreate the passage. • Using analytical view finders to assess and examine their work. • Reflective work to identify what techniques they used and justifying their employment. • Re-using the view finders on essays from their previous class. • Exam-style essay using someone else's piece of art and passage.	• Pre- and post-lesson questionnaires. • Observations by myself, participants and critical friends (including verbal responses from students). • Creative data produced by participants. • Independently produced reflective essays from previous lessons.

Within this lesson sequence, students were able to produce their own work, as well as review and analyse modelled examples; this would benefit not only the students with ASC (Rigler, Rutherford and Quinn, 2015, p. 76-77), but also the students that may need wider levels of differentiation. Through examining visual images inspired by the *Odyssey*, the students enhanced their knowledge of cultural context and gained inspiration from the artwork. Most importantly, students were able explore artistic materials and techniques freely (within the confines of a comprehensive school art cupboard) to explore and demonstrate their interpretation of the text. The idea for free exploration was influenced by the study of Wilson, who remarked that the "noisy and chaotic" atmosphere that was produced by the free exploration, built confidence and camaraderie between the participants with ASC (Wilson, 2014, p. 52). The use of critical viewfinders, which are usually seen within the art curriculum, encouraged the students to be self-reflective in how they use techniques and why they have

chosen them; this henceforth helped them to identify why other students may work in this way. This exercise was intended to model how students could analyse their own work in the same critical way, justify their choices and opinions, as well as engage critically in the work of others.

Data Analysis Strategies

The data that would emerge from this action-research project would be widely qualitative, requiring both narrative and discourse analysis to generate conclusions. I needed to respect the cyclical nature of qualitative data collection, in which analyses needed to be carried out before, during, and after the research project (Huberman and Miles, 2002). As a practitioner, I felt it most appropriate to use primary and secondary data comparisons to draw findings from the data. As I had already been teaching the class for six months prior to the project, I had already acquired a rounded understanding of each student's behaviours and interactions with both the subject and each other. Therefore, it felt logical to use this acquired knowledge as a point of comparison, from which to observe and analyse any changes. Through the narrative observation data, frequently occurring phenomena were grouped into broad themes, upon which I could anchor narrative discussion and analysis. This approach also highlighted the absence of these phenomena, which concluded findings and limitations.

Ethics

It was integral to the project to ensure that ethics were not just considered briefly but seen *in situ* throughout the research project. Project plans were discussed within the research Faculty and within school with all relevant professional parties. Parental and student permission was sought by every participant involved. It was paramount that the emotions and individual experiences of each participant were treated with utmost respect, with each understanding that it was permissible to withdraw their contributions from the project at any time. All participants of this project will be anonymised, and the inclusion of any contributions made in discussions or classwork will be included at the discretion of the participant. The project and data collection were undertaken in line with the framework set by British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011).

Data Findings and Analysis

The findings are presented as a simultaneous narrative discussion and analysis of outcomes that emerged from the data set in relation to the research question. The discussion focuses on students with SEND, and it is signposted whenever other students are mentioned.

Outcome 1: The opportunity to view, imitate and develop the work and art of others

Much like an exemplar essay, active engagement with the artwork of others helped the students to develop a critical voice with which to discuss the *Odyssey*. Although Corbett discusses the benefits of imitation through watching videos (Corbett et al., 2016a, p. 658; 660), the ability for students to imitate images was more beneficial in this study; students could visualise and analyse the techniques they were imitating and recreating in their work. The students enthusiastically took to observing and analysing artistic reinterpretations of the epic. Zeta particularly enjoyed the discussion of the different images, comparing them to film stills from his favourite movies. There was camaraderie and engagement in each other's works, and each student's unique interpretation helped to broaden their understanding. This could be seen in the written work that discussed rejection of Odysseus' wife, Penelope, for being "female" and her "obedience", which was inspired by Ksi's artwork presenting Penelope and the suitors (figure 1). The benefits of art meant that a subjective parity was created where there are no visually correct or incorrect answers, allowing everybody to interpret the material in an individual way.

Figure 1. Artwork showing Penelope and the suitors

From observation by both myself and critical friends, it was through the viewing and creating of art that the students were most willing to take risks with their interpretation of the text. When

the students were to recreate these passages through visual art, they were asked to consider reasoning behind their artistic choices, rather than creating a realistic image. The students were engaged and focussed on their passages, and although it took some students longer to decide how to portray their passage, all of the students were attempting something within the first five minutes of the activity. Eta heightened the fine details of her dead bird (figure 2) and wrote an accompanying passage next to it. This enabled her to extrapolate finer details of analysis in her written work, commenting on how the choice of "birds" connotes to "frailty…love and peace" in connection to Penelope. The demonstration of abstract themes through her artwork showed an improvement in her ability to infer implicit information through visualisation.

As when long-winged thrushes or doves get entangled in a snare, which has been set in a thicket – they are on their way to roost, but find a grim reception – so the women's heads were held fast in a row, with nooses round their necks, to bring them to a most pitiable end.

the women's heads were held fast in a row.". Both birds Homer chose to compare the women t known for their frailty, doves specifically connote love and peace, and thrushes their sweet son of these characteristics can be applied to the Ancient Greeks' view of women (and the great ma of societies) – that, in comparison with men, women are weaker, and better suited for 'softer' passions like the arts. For example, Circe, an incredibly powerful woman in the epic, is first encountered through her singing voice. The maids are also described in this section as "wailing bitterly", which would be considered cowardly had a man reacted in the same way to his approaching death. The women's delicacy is highlighted further as their deaths come after the l

Figure 2. Artwork depicting Homer's narrative, with responsive essay extract.

Outcome 2: The transferable skills of discussing and analysing visual presentations of the literary material

Creating art allowed students to utilise the critical viewfinders to see their work from a new - both literal and figure - perspective. Based upon the art and design assessment compulsory objectives (DfE, 2013), I created a critical viewfinder that students used to analyse and justify their artistic techniques, before analysing whether this improved their ability to analyse the choices of others.

The students enjoyed the novelty of the viewfinder, but also used them to structure and develop their ideas. Although this was not the intention, the students began to draw on the viewfinders themselves, and structure their essays with these annotations. This additional planning and structure exhibited as more coherent and fluid lines of argument within their essay writing. The students could analyse the text in a visual way, by using the art assessment objectives. They could then pair these with the literary objectives of Classics, and more easily interpret the text and question in smaller parts. The reflections on their artwork helped them to apply the same parameters (artistic choice, technique, analysis, cultural and contextual justification) to their essays. This can then be seen in Zeta's viewfinder: he analyses the possessive nature of Odysseus' mother on his viewfinder, which he then goes on to compare to Odysseus' meeting Epicaste, who married her son, Oedipus (figure 3).
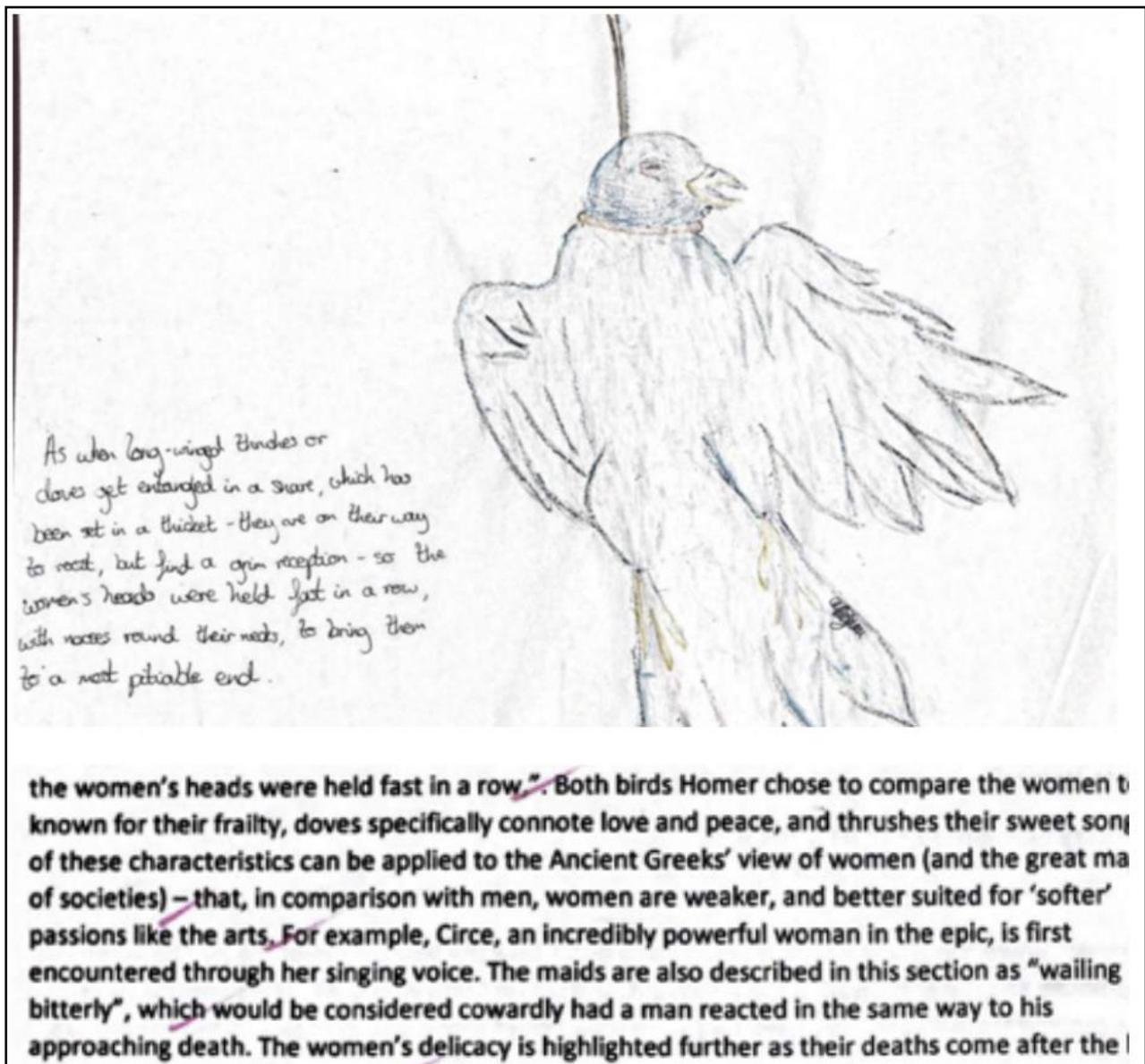

Figure 3. An annotated critical viewfinder, the accompanying artwork depicting Homer's narrative, with responsive essay extract

Students also became more confident in being able to rationalise and interpret unreality and implicit knowledge within ancient texts. This meant that students could access embedded layers of the text, with the creative license to indulge thinking outside the box; this vastly improved the originality and maturity of their essay writing. Comparing the plot to a graphic novel or film sequence allowed Zeta to chart the chaotic progressions within the narrative, whilst visual prompts through artistic interpretation allowed Eta to analyse the narrative picture as a whole. In addition, this also highlighted when a student required further scaffolding to interpret the narrative. When analysing his own work through a viewfinder, Theta quickly realised that he could not articulate the specific linguistic techniques Homer was using in the text, even though he could explain the effect that the words had on the reader.

Outcome 3: The internal exploration of understanding and interpreting the text

The need for spontaneous conversation with peers was removed in the analysis of art work, as there was already – what Dolphin coins – a "tangible focus" on the work (2014, p5; p8). This was seen particularly with Eta's bird, which showed her to engage with one of the more gruesome parts of the text through visualisation in place of discussion. Eta found it easier to compartmentalise what was happening in the narrative, because she could visually label and analyse these episodes. Although Nu said she did not enjoy the art, she was able to reinterpret a scene in the Underworld through a less macabre lens, which made it easier for her to analyse (figure 4).

Additionally, the murder of the Suitors is described as a "mighty achievement", which is an especially notable use of descriptive language by Homer. The fact that Eurycleia has lived with the men wreaking havoc in everyone's lives for the past twenty years and now feels "crying out in triumph" at their brutal extermination is exceptionally poignant. All the while Odysseus has been fighting at, in Penelope's words, "evil Ilium", the women of his household have been suffering at the hands of these men. It should never be an "achievement" to observe such a nefarious scene, let alone a "mighty" one. If something is described as mighty,

Figure 4. Artwork depicting Homer's narrative, with responsive essay extract

Although discussion was not required for the art activity, the relaxed atmosphere of the session led to spontaneous and natural discussion. Moreover, due to timetabling alterations, the class gained an additional two-hour slot during the teaching sequence, with which the students asked whether they look more critically at the ideas of art and the idea of gender. I outlined the theory of John Berger and the idea of the male gaze, and the class shared their own responses to the nuances of his theory based on a selection of artistic images. The students then read an extract from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* and chose key quotations they felt most relevant to the *Odyssey*. Ksi and Nu were hyper-perceptive about comparing this to the text and could draw direct parallels between the characters in the epic, their own emotions, and the critical theory. These emotional comparisons then led to strength and perception in their arguments, commenting on the "brutal extermination" of "crying out in triumph," and the juxtaposition this phrase holds (figure 4). The engagement in art theory also supported students with scholarly engagement in their essay writing, which meet the higher marking criteria in the exam board mark schemes. The questionnaire data (figure 5), demonstrates that almost all students

felt they had a better understanding of the characters and episodes within the epic that discuss women and gender; only one felt they were still unsure, but only for the second question asked.

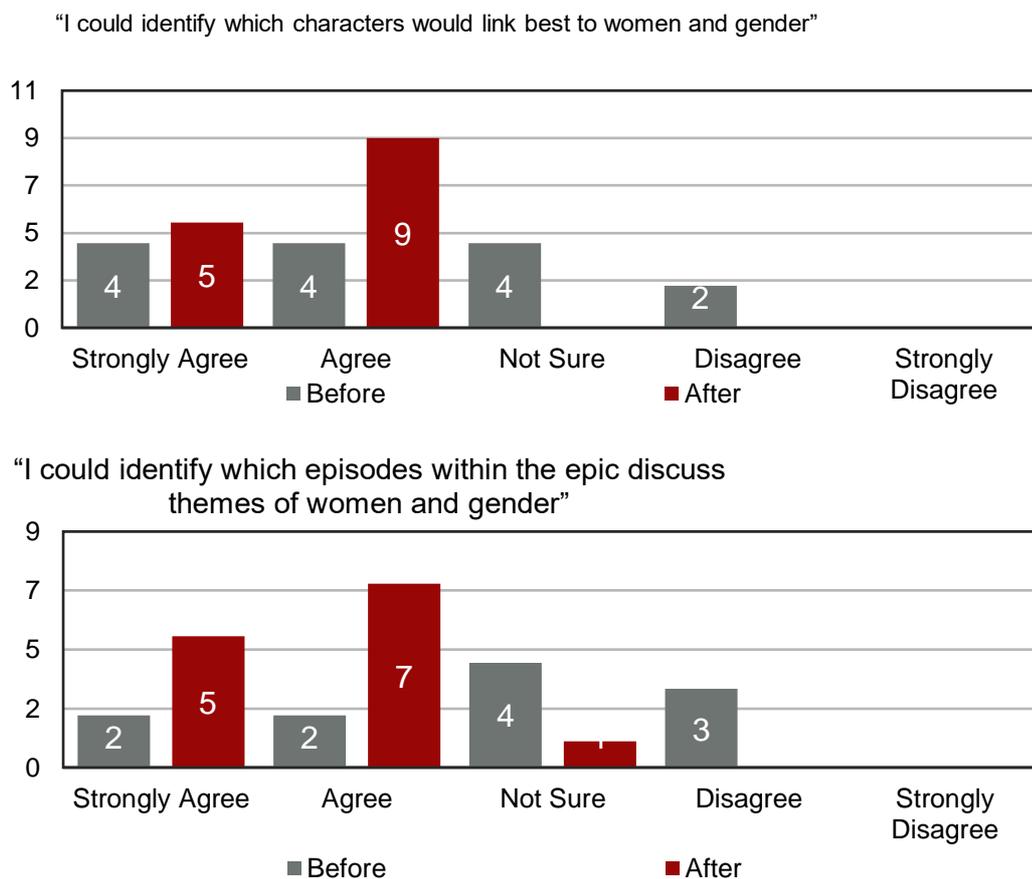*Outcome 4: The opportunity for reflection and comprehension time*

Figure 5. Student questionnaire data showing student perception of understanding before and after the lesson sequence.

The process of creating art was relaxing for the students and promoted mindfulness in the present moment. As the activity promoted independent exploration of thought, there was little anxiety over processing time. Whereas Wilson tells of the "noisy and chaotic atmosphere" that emerged through their art-therapy case study, (2014, p52), a critical friend commented that the classroom atmosphere was "extremely productive and all of the students were clearly engaged with the task". The additional attention that was given to the artwork led to finer details in their written essays, since students could reflect on their ideas in a less pressurised manner. This improved accessibility for the whole class, not just students with SEND. Mu (student without known SEND), who had previously struggled to structure her answers coherently, presented not only the statement that "women are shown as a threat to men", but presented this statement as a refute against Aristotle and contributed to an attack on Odysseus' "*nostos*", the Greek term

for 'homecoming'. Theta similarly showed great improvement in how he conveyed his understanding after these artistic activities. Although he rarely had an issue with the more challenging topics of the *Odyssey*, he did struggle with how to convey his thoughts in writing and was often anxious that he "[wrote] in the same way that [he spoke]". After the art lesson, he showed a greater ability to reflect on his ideas, using the viewfinder as a scaffold to organise his thoughts (figure 6).

Developing ideas:	Using resources and materials (range of evidence from the text):	
Recording ideas and observations (planning and line of argument):	Homer quotes in Book 10 "Now they had pigs' heads and bristles, as they grunted like pigs; but their minds were as human as they had been before". This makes use of "their minds as human as they had been before" as an example of a Homeric simile, which highlights both the power and whimsical nature of circe's sorcery, as well as the lack of control from Odysseus' men. The use of the simile " as they grunted like pigs" also highlights the animalistic nature of Circe's victims and the specific details of her magic. This use of animalistic imagery can also be compared to Book 9, where it is consistently used to describe Polyphemus, such as in the quote "dashed their heads against the floor as though they had been puppies" where another homeric simile is used, this therefore develops an interesting comparison between Circe and Polyphemus, two characters who are in stark contrast in outer appearance, yet somehow very similar due to the correlating techniques Homer uses for their descriptions, it could almost be said that Circe is just another Cyclopes with a seductive facade.	**Making a personal and meaningful response (AO2):**
Critical scholarship:	**Specialist terminology:**	

Figure 6. Written work showing critical essay approach, in comparison to sections of the viewfinder.

Outcome 5: The benefits of experiencing enjoyment and self-expression

From observation by both myself and critical friends, it was through the viewing and creating of art that all students in the classroom seemed to be the most engaged and were willing to take the most risks with their interpretation and their understanding. Most of the time, the students were not concerned about whether the artwork looked aesthetically pleasing because they enjoyed justifying the techniques they had used. This could be seen in a range of the students' written works and how Eta separately commented on how she "really enjoyed" the artwork, and that she did not need to "focus on anything else" while undertaking the activity. The creation of art also supported good humour within the students, as well as higher self-esteem when it came to reflecting and reviewing their work. Ksi - who would be very self-critical - was very vocal and excited to share her artwork, sharing light-hearted comments about her own art-work "What even is that? Like what have I drawn here?!".

Outcome 6: The anxiety of creativity

Interestingly, this research also highlighted that some students without known SEND considerations experienced feelings of self-consciousness and vulnerability in expressing themselves creatively. Previously, there would be a marked difference in who could and could not engage in the work, whereas now each student was presented with different challenges to engage in and were being tested in different ways. Whereas our SEND focus students were being challenged by accessing the themes, others in the class were challenging their abilities to reinterpret their ideas in a different way, which they found required a much greater level of understanding. This could be observed during the lesson, when some of the students asked for a success criterion for their artwork to assess whether what they had produced was "correct" or not. The students who were most comfortable with the customary approach to demonstrating knowledge found it more difficult to work without the bounds that had limited others.

The artistic activities also highlighted which students were more reliant on praise to feel achievement in the classroom. This could be seen with Chi (student without known SEND considerations) during the art lesson; although they usually appeared as confident student, they required a great deal of positive praise during the activity to reassure them that the work didn't look "stupid" or not "unique enough". Upon reflection, this then correlated to previous essay feedback, in which they would write well-structured essays that were often complicated by a desire to show a unique perspective. It could be argued that these self-exploratory, creative activities may be more challenging for those whose sense of achievement is based upon the reassurance of others.

Conclusion

Does the creating and viewing of art positively impact the emotional and communicative accessibility of classical literature?

Findings

The data showed there to be a range of positive outcomes from using the viewing and creating of art in the classroom, both for students with or without socio-emotional or communication needs. Students could view and analyse each other's work, a skill they would then transfer to their own critical writing. The demonstration of their understanding through non-written media allowed the students to explore their response in an abstract way, which built their confidence in tackling the abstract concepts in the epic. The activities built camaraderie between the groups, and encouraged collaboration and participation. The students could also demonstrate the strength of their learning in new ways and use tangible skills in order to approach their essay writing in a non-linear fashion. The visualisation of the narrative became a stimulus to deepen their breadth of knowledge, exposing and therefore eradicating the fear of the unknown. However, not all students found it as easy to engage in these activities: some were bound by

the conventional concern of being 'correct', whilst others found it more difficult to feel confident and settled in the validity of their perspective.

Limitations

Although many arts-therapy based studies have very small numbers of participants, a key limitation of this project could be the size and length of the action-research. If the project continued over a longer time frame, new outcomes could emerge, or the artistic approach could lose its novelty. Similarly, with a larger research group, the space may have felt too 'large' for the creative collaboration and discussions to happen and the students may not have been as willing to challenge themselves creatively.

Implications on Teaching Practice and Further Discussion

The research has emphasised the importance of employing multi-disciplinary approaches within the classroom, as well as integrating SEND intervention approaches into curriculum planning. The project outcomes have raised discussions regarding how educators can utilise creative activities in the classroom to benefit additional needs, but also how as inclusive educators, we can acknowledge emotional differentiation as part of our everyday planning. Further research may question:

1. What transferable skills can be taken from art activities that can be applied in all classrooms to aid a broader variety of learners?
2. Explicitly, how can we incorporate cognitive and emotional differentiation into our everyday planning?
3. How can creative activities be differentiated to meet all emotional needs?

As the project focussed around a smaller group of students, it would also be interesting to assess how a project of this kind could be adapted to retrieve data from a wide range of students over a greater length of time, and assess the effect it had on attitudes to learning in the long-term.

Final Reflections

The use of visual art allowed students to experience and interact with Homer's *Odyssey* from a unique perspective and introduced them to new ways of demonstrating their understanding. It also highlighted the importance of exposing students to creative activities, both for those who found them liberating, and those who found them more challenging. By integrating a wellbeing intervention into curriculum delivery, students were able to recognise their own potential, or discover new ways through which they could best achieve it.

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