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Disturbing the teacher's role as assessor: the case of calculated grades 2020–2021 in Ireland

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ABSTRACT

For the first time in the history of the high stakes Leaving Certificate Established examination in Ireland, teachers graded and ranked their own students due to Covid-19 restrictions. In the wake of the process, a questionnaire and focus group interviews explored how teachers engaged with the Leaving Certificate Calculated Grades 2020 (CG2020) and how they viewed their role as assessor. The process challenged the becoming of teachers in their personal, professional, and political identity, and it created a space where teachers' feelings and beliefs oscillated between holding on to the traditional assessment approach and engaging in new possibilities of assessment reform. This paper maps what teachers were feeling and believing during the event of CG2020 and offers possible explanations for these responses through interrogating the molar, molecular and lines of flight of Teacher Assessment Becoming [Deleuze and Guattari. 1988. *A Thousand Plateaus*. University of Minnesota Press]. The feelings and beliefs of teachers as assessors offer potential lines of flight to reterritorialize through the reimagining of new assessment spaces, but there are many complex challenges to ensure that this reterritorialization does not regroup back into the old, striated space of previous assessment practices..

1. Introduction

1.1. The Irish senior cycle assessment context

In Ireland, the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE) is a high stakes terminal examination at the end of a two-year Senior Cycle (SC). The combined results of six subjects at higher or ordinary level, feed into a points system used for entry to higher education. The LCE receives high levels of public trust in Ireland (Gleeson 2010) and the public view the assessment work carried out by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) as fair, reliable, and transparent. However, in recent years the LCE has been accompanied by questions about its validity (OECD 2020), high-stakes nature (Jeffers 2011), connection

to matriculation (Hennessy and Mannix McNamara 2013), adherence to subjects (Neumann et al. 2020) and its lack of alignment with its philosophical purposes (NCCA 2019). The primary purpose of this assessment is not just to determine 'what students know, understand and do' (Hill and Barber 2014, 25) but is caught in the complex process of certification, public reporting, selection and system accountability.

This multiplicity of purposes makes any change to assessment at SC in Ireland challenging and problematic. The educational purposes of the Junior Cycle (JC), which have undergone momentous reform, are student-centred and holistic and encourage a dualistic assessment approach, both formative and summative (NCCA 2015). The present approach to SC assessment does not align with JC and is a source of tension in the system (McCoy et al. 2019, 67). Furthermore, the agency of the teacher to make curriculum (Priestley et al. 2021) in SC is restricted by a somewhat narrow understanding of knowledge and at times a reliance on lower order processes, rote learning, and memory recall (Burns et al. 2018). The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) acknowledge this point further in the 'Senior Cycle Review' (2019): 'terminal assessment can contribute to over-reliance on memorisation, rote learning of sample answers, and a grinds culture' (67).

From the late 1990s, educational policies across Europe have recognised the broadening and complex understanding of knowledge and the need to include a wide range of competences (Coolahan et al. 2017; Looney 2006; NESET 2017; OECD 2013). Whilst the SC does offer five key skills (NCCA 2017) across the curriculum: information processing; communication; being personally effective; working with others and critical and creative thinking, the assessment of these skills has been limited. The continued focus on subjects at SC (Gleeson 2021), and the subsequent practice of external assessment by the State Examination Commission (SEC) closes the potential of introducing alternative assessment practices and the engagement with assessment of expanding knowledge and competences. Gleeson, Klenowski, and Looney (2020) argue that high stakes assessment promotes:

> The standardization of teaching that both disempowers and deskills teachers [and that] the content of the curriculum moves to match what the tests require' with the result that 'teachers' power [is] being increasingly usurped through policy and curriculum structure (3).

The emerging thinking on assessment lies in a synergy of approaches and functions of both state and teachers as key agents in educational assessment (Leung and Mohan 2004). The endorsement of this approach recently by the Minister of Education for a reimagined SC in Ireland called 'Equity and Excellence for All: where the student is at the centre of their Senior Cycle experience' (DoE 2022a) has set an agenda for future reform. Done and Murphy (2016, 3) question such an initiative to identify the teacher as 'change agents' and see it as a seductive image that 'is explicitly framed as one of several biopolitical "strategies" through which the state seeks to avert resistance and sustain power relations'. Both the NCCA and the SEC are considering teacher involvement in the marking of assessment components outside the traditional final state examination. Historically in Ireland, the teacher unions have insisted that teachers will not involve themselves in the marking for state examinations (TUI, 19/01/2023). The enactment of this policy runs counter to their beliefs about their identity as teachers and assessors. The navigation of this 'responsibilisation' (Foucault 1982, 783), the process by which responsibility is transferred from state to social actors by triggering a moral imperative, is one of the many complexities in the Irish assessment arena.

1.2. The calculated Grades 2020 process

On the 8th of May 2020, the Minister for Education announced the postponement of the 2020 LCE examinations involving 61,053 students due to Covid-19 restrictions. What was proposed was the Calculated Grades 2020 (CG2020) process. The Department of Education (DoE) were inviting teachers for the first time in Irish history to use their professional judgement in assigning grades and ranking based on past performance for their LCE classes. Teachers of the same subject would then attend an Alignment Meeting whereby they 'ensure that all teachers who are providing estimated percentage marks in respect of the same subject in the school are applying standards that are appropriate and are consistent with each other when doing so' (DoE 2020, 19). School-sourced data was combined with a process called national standardisation. The DoE planned to use four sub-sets of data (DoE 2020, 11; Doyle, Lysaght, and O'Leary 2021a, 2) but due to controversy experienced in the United Kingdom they retracted the use of some historical data (DoE 2020, 82).

This CG2020 process opened an experience that disrupted previous iterations of how teachers viewed themselves in their role as assessors. This paper will define teacher identity as 'becoming' as proffered by Deleuze and Guattari (1988). Teacher becoming is an assemblage that is in a constant dynamic process of arranging, organising and fitting together personal, professional and political elements so that it can make sense of itself as it becomes and transforms over the many years of a teacher's career. An element of the assemblage of teacher becoming is Teacher Assessment Becoming (TAB). I am interested not only in the characteristics of TAB but how it works in relation to the event of CG2020. A description of the methodological design and why it was chosen for this research is proffered. Reflections from the questionnaire (Stage 1) and the focus group interviews (Stage 2) in relation to teachers' feelings and beliefs during the CG2020 are reported and finally, a discussion on how these findings might affect or cut off future assessment reform and policy at SC will be considered.

2. The theoretical imaginary

2.1. Teacher becoming – a post-structuralist lens

This paper uses a post-structuralist lens to understand teacher identity (Butler 1999; Deleuze and Guattari 1988; Foucault 1984). The strong and very influential tradition in teacher identity theory (Cooley 1902; Erikson 1959; 1963; 1964; 1968; Vygotsky 1978; 1986) has paved the way for researchers to move beyond the dichotomies, binaries and compartmentalisation of teacher identity to view it according to Deleuze and Guattari (1988), as no longer about being but becoming (May 2003). The problem Deleuze and Guattari had with western thought is that it begins in being, which it then imagines as going through becoming or movement (Colebrook 2002). Deleuze insists that all life is a plane of ***becoming*** and becoming is a process in which any given ***multiplicity*** 'changes nature as it expands its connections' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). A multiplicity is neither subject nor object (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 8), and is not a multiple entity of discrete parts nor is it an unchanging collection of units (Colebrook 2002). Rather in the simplest terms it can be defined as a connection of parts. This understanding disrupts the thinking of a human as stable and rational, experiencing change but remaining

the same person. Rather, Stagoll (2010, 27) suggests 'one's self must be conceived as a constantly changing assemblage of forces, an epiphenomenon arising from chance confluences of languages, organisms, societies, expectations, laws and so on'.

Teacher identity or rather becoming, is thus understood as an ***assemblage*** of heterogeneous elements that are engaged in a dynamic and emerging flow of energy through its connectivities and relationships (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). An assemblage finds its etymological roots in the French word *agencement* which comes from the verb *agencer*, 'the process of arranging, to laying out, to piecing together' (Dewsbury 2011, 150). The assemblage of teacher becoming is a dynamic multiplicity made up of any number or pieces of 'things' gathered into a single context. It contains multitudinous elements: personal, professional, and political (Mockler 2011), and it refuses the singularity of each 'component' of identity formation (Zembylas 2003). Some of the multiple pieces or 'singularities' (Deleuzeand Guattari 1988) that are in connection in a teacher's becoming are their personal history and life events, socio-cultural and political context, knowledge, (subject, pedagogical and local), beliefs, feelings, self-efficacy, values and tools. Deleuzian thinking would suggest there are many others and add 'and, and, and … ' to the valence or combination of many pieces and things. These work in a dynamic synergy of inter and intra-relationships with each other and Deleuze states that 'in a multiplicity what counts are not … .the elements, but what there is between, the between, a site of relations which are not separable from each other. Every multiplicity grows in the middle' (Deleuze and Parnet 2002 , viii).

Deleuze and Guattari believe that an assemblage needs to be evaluated according to its affective capacity – that is the ability to affect and be affected by other assemblages (Colman 2005). They state:

> … we know nothing of a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body. (1988, 284).

Teacher becoming as an assemblage can bring about any number of 'affects' – aesthetic, machinic, productive, destructive, consumptive, informatic, etc. An affect is a 'becoming' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 256) that represents a change of state or capacities of an entity (Massumi 1988, xvi): this change may be physical, psychological, emotional or social (Fox and Alldred 2014). Deleuze and Guattari (1988) explain that these affects, or 'affective flows', keep the assemblage in a constant state of flux, with territorialising flows stabilising an assemblage, while others de-stabilise or de-territorialise it (1988, 88–89).

The important thing is not what the assemblage is but how it works and its capacity to affect (Braidotti 2013). Thus an important characteristic of an assemblage is its relations of exteriority – it exists only through the outside and on the outside (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). This implies constant awareness that an assemblage is connected to a larger rhizomatic structure. A teacher's assemblage of becoming is nested within other assemblages (relationships of exteriority) such as the classroom, school and society which have their own philosophy, culture, traditions and bodies and things (Fox and Alldred 2014) and which exert relations of power and are highly political (Ball et al. 2011). Ringrose

(2011) explains that we have to analyse what the affective capacities of assemblages are in political and ethical terms – are they 'life affirming' or 'destroying'?

All assemblages are made up of lines and are flat not hierarchical. For this research, the three lines proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (1988): molar, molecular and lines of flight assist in the understanding of teacher becoming. Deleuze and Guattari speak of this as the 'plane of consistency'.

2.1.1. The molar lines

Molar lines are also called the rigid lines of segmentarity and maintain the structures of life. They are the lines that concern themselves with the survival of the assemblage and therefore it is about generating codes, rules, order, duty, prioritisation, and binaries. Deleuze and Guattari call this 'striated space' (1988), which encourages the process of making things the same and is about equilibrium and the state of being rather than becoming. Molar lines reduce life's complexity and try to bring it under control. The molar lines of a teacher's becoming are made up of such segments in the form of school policies and professional rules (Teaching Council 2016, 2020); subject knowledge, curriculum, syllabi, specifications, learning outcomes and intentions, lesson planning, books, technologies, etc. There are the time segments such as lessons, terms, semesters, and years. The roles within the system are segments – students, teachers, principals, inspectors, males, females, transgender, family, community, etc. Within these segments there are also rigid and closed mindsets and assumptions of what education is for and the ideology of curriculum and assessment. These are the rigid segment spaces that define a teacher by clear, 'well-determined and well-planned territories' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 195).

2.1.2. The line of flight

The line of flight crosses through these molar segments, ruptures them and brings chaos to the order, control, and reduction. This is the line of the frontier, the line that moves beyond survival and is willing to take risks and chances. This is the space of the incalculable, possibility and opens to 'smooth space'. Smooth space is occupied by intensities and events. Lines of flight are 'becomings', 'tiny connections' and 'movements' which are operative at the minute or molecular level, and which need to be mapped (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). Tamboukou (2008, 360) states that 'we constantly move between deterritorialization – freeing ourselves from the restrictions and boundaries of controlled, striated spaces – and reterritorialization – repositioning ourselves within new regimes of striated spaces'. This research will ask whether the event of the 'Calculated Grades Process 2020' offered any 'lines of flight' for teacher assessment becoming and whether they have reterritorialized into new or old striated spaces.

2.1.3. The molecular line

The molecular lines lie between order (molar) and chaos (line of flight) and result from the tension of the other two. They allow the structure to adapt and change to the environment. It is here that supple tiny cracks or what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'quanta of deterritorialization' may occur (196). Whilst all might be apparently ordered and compartmentalised at the molar level, beneath this order there is a dawning realisation or

crack in that order. These lines allow small cracks to emerge that might lead to fuller transformation and bring the system to the edge of chaos. These molecular lines might help the thinking around where CG2020 began to disrupt teachers' becoming.

2.2. Teacher assessment becoming

For this paper, I am focusing on one element of the assemblage of teacher becoming: Teacher Assessment Becoming (TAB). I understand that this element of the assemblage must be placed back on the map of the larger assemblage as it works not as a separate silo but in conjunction with all the elements of teacher becoming. Assessment in particular combines with the elements of teaching and learning through its purposes to support students' learning (NCCA 2015) and monitor progression (Christ, Snidarich, and Thayer 2018). I am concerned to not just define its characteristics and relations but explore how it affected and was affected by the event of the CG2020.

TAB is made up of territories of molar lines which consist of complex elements such as measurement, accountability and standards for testing and scoring, all laid down at a macropolitical level. Alongside these striated spaces, nest the ethical concepts such as reliability, validity and fairness (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association & National Council on Measurement in Education, 2014). It includes teachers' assessment literacy such as disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of assessment purposes – diagnostic, formative or summative (Stiggins 1991; Xu and Brown 2016; Black and Wiliam 1998). There are segments of grading methods (i.e. norm, criterion or ipsative-referenced) and tools such as rubrics, digital assessment tools, polling, surveys, etc. (Xu and Brown 2016). There is the striated territory of reporting and feedback to students, parents, and the public (Brookhart 2011). To add to the complexity, there are segmented concepts about high stakes certification examination, standardisation tests such as PISA, TIMMS, PIRLS, etc., the use of such assessment data and its implications for a country's economic potential based on such scores (Broadfoot and Black 2004).

The assessment literacy (Popham 2009) of Irish teachers has been bounded to school-based assessment rather than the experience of engaging at state level assessment. Young, MacPhail, and Tannehill (2022) report low competency levels in Irish pre-service teachers' literacy levels and Looney (2006) highlights the lack of assessment policy and practice in Ireland. However, molecular lines with TAB had begun to emerge through the reform of assessment at lower secondary. Small cracks or 'quanta of deterritorialization' had appeared in the form of formative assessment from the late 1990s (Looney 2006). Further changes in the 'Junior Cycle' reform (NCCA 2012) offered a range of changes to assessment in the form of common level papers, Classroom Based Assessments and a new way of reporting called the 'Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement' (NCCA 2015). One of the most significant molecular cracks was the introduction of a Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings at which teachers of the same subject would discuss together, not only the standards of marking for the Classroom Based Assessment but would converse about how that learning was achieved (Dempsey, Doyle, and Looney 2021). Whilst there is ongoing tension about the timing of these two-hour SLAR meetings, Irish teachers are officially talking and learning about assessment practices and grading for the first time in the history of Irish education. This developing assessment

literacy has implications for senior cycle assessment as the molecular cracks evidence that assessment practices can change and be disrupted in their habitual spaces.

How the molar and molecular lines of TAB work is to generate a flow of beliefs and feelings about assessment. Teachers' beliefs emerge from what they believe to be the purposes of education which underpin their approach to teaching, assessment and learning. Xu and Brown (2016, 21) explain, 'Conceptions of assessment denote the belief systems that teachers have about the nature and purposes of assessment, and that encompass their cognitive and affective responses'. Beliefs or conceptualizations of assessment assist the teacher to interpret and interact with the teaching and learning environment (Looney et al. 2018, 444). Teachers' history with assessment and the social context in which they teach are powerful influences on these beliefs. They are further developed by the different political discourses related to assessment such as elitism, meritocracy, equality and inclusion (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). Xu and Brown (2016) sum up the importance of teacher beliefs in relation to assessment when they acknowledge that 'teachers tend to adopt new knowledge, ideas, and strategies of assessment that are congruent with their conceptions of assessment, while rejecting those that are not' (21).

Feelings and emotions generated in relation to assessment have a persuasive affect on a teacher's response to reform (Crossman 2007). The history of a teachers' engagement with assessment has an impact on the confidence they feel in a future task (Smylie 1988). For some teachers, the fact that they had no history in marking and ranking for state examinations, had the potential to endorse self-doubt and a lack of confidence in the CG2020 process. A significant emotion in this study was fear of how assessment might change the student-teacher relationship, a fear of being found out, and a fear of moving into unknown assessment territory of state examinations. The structures and collective practices of a professional community (Allal 2013) similarly shape a teachers' judgement. Whilst much of the research highlights the positive nature of professional communities of practice (Wenger 1998), dialogue with other teachers on how a piece of work had been assessed, can leave the teacher feeling vulnerable to the judgement of their own colleagues. The consideration of how a teacher views their relationship with students as an advocate for their individual needs, rather than that of a judge, is an important element in any reform of assessment, but is a source of tension. Looney et al. 2018 notes the 'recognition of the ontological as well as the epistemological dimensions of learning all contribute to our conceptualisation of teacher assessment identity' (448).

TAB is a highly complex, dynamic element of teacher becoming. As I lay out these pieces of TAB, I must ask what are their material affects – what do they do and what emerges from the middle of their relationship in relation to the event of CG2020? Whilst the questions in this study are about the feelings and beliefs of a teacher during the CG2020 process, the concepts of assemblage and becoming allow the researcher to be aware that feelings and beliefs are not lone silos but emerge from between (intermezzo) the other complex personal, professional and political elements working within TAB and have the power to affect the role of the teacher as assessor.

3. Methodology

My positioning in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (1988) might indicate that the methodology would take a (post)qualitative approach (Jackson and Mazzei 2009; Lather

1993). The research questions I was concerned with were how were the feelings and beliefs of teachers working during the event of the CG2020? The context of this study was during the lockdown for Covid-19, and due to the many restrictions at the time, I was restricted in my methodological design. Initially, an online questionnaire was the only option to begin to map what was happening for teachers in relation to the CG2020 process, which brought me down the pathway of quantitative research. In September/October 2020, the online questionnaire survey (Stage 1) containing predominantly multiple-choice and Likert-type questions was collected from 713 post-primary teachers to capture their reflections on the process of estimating students' marks and ranks. It also researched how engagement in the CG2020 process had influenced their perceptions of their role as assessor (Doyle, Lysaght, and O'Leary 2021b). Table 1 offers the teachers' biographical and school related data, showing a ratio of approximately two to one females to males; the multiple range of experience the participants had in the school and with teaching at SC and their role within the school.

The main findings of this Stage 1 of the research are outlined in the following articles and reports (Doyle, O'Leary, and Lysaght 2021a, 2021b; Lysaght 2022). The Stage 1 researchers did not report on the four questions in Section 4 of the questionnaire exploring teachers' feelings (Q.10d; Q.10e) and beliefs (Q.11c; Q11a) on teacher assessment identity as they merited further analysis.

Stage Two of this research in the form of focus group interviews commenced to further explore and connect to the feelings and beliefs of teachers during the CG2020. The number of participants ($n = 13$) is quite small. Teachers had just returned from Covid-19 lockdown, were in the process of marking the Leaving Certificate for a second time under the renewed process called 'Accredited Grades 2021', and thus were not as available as in Stage 1. However, each interview offered me an invitation into what Husserl (1954) called 'lifeworld', 132) or what we call the 'lived experience' of the people to be interviewed. The interview is not just about gathering knowledge on what was happening but ontologically it opened the possibility for me as researcher to connect, relate and dialogue with the actors who were engaged in the process. I sent an open invitation to all post-primary schools in March 2021, and posted on Twitter, for SC teachers to engage in an exploratory study of these four questions. Ten teachers and three school managers responded. Three focus groups consisting of

Table 1. Teacher biographical data (Question 1a-d).

Gender	%	Years teaching	Teacher **years** In current school %	In total %	Number of LCE Classes taught	%	Role in school (alphabetical)	%
Female	67	0 to 1	5	1	None	3	Assistant Principal	27
Male	33	2 to 5	23	10	1	31	Cal. Grades Coordinator	4
Other	<1	6 to 10	19	18	2 to 5	21	Chaplain	1
		11 to 20	28	33	6 to 10	10	Deputy Principal	3
		>20	25	37	11+	35	Guidance Counsellor	2
							LC Year Head	6
							SEN Coordinator	3
							Subject/Dept. Head	49
							Teaching Principal	1

different school types, geographical contexts, subjects, gender and roles were set up in June 2021 on Zoom due to the Covid-19 restrictions (Wallace, Goodyear-Grant, and Bittner 2021).

Whilst circumstances in Phase 2 dictated a qualitative route, I decided that the analysis should consider a more (post)qualitative direction. Data was analysed using a rhizoanalysis which assisted me in capturing the complexity of this assessment change as it was happening through a multiplicity of voices. Rhizoanalysis offered the concepts of connectivity, multiplicity, heterogeneity, asignifying rupture and mapping (Sellers 2015) and helped to disrupt my own thinking. It offered me the chance to see patterns and connections emerge that were unexpected and explore spaces to find out how do teachers' feelings and beliefs work in relation to the event of CG2020 and what new thoughts now become possible to think (Massumi 1992). Analysing in a rhizomatical way, offers the possibility of thinking in all sorts of different directions, making multitudinous complex connections through using a diversity of data, texts, reading and theory. The rhizome potentially connects any point to any other point. There is no beginning or end but always a middle from which it grows and expands: 'it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 25). Ethical approval for the study was granted by DCU's research Ethics Committee (DCUREC/2020/189).

4. Findings

In Section 4 of the questionnaire (Question 10 & 11), teachers were asked to give their reflections on the impact of having been involved in the Calculated Grades process in their schools and on their role as assessors. The following table shows that approximately one third of teachers offered a positive response in their feelings and beliefs about their role as assessor during the process and in contemplating future assessment reform. However, there are approximately two-thirds of teachers who are not so positively disposed.

Drawing on the results from the questionnaire, the focus group participants were offered the data from Table 2 and the interviews then interrogated the reasons why teachers might answer as they did. The findings about the feelings and beliefs of teachers during the CG2020 process amassed under three main intensities:

Table 2. Section 4 of the questionnaire exploring teachers' feelings (Q.10d; Q.10e) and beliefs (Q.11c; Q11a).

	Agree %	Disagree %	Undecided %
10d. As a result of having been involved in the calculated grades process in my school **I feel** more supportive of efforts being made to reform the LCE programme and examination	36	53	11
10e. As a result of having been involved in the calculated grades process in my school **I feel** more positively disposed to being involved directly in assessing my students for certification purposes	29	62	9
11a. **I believe** that my involvement in the calculated grades process in 2020 led to fairer outcomes for the students in my class than if they had taken the LCE exam in June 2020	31	54	15
11c. **I believe** that teachers' involvement in assessment for certification purposes would lead to fairer outcomes for the students in my school (than if they were not involved)	36	48	16

1. Teachers' feelings of professionalism in the role of assessor
2. Teachers' feelings of tension and compromise in the role of assessor
3. Teachers' beliefs about assessment practices going forward.

4.1. Teachers' feelings of professionalism in the role of assessor

From the questionnaire Section 2: Question 7, one of the most noteworthy results was the large percentage of teachers (87%) who expressed feelings of confidence in their professionalism as assessors during the CG process. 71% of teachers reported feeling good about the marking and ranking decisions they made. From the open-ended data from Question 4 of the questionnaire, teachers listed their years of experience of assessment at both senior and junior cycle; professional knowledge and expertise of working with the State Examinations Commission; working in other jurisdictions (International Baccalaureate; GCSE); use of in-school tracking and assessment records and use of school historical State Examinations performance data. Teachers from both the questionnaire and focus group interviews clearly acknowledged that they worked from a very good knowledge base of effective assessment practice and standards and were very comfortable offering a professional judgement on a student's performance:

> I have always prepared, for my own records, estimated grades based on the students' averages across 6th Year. I have found them to be quite accurate and as such I was comfortable enough predicting what I thought students would get (Questionnaire, Q4).

Guidelines were offered by the DoE and the vast majority of teachers (90%) noted that they were able to apply these strictly when estimating marks and ranks for 75% or more of their students.

The focus groups highlighted the importance of the professional dialogue that took place within the Alignment Meetings, which for many teachers was a new experience at SC. The following input from a focus group participant captures the growing feelings of how valuable these alignment meetings were for building assessment literacy:

> … the depth of a discussion in terms of having a standardised process, like all your teachers doing the same thing, because I found I had not spoken to the other maths teachers in the department like that either until the Calculated Grades process. In addition, there were discussions such as, how difficult are the exams, are you using past exam papers? And we had an interesting discussion about, well are you an easy marker or a hard marker? (T6)

In the questionnaire, (Section 3: Q.9.), 86% of teachers found it easy to work with their colleagues during the alignment meeting and 89% could justify their decisions to them. However, it is important to note that 23% of teachers found it hard to voice their concerns about how colleagues arrived at their marks and/or class ranks (Q.91d). Further work on a more democratic approach in such assessment conversations is something for schools to note in the future. Data from the focus group interviews described how the emphasis of these conversations were initially on teachers' grades and percentage scoring, but that the dialogue moved to discussion about consistency across their teaching and of sharing teachers' views of learning and epistemological beliefs:

… . you know we actually need to streamline a bit more without influencing individual teaching styles or personalities. Some teachers previously might have been teaching one elective at the start and somebody else which they left at the end … we weighed things slightly differently and then there was a discussion around, what do we weigh more? What do we prioritise? (T2)

The prioritisation of the Leaving Certificate examination as 'high stakes' and 'the entrance examination for third level' (T4), was offered by focus group participants as a compromising of teachers' feelings of professionalism. The lack of trust that teachers felt in some of the decisions made by the DoE during the process is very well captured by Lysaght (2022). Participants stated that the backwash from this terminal examination on teaching and learning brought about 'a point where you become less concerned with educating your students and more concerned with getting them through a test' *(T8).* One participant felt the existing one LCE pathway for all as 'torture' because we have 'fetishized the LCE for so long, but it's time to change that' (T9). Interestingly, there was consensus that the CG2020 had opened up a new imaginary for teachers in their role in LCE assessment.

> It emphasised for people that number one there is an alternative people never imagined and could not imagine an alternative to the leaving cert (T1).

The growing feeling of professionalism experienced by teachers during the process of CG2020 offers a potential insight into why approximately one third of teachers feel supportive of efforts to reform LCE programme and examination. Data counters the argument that teachers' assessment literacy was limited. The process of engagement with their base assessment knowledge, conversations about their epistemological and ontological feelings and beliefs about teaching, learning and assessment and engaging in discussions about the wider implications of their role as assessor in the LC examination, have opened up new avenues of thought about their future becoming as a teacher.

4.2. Teachers' feelings of tension and compromise in the role of assessor

From Section 4 of the questionnaire, over 53% of teachers disagreed that they feel more supportive of efforts being made to reform the LCE programme and examination and 11% were undecided. 62% also disagreed that they feel more positively disposed to being involved directly in assessing their students for certification purposes and 9% were undecided. The process of CG2020 created feelings of stress in 81% of teachers (Section 2: Q.7b), with 73% of teachers feeling uncomfortable at the prospect of their students learning how they had ranked them (Q.7c). 32% of teachers felt guilty about the marking and ranking they had made. The focus group participants suggested that the reason for the presence of such feelings of tension during the process was the value placed on the importance of the role of the teacher as advocate for their students.

4.2.1. The important value of advocacy in the student-teacher relationship
The relationship between student and teacher was highlighted as being the most important value to the teacher – 'we have that emotional attachment to these kids' (T7), and they did not want this to change. The role of advocate for students rather than judge and assessor was the fall-back position for most of the teachers:

> So, we did feel a bit like advocates for our students but also some of the socio-economic backgrounds of some of the people that I teach, is you do feel like, I'm okay with bumping these people up actually because they need a bump up in life (T7).

The CG2020 process instigated a tension into this relationship on an ontological level that was not present previously and placed teachers into a very uncomfortable space:

> … ..it was very difficult as it changed the relationship I had with my students. I was unable to converse with them in the same way I had done previously. I prefer to be impartial so that my students see me as the supportive guide in their learning process rather than judge and jury (Questionnaire Q.12).

Teachers pointed out the change in power dynamics when the teacher becomes assessor for state exams, and it causes teachers to rethink how they behave in the classroom:

> I feel like it might change classroom dynamics. I could be wrong, but there were definitely moments where before I opened my mouth I was like, (think about what you're about to say here now), because they know that you're giving them a grade. It's that kind of … the lack of ease, I think? (T2)

The desire for the continuation of this relationship of advocacy affected teacher judgement in their marking and ranking. On a personal level, teachers were comfortable in the striated space of their relationships with students and resisted the imposition of a new space. The relationship is:

> so culturally embedded in us that, I mean I even go into fifth year and I'm like, you are all grown up now and this is a partnership and it's you and it's me getting us through the Leaving Cert, we're working together. And they respect that, and that dynamic has always I think been there for all teachers in SC. (T12)

As assessors, they had the power to take more than measurement into their judgements. Feelings of bias were one aspect the focus groups highlighted that teachers could or would not overcome: 'you can have a handout on unconscious bias but it's impossible to remove bias's (T1). The discussion on teacher bias ranged from socio-cultural reasons to boost students' grades: knowledge of a student's desire for a university course or apprenticeship (T5): confidence building (T3): to liking the student and the recognition that the grades affected the career of each student. Each feeling of bias narrated a story of the affective connection of the teacher with their students:

> … .I would have struggled because the emotional part of trying to make that judgement and not take account that the fact that these children need a help in life. (T12)

The importance of this advocacy affected teacher decision to follow the rules of the process and to resist the political space that had been planned. According to Athena Analytics, in the years 2011 to 2019 of Ireland's Leaving Certificate examination, the average percentage of students receiving a H1, averaged across all higher-level subjects, was 5.4%, with this figure remaining fairly consistent year on year. In 2020 during the CG process, this percentage rose to 10.3%.

4.2.2. A response to socio-cultural differences

The teacher works within a socio-culturally specific context, and they respond to the goals and needs of the students, parents, and communities that they serve. The

CG2020 process opened the lid on the socio-cultural divide experienced by schools and individual students (Freire 1970). Data continually demonstrated a gap between the learning experiences available to different socio-cultural and economic groups:

> You tend when behaviour is an issue or other socio-economic factors come into play in a classroom, you try to make sure you've hit the key areas. And, in doing that, those children are denied the opportunity to learn purely for other reasons. You know, it's not necessarily that the quality of the teacher is poor, or the quality of the experience is poor but it's a different experience. (T7)

Teachers agreed that this 'different experience' (T12) made the role of assessor even more complex. The starkness of the difference between the educational experiences of different cohorts of students is summed up in the insights of the following narrative:

> I remember in noticing in the news, there was students who were bringing court cases. Okay, who were these students? Well, they weren't from where I was teaching anyway. Nobody from where I was teaching were bringing any court cases and didn't have the resources to do that. (T2)

However, on the other side of the socio-economic divide, a participant reminded the group that her students had been 'treated unfairly' as they were downgraded. They resat the LCE exam in November and got the grades they had been rewarded by their teachers and she now believed *that* 'here was kind of a societal decision made that, let the people at the top who have everything, let them be the ones to suffer rather than the ones at the bottom' (T1). The group agreed such a process was unfair.

Data suggested in response to teachers' perception of unfairness, some teachers inflated their grades for their students.

> People might have gotten swept up in this talk of inflating grades. I mean it's a phrase I heard a lot, inflating grades … .and you're like, why didn't I inflate my grades. (laughing) It was kind of a moment of panic afterwards (T6).

The questionnaire (Q.7:2c) revealed that 38% of teachers admitted that they found it difficult to maintain an unbiased position when marking/ranking their students. In Q.12 of the questionnaire, the open comment highlighted that many schools did really try to engage in rigorous and robust practices to overcome bias and arrive at a fair estimate of grades:

> I worked extremely hard on this process to be fair and unbiased. I was able to back up every grade with data I had gathered over the two-year course (Q.12).

This at times led teachers to be disappointed with their colleagues or other schools' responses, as they did not keep to the guidelines and inflated their students' grades:

> Despite my best attempts to ensure fairness for my students, having used every result I had for them, which was proved to be utterly pointless when another teacher in my own departments admitted to adding an extra 15% to all student grades across the board because that's how much he improved in his own exams after the mocks. It was a horrible position to be put in at the time, and it has damaged professional relationships as a result. (Q.12)

Focus group participants acknowledged that on reflection on their own relationships with students, they too might have over inflated their grades: 'I'm not saying I did that, but maybe now that I'm thinking of it, maybe I did, and I didn't realise' (T8).

The complexities of ensuring a fair and robust assessment system were evident in the data and there was overall agreement that the CG2020 process did not offer that approach. This disturbed the deeply held feelings about the student-teacher relationship and created a very stressful experience for many. It presented questions about the very purpose and function of the role they play as a teacher.

> I think it is part of my identity as a teacher. And I felt I almost floundered last year, and this is going to sound very dramatic, but I was like, bloody hell if they're not sitting a leaving cert, what's the point in me. You know, there was a bit of that. I was like, my so-called job here is to get them to reach their potential, you know. And part of me was like, oh god I'm a bit at a loss because I'm not doing this. Even though I was, you know. (T12)

4.3. Teachers' beliefs about what assessment could work in the future

Question 11a and 11c asked whether teachers believe their involvement in assessment for certification purposes would lead to fairer outcomes for the students in the school and the teachers' own students. Again, in Stage 1 of the questionnaire, 31% (Q11a) and 36% (Q11c) agreed. However, the focus groups explained that this agreement was based on the belief that continuous assessment would offer a fairer process to senior cycle examinations. Data suggested that the teachers' role as assessor should operate across the two years of SC in a process of continuous assessment (CA) and not just the end game of Calculated Grades:

> And I think that's one of the things that strikes me about what's even the current conversation and the whole predictive grading system, is that you're guessing what these students would get as opposed to having a robust system in place based on formative assessment where you have been doing assessments all along or you've been doing work all along …
> … I would give a more accurate reflection on the student's ability by assessing through a system of continuous assessment. (T6).

Participants whose subjects had a project component were very positive about how these components encourage students to engage throughout the two years and not just a spurt of progression after the Mock LCE examinations. They highlighted how teachers have been trained to assess these components and the presence of an outside moderator in the form of the SEC ensures that everyone sticks to the process:

> What's very good about construction studies, is that twenty-five percent that we get to judge. Like, we are trained; we do know what that twenty-five percent is. Its evidence, it is there, you know, there's a folder, a practical piece and I am very happy to mark that (T4).

However, some problems that counteracted these affirmative practices of CA were students seeing these assessments as high stakes, generating further anxiety. This shifted how teachers and students viewed each piece of work 'as a potential factor in the Calculated Grades process' (T3) and brought a 'lack of ease' (T11) into the classroom dynamic. There was also the question about the place of formative assessment in the LCE and they agreed that we:

> … just don't think formative fits the current mould of Leaving Cert even though we all know it helps them learn along the way. So, we've almost been programmed to devalue the formative in terms of an end exam. I think that's probably the biggest takeaway that I've had (T12)

In adding to the debate on the fairness of CA, students' CAs are based on individual topics rather than an entire curriculum, leading to them ultimately achieving higher grades.

> Like some of my data would be, would be very high because they knew exactly what was going to be coming up for example and they absolutely worked their socks off for that class on a Thursday or whatever it was (T1).

5. Discussion

The CG2020 process instigated a reimagining of teachers' conceptualisations of assessment and their approach to senior cycle teaching and learning in Ireland. In the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari 1988, the CG2020 process would be viewed as a threshold or middle, where things accelerate and becoming is redefined. It disturbed many of the long-held beliefs and feelings teachers had about the purpose and function of senior cycle assessment in Ireland. The findings highlighted that what 'bubbled up' (Jackson and Mazzei 2013) in the rhizomatic analysis were intensities around high stakes assessment, professionalism, student teacher relationships, power dynamics, socio-cultural inequity, and beliefs about future assessment practices. This discussion will locate these findings onto the assemblage's molar and molecular lines and follow the data to see where the lines of flight have the potential to re-territorialize. Teachers' feelings and beliefs have been affected by the CG2020 process and are significant for future assessment becoming.

5.1. The molar lines of TAB during CG2020

Data in the findings offer an entry into the molar lines of TAB during the CG2020 process. The molar lines presented are made up of striated spaces such as:

a. The purposes and functions of assessment.
b. The role of the teacher as assessor
c. Expectations of relationships.

5.1.1. The purposes and functions of assessment

The CG2020 process raised the question of the purposes for assessment at senior cycle (SC) and whether these purposes sit comfortably within the philosophical becoming of the teacher. Over one third of teachers felt a need to expand the multiplicity of purposes for education beyond the narrow and instrumental function that has been determined by the LCE assessment. This is significant as assessment at SC has focused very much on the element of qualification in the form of a high stake's examination which leads into points for matriculation (Hennessy and Mannix McNamara 2013). This has placed restrictions on the broadening of knowledge, skills, and the spaces for the emergence of the individual as teachers try to 'cover' the course (Gleeson 2021). Data highlighted that this striated space of high stakes assessment and accountability affected the process of calculating and ranking grades for students and generated feelings of guilt, stress, and tension for the teacher. Studies have shown a similar stressful response by teachers to such assessment

across the globe (Gonzalez et al. 2016; Chen and Timothy 2020; Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith 2012). CG2020 raised the fundamental question about the domination of qualification as the singular purpose for education at senior cycle, which stifles a more holistic development of the student (Biesta 2011; Ryen and Jøsok 2021). Gunzenhauser (2003, 51) sums this up by explaining that in the context of high-stakes testing, one predominant default philosophy results from an inordinate focus on the tests themselves and this creates a context in which conversations about the meaning and value of education cannot take place without performance on standardised tests taking centre stage.

5.1.2. The role of the teacher as assessor

The role of the teacher as assessor in the CG2020 process was to mark and rank their students through the making of a professional judgement. West-Burnham and Bowring-Carr (1999) argues that professionalism arises from the exercise of judgement in context rather than the application of formulaic techniques. This requires an ethical judgement. CG2020 requested teachers to take up the responsibility of this ethical judgement through their own agency and capacity to act for the best interest of the student and the common good (Dempsey 2023). From the perspective of the teachers, they have been used to striated space of conformity and compliance with a set of externally determined standards. Documents and videos (A Guide to Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate 2020) offered the rules and regulations that teachers were asked to follow. These laid out the segments of duty, prioritisation and encouraged teachers to engage in a process of making things the same for students. Teachers had been used to what Solbrekke and Englund 2011 call professional accountability rather than professional responsibility. The CG2020 process moved teachers into the arena of professional responsibility, and it created a feeling a dis-ease.

Teachers found that the CG2020 process was highly instrumental in its approach and did not lend itself to integrating formative assessment practices. The focus was on marks and grades. Data reaffirmed how teachers had previously embraced formative assessment in their practice, as a process without formative assessment belies the function of assessment (AERA, APA and NCME. 2014). Teachers asserted that the feedback nature of formative assessment (Black and Wiliam 1998), was having a powerful role on encouraging student progression, and raising student achievement. This mirrors the literature on the importance of formative assessment (Box 2019; Hattie and Timperley 2007 Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith 2014;), giving the teacher and student the ability to factor in their circumstances and socio-cultural context (Rushton 2005), while offering them both a voice. The progress on the introduction of a dualistic approach to assessment at SC became stymied in a search for grades in the CG2020 process. A process that only celebrates the summative element of assessment is a process that is extremely limited and cuts off a deeper understanding of knowledge as provisional and partial (Slattery 2013). It reduces TAB to end output, numbers and a focus on progression alone rather than learning and education. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1988) these are the rigid segment lines that define us by clear, 'well-determined and well-planned territories'.

5.1.3. Expectations of relationships

Data highlighted how teachers were very uncomfortable with being judge and assessor of their own students for state examinations. Pryor and Crossouard (2010), outline the

epistemological and ontological complexity of judging a student's work but this study also suggests an axiological dimension. Teachers believed that during student assessment, a moral dilemma resulted as they balanced their tacit and socio-cultural knowledge of the student with their assessment knowledge. This generated a conflict about who they were as a teacher and who they wanted to become, but the data shows they ultimately wanted to advocate for their students. Kaplan (2003) explains that: 'the teacher as advocate demands the use of pedagogical skills related to principles of learning that form the foundation of advocacy'. In Ireland, the focus of the advocacy has been on the ringfencing of pedagogical skills that support the student in getting ready for the assessment. The assessment was not teachers' responsibility to advocate for but the role of the State Examinations Commission. The CG2002 event highlights the complexity of the teacher's role as advocate. On the one hand, it could be seen that teachers need to extend their advocacy for students as there is a gap in that advocacy during the marking and grading of the state exams. The teacher's job was done before the examinations began. On the other, such a high-stakes exam should never be the responsibility of a teacher alone as it requests a heavy political, social, educational, and personal burden to be carried. Another possibility is to re-imagine this striated space of LC examination and reduce its high-stakes positioning. Güloğlu-Demir and Kaplan-Keleş (2021, 119) calls on all policy makers to 'take action toward improving the teaching process by acting together with the teachers to minimise the negative impacts of high-stakes testing on the process'. An important statistic to remember is that one third of teachers are voicing their feelings and beliefs that there might be room for a new way of re-imagining assessment advocacy for SC. Data suggested that whilst teachers did not want to return to the CG2020 process, they saw that they could have a role in LCE assessment in conjunction with the oversight of the SEC. Teachers who had examination components in their subjects were clear on how they had developed their assessment literacy through professional development and practice.

5.2. The molecular lines of TAB during CG2020

The CG2020 process created small cracks in the molar lines. These cracks were experience in two main areas:

a. The experience of the alignment meetings
b. The emerging question of fairness

5.2.1. The experience of the alignment meetings

The alignment meetings may be viewed as instigating a supple tiny crack in the usual molar lines of assessment practice. They offered teachers a space to extend their advocacy for the student beyond teaching and learning to assessment. The professional discussion expanded teachers' assessment literacy and knowledge, and many experienced the power of collaborative practice when everyone worked to ensure that assessment protocols were followed (Green and Johnson 2015). Whilst teachers marked and ranked their students as an individual, the professional community of teachers worked together to agree the standards offered by the DoE. In Ireland, professional dialogue amongst teachers can be

intermittent (Moynihan and O'Donovan 2021) but in the DoE's policy document 'Looking at our Schools' (2022b), it turns a lens specifically on teachers' collective and collaborative practice. One area of highly effective practice is that 'Teachers view collaboration as a means to improve student learning and also to enhance their own professional learning. They engage in constructive collaborative practice and in collaborative review of their practice'. In line with the literature on collaborative communities (Fullan and Hargreaves 2012; Hattie 2012; Wenger 1998), data highlighted the positive response of teachers in the expansion of their learning when they worked as an effective team. However, it is important to note that this was not the experience for all teachers and much work needs to be done on building collaborative communities amongst teachers in Ireland.

5.2.2. The question of fairness

The CG2020 process threw open the windows of the Leaving Certificate examination as a process and allowed the nation to view the reality of its inequity and lack of fairness. It highlighted the ongoing social divide between students sitting their Leaving Certificate examinations in Ireland. Teachers working in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) were highly aware that their students were at a stark disadvantage to other schools who had far more cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu 1983). The bias to assist these students was palpable in data and teachers were motivated to give these students their advocacy and assistance in their journey to university. In the standardisation process that followed, the school's historical data was not used in the wake of an outcry from the UK, which saw more affluent students do better and disadvantaged students suffer under the calculated grades system. However, this then backfired on the 'more exceptional' students, and many of the high achievers did not achieve what they had expected. The process of standardisation can be debated back and forth but the bigger question that came to the fore was whether the whole Leaving Certificate examinations system is a fair system? There is agreement that the SEC run a fair process of assessment. However, the question of equity begins before this process and the CG2020 instigated the deeper interrogation as to who is it fair for and how does fairness work for all students?

5.3. The lines of flight of TAB during CG2020

When examining all data and the connections between the different lines, the lines of flight from the event of CG2020 lie in the soaring belief of self-efficacy in the professionalism of teacher to carry out assessment for state examinations and the feeling of advocacy for students is the most highly valued component of TAB. Teachers' educational desires for professionalism and advocacy are such powerful beliefs and feelings that they can act to shape action (Edwards and Edwards 2017). At present, these desires have been disrupted and interrupted through the CG2020 process. Before they resettle back to their previous striated space, there needs to be an acceleration of conversations, recursion, dialogue and debate about what is it that teachers desire for their students at senior cycle and only then how can that desire be translated into robust and fair future assessment practices. These encounters need to dissect the many complexities around teaching, learning and assessment (Loughran 2004) at SC and its very purposes. TAB

has become something different in the wake of the CG2020 process. The affect of the CG2020 process on future reform to LC assessment lies in understanding these deep beliefs and desires of teachers. They have the power to open up (life-affirming) or close down (destructive) future reform.

6. Conclusion

This paper has mapped the CG2020 process as an event that disturbed and affected teachers on epistemological, ontological and axiological levels and encouraged them to look anew at who they are as assessors. Teachers felt pulled between how they historically approached assessment, their role in the CG2020 now, and what future assessment reform might hold. Previous assessment reforms, viewed as unsuccessful by teachers, affected the appetite for reform for teachers in the present (MacPhail, Halbert, and O'Neill 2018). CG2020 brought to the fore the relationship of advocate that is promoted between teacher and student and the dilemma of balancing this with critical and professional judgement. Professionally, teachers questioned the very purposes and fairness of the SC and the role of assessment in this vision. The tension of the dualistic approach to assessment, both formative and summative and a growing assessment literacy has added to a deeper understanding of the limitations of the present system. When TAB is placed back on the map of teacher becoming, it combines with many other elements. It will affect and be affected by approaches to teaching and how the student learns. What now comes up from the middle of these connectivities is something different due to the event of CG2020.

Teachers' assessment becoming is being re-envisaged in Ireland and the many new facets of this becoming has created much angst and dis-ease. The CG2020 process has reimagined SC assessment and making sense of this could be a catalyst for deep dialogue at every level of the system. Teachers offered the importance of a robust, consistent and fair form of continuous assessment throughout the two years as an opening point to this dialogue. The continuing role of the SEC as moderator was highlighted as having an important future role to ensure equity for all in the system. Beabout (2012) wisely suggests that after turbulence or any disruptive force, there must be perturbance. This is defined as a social process in which people respond to the turbulence by considering organisational practice. Future reform demands perturbance by all parties involved. The aim of TAB in the future is:

> not a totalization, a definitive tracing of limits, or a final theory of everything. It is rather an expansion of possibilities, an invention of new methods and new per-spectives, an active 'entertainment' of things, feelings, ideas, and propositions that were previously unavailable to us. (Shaviro 2009, 148–9)

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributor

Audrey Doyle is an assistant professor in the School of Policy and Practice in DCU. A former second-level principal of a large all-girls post-primary school in Dublin, she achieved her Ph.D. in Maynooth University in 2019. She now lectures on curriculum and assessment across a diversity of modules in DCU, contributing to the Masters in Leadership and the Doctorate in Education.

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