Creativity as Symbolic Gift Exchange Between a Visual Arts Teacher and his Senior School Students

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Abstract: This paper reports on qualitative research undertaken over the last two years that investigates creativity as a kind of symbolic gift exchange between Visual Arts teachers and their senior students. This research takes into account the intentional presence of the teacher as a creative function in the student’s artworks. The research draws on the theory of Pierre Bourdieu who explains the notion of the ‘project of the gift’ within his theory of the habitus and symbolic capital.

The paper questions conventional views of creativity as fixed behaviours. It acknowledges the importance of the micro-contextual history underlying the functional transactions between the teacher, student and creative performances and how these performances are transformed by the intercession of new agencies over time.

Fieldwork involves observations and interviews with teachers and their students in the senior art classroom. Attention focuses on the transactions between the teachers and their students at moments of creative origination as students make artworks in their final year of schooling in Visual Arts. Transactions are conducted in the production of diverse art forms.

Observations and interviews are semantically analysed and emergent results interpreted.

Background to the study

Theoretical conceptions of creativity

Theoretical conceptions of creativity vary enormously within the fields of psychology, philosophy and art education. Creativity is theorised as a priori structure of the imagination (Kant, Piaget), as a faculty of mental representation (Perkins), as a process of problem solving (Ecker), as a form of lateral thought (Guilford), as metaphoric transfer (Goodman), as a type of symbolic innovation within prodigious individuals (Gardner, Pariser), as a faculty of will (Nietzsche), as a fragile motivation (Lowenfeld), as typologies of behaviour (Eisner), as normally distributed properties of talent (Clark and Zimmermann), as dispositional factors that can be measured (Torrance), and as problem finding (Csikszentmihalyi).

The agency of the visual arts teacher within the production of students’ artworks

The literature of art education positions the art teacher at different historical moments in quite contrary ways. The art teacher can be described as one who fosters, collaborates, corrupts or appropriates student’s creative originality. Gardner, reminiscent of Lowenfeld,
proposes that an art teacher should foster young students’ art — but remotely, with the teacher nurturing but not directing creative work. In other words, the teacher’s function, according to Gardner, is to assist the student to unfold their naturally developing artistic competence. In adolescence, Gardner claims, the student is ‘especially open and undefensive and is receptive to aid, suggestion and inspirational models’ (1982:217). The teacher can intervene, but in a sensitive and critical way, a view that is deeply embedded in art teachers and students thinking, even today. Yet what this means practically and how an art teacher can go on is not immediately evident. Furthermore, the intentional presence of the teacher as a creative faculty in the student and the students’ beliefs about the teacher’s agency in their artistic performances and in the creative artifacts produced is rarely commented on.

**The creative autonomy of senior students**

It is readily apparent to Visual Arts teachers and their Year 12 students that to be competitive within assessment and the Higher School Certificate (HSC) examination in Visual Arts and to be selected for the ARTEXPRESS exhibition that follows students need to make art that demonstrates their originality and creativity. Through the course in this final year of schooling students are granted a range of opportunities to experiment and produce original, intentional and authentic artworks. Art teachers are the first to defend the value of this creative autonomy in their students’, their artistic performances and in the artifact they make. They will explain how students originate in their ideas in artmaking and in the experimental processes used. Students’ life experiences are often cited as central tenets within the artworks produced. Teachers may be even a little mystified by their students’ abilities.

It is therefore somewhat surprising that in viewing exhibitions of these artworks held in many schools in the weeks prior to their examination that certain features can be distinguished which pose a challenge to the art teachers’ narratives. Artworks, although original for each student, may exhibit a similar character, complexion, or intensity. A recognisable style may be in evidence or a proportion of the student group may approach a narrow or broad range of representational interests in a similar way.

**The selection of artworks by Senior Markers in HSC Visual Arts marking**

Within the HSC Practical Examination each year artworks are selected for marking scales in different expressive forms such as painting, sculpture, collections of works, video and digital media and so on. Selected in concert with a set of marking guidelines, these works act as the benchmarks for discussion amongst markers and provide exemplars at particular mark ranges for the ranking of other artworks. Small teams are assigned to search out representative works from the stacks of flat works, racks of paintings and conglomerates of three-dimensional works to establish these scales. Teams work independently of one another and are under some pressure to build these scales. Thousands of artworks are discussed and debated before final selections are arrived at and confirmed by a larger group of senior markers which are then used, with written commentary and the marking guidelines, as exemplars of different mark ranges. Coincidences appear to occur each year, which defy simple explanation. Senior markers, with little knowledge of one another’s work through this process, regularly select works from a small number of schools to represent top of the range performances. Furthermore, some schools are represented on more than one of the marking scales each year and over the years.
ARTEXPRESS

ARTEXPRESS, the exhibition of student’s artworks from the HSC examination is a high stakes event for students, teachers, schools, families and educational sectors and those venues where artworks are exhibited. Within the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition students write of their own intentions, inspirations, and artistic processes. In the openings to the shows students’, whose artworks are exhibited, are praised for their intelligence and individuality, as well as their psychological insights into the human condition that these works and youth culture represent. The students’ creativity and technical virtuosity is often remarked on as exceptional. Curiously, at the same openings, it is not uncommon for an art teacher to make an aside to another art teacher, even prior to their reading the citation that accompanies the artworks, that ‘this is one of X’s [name of teacher/school] artworks’. Whilst generally only discussed in hushed tones the artworks of particular art teachers and schools are often recognised by those have a local knowledge of what selected art teachers are doing with their students. And, while around 200 students works are chosen for exhibition from around 1000 that satisfy the mark value each year particular schools and teachers repeatedly have their students’ artworks selected from year to year.

Claims

Theories of creativity and the literature on the art teacher’s pedagogical role, whilst valuable to some extent, seem to be theoretically insufficient to explain the ostensibly like minded, yet hardly routine, social transactions between teachers and students and teachers and teachers that appear to be at work in the creative performances associated with the making of art in the senior classroom. Furthermore, these social transactions appear to affect how artworks are valued in the interconnected structural and social contexts of the school and senior classroom, the HSC examination and ARTEXPRESS exhibition. These theories offer little by way of explanation of creativity that can accommodate the disjunctions between the art teachers narratives and the artworks produced by students, nor can they account for the social agreements, orientation, and irreversibility that also appear to be at work in the markers selection of artworks as benchmarks within the examination and in the subsequent selection of works for ARTEXPRESS. Consideration of these kinds of structures and the associated social relationships have either been disallowed or misrecognised under the terms of more conventional theories of creativity. These issues warrant further investigation. Is there a possibility for example that the art teacher’s intentional presence within the student’s creative performances is more significant than has been assumed previously? What the teacher has to offer in the students’ making of creative artifacts and how they are judged may be more consequential than previously believed in the students thinking, action, and directionality of their artistic practice and reflected in the social and linguistic exchanges within the classroom.

This research focuses on seeking to understand the social transactions between a Visual Arts teacher and his senior students at moments of creative origination as students’ work towards their production of artworks to be submitted for the HSC examination. The art teacher and his art students are keen and resourceful players in the milieu described in the students’ final year of schooling, and are affected by the forthcoming HSC examination and the possibility of their artworks being selected for ARTEXPRESS.

The author tests the propositions that:

- Creativity can be conceived of as a kind of symbolic gift exchange that occurs in the transactions between the Visual Arts teacher and his Year 12 students.
• These transactions are dependent on the ‘symbolic capital’ and social competence of the teacher and students and are subject to, in all good faith, dissimulation about the truth of their exchange.
• The exchange of gifts between the teacher and students will be distributed unevenly amongst the class.
• The exchange of gifts will positively correlate with the social reasoning, tact, charm and degree of misrecognition that the teacher and students are capable of.
• the aesthetic value of the creative performances of students will correlate positively with the increasing subtlety of misrecognition possessed by the teacher and student involved in their production

Theoretical Framework of the Study

It is Pierre Bourdieu, the French social theorist and realist, who provides the socio-cognitive framework for this study. His theory of practice, including his consideration of the habitus and the exchange of symbolic capital, are demonstrably relevant for understanding creativity as a social transaction between the art teachers and their students and provide the theoretical framework for the design of the study. Whilst Bourdieu would never deny the importance of the psychological disposition of the artist in the making of art and the development of his/her individual style, his theories suggest that there could be more to creativity than an individual’s creative psychology or behaviour. In other words, while the students’ dispositions may be significant in the making of art other factors are at play and we may have been looking in the wrong place. He offers a way to understand the practical realities of creativity as a social transaction between art teachers and students. However, his theories remain ethically controversial and little discussed because of their challenge to the sacred transaction of the reflective mind and his/her work.

The habitus

Bourdieu explains the habitus as a:

‘socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures in which the agents’ interests are defined and with them the objective functions and subjective motivations of their practices’ (1977: 76)

With this explanation Bourdieu identifies that the individual is never the sole originator of their practices. Rather he highlights the causal relations between an individual’s employment of cognitive resources and the social domains in which thinking and action takes place. Further he recognises how the subjective motivations of agents are connected to the objective conditions of their practices (Brown and Thomas 1999: 8).

His view challenges a pure model of rational action. Quoting Weber, Bourdieu notes that ‘the pure model of rational action cannot be regarded as a rational description of practice’ (1990: 63). While the habitus provides the regularity to affect a semblance of certainty in what agents do and how they go on, without resorting to a pure model of rational action, it is taken as the ‘natural thing to do’ (1990:63). It is collectively orchestrated and objectively organised in durable and regulated improvisations or strategies (1977:78). Accordingly, the habitus offers infinite choice and invention in strategy without regression to the rule functioning as an ‘accumulated capital’ for accomplished social agents. It is a kind of social and linguistic competence, a savoir faire that takes into account the practical mastery of the symbolism of social interaction, born of the individual’s immersion in the complexities of a social domain (Brown and Thomas 1999: 8).
The strategies of the habitus are like those of players who have ‘a feel for the game’, without being the product of a deliberately strategic intention (1977:11, 1990:62). The habitus is embodied, loaded with incipient anticipation and contextual meaning, each move triggering a counter move amongst the agents. Strategies resist universalisation and mechanisation. They occur as a product of history at a certain time and with a particular tempo in a social domain. The habitus produces, amongst agents who are disposed to enter and play the game, a common sense world-view that is objectively secured by a consensus of meaning (1977:80). Bourdieu notes that the practices that the habitus generates are reinforced objectively, through the agents’ harmonisation and adjustments and through the continuous reinforcement that each receives through individual and collective experience (1997: 81). They are ‘objectively compatible with their conditions and expectations and are pre-adapted to their objective demands’ (1990:63).

This logic, with its stylistic unity that is immediately perceptible, has neither the rigour or constancy of logical logic, nor the strict, regular coherence of the concerted product of a plan (1990:102). Nevertheless it maintains a practical, symbolic and economical coherence that can be applied in different social contexts in sensible, foreseeable and reasonable ways.

**The exchange of symbolic capital**

Bourdieu’s explanation of the theory of symbolic capital extends his theory of the habitus. Symbolic capital, as the primary currency of exchange in the social economy, is a capital of credit used in the day to day economy of social transactions. It is any property recognised as having value by the social agents who contribute to a field of practice and can only be perpetuated to the extent that it succeeds in obtaining belief about its existence (2000:166). Although denied as an economic capital, it is nonetheless recognised by agents as a capital of symbolic power and profit. It contributes towards enhancing the prestige of an individual and group through its accumulation.

The exchange of symbolic capital within a symbolic economy is likened to the archaic economy where ‘everything takes place as if the economic activity cannot explicitly recognise the economic ends in relation to which it is objectively orientated’ (1990:113). It is a denied economy, an economy of ‘good faith’ that refuses to declare itself as such. Bourdieu notes that in the symbolic economy agents are forced to devote almost as much ingenuity and energy to disguising the truth of the economic acts of their exchange as they expend on performing them. It ensures, through the sincere fiction of the ‘disinterested exchange’ that rites of alliances and elective relations of reciprocity transfigure interested relations retrospectively into generous exchanges. These are the economy’s best-kept and worst kept secrets (1990:112, 113).

**The project of the gift**

Bourdieu’s explanation of the ‘project of the gift’ further illuminates how the exchange of symbolic capital functions economically, although infinitely varied, as a series of successive choices, ‘performed on the basis of a small number of principles within the logic of a social practice’ (1990: 101). The giving and receiving of gifts is a kind of uncertain and risky improvisation which may be full of surprise and charm although potential rejections and non reciprocations may follow. Agents who participate in gift exchange, from the little everyday gifts that bind social relationships and function within the logic of surprise and contribute to a social efficacy to the more rigorously forced gifts, must be agents of honour who are capable of ‘playing the game… and playing it well’ (99, 100).

Explained as a twofold truth, the objective exchange of the gift and the subsequent counter gift, is experienced as a discontinuous series of free and generous acts between agents.
despite the simultaneous self-deception and denial that occurs about the truth of the exchange. This self-deception and denial is supported by a collective self-deception that misrecognises the inaugural act and subsequent acts as singular acts rather than as stages in a relationship (2000:192). Bourdieu recognises the *illusio* of the collective activity of agents who will deny the labour devoted to maintaining this misrecognition. He explains how ‘this collective self-deception is repressed through the lapse of time’ which masks the contradiction of the exchange. This contradiction is exposed when a gift is returned too soon revealing the objective mechanism and truth of the exchange (2000:192, 1990:105).

Bourdieu’s recognition of the interval of time within gift exchange marks a significance departure from structuralist interpretations of gift exchange as proposed by Levi-Strauss and Mauss.

Within gift exchange, as with the exchange of any symbolic capital, the interval of time provides a way to understand how the same act may take on completely different meanings at different times. The risky and necessary improvisation of a giver’s undeclared calculation must ‘reckon with a receiver’s undeclared calculation, and hence satisfy his expectations without appearing to know what they are’ (1977:171). Furthermore, an agent must seek to transfigure interested relations into elective relations of reciprocity through the sincere fiction of the disinterested exchange. This ensures not only the interests of the agent but also the vitality of the group and the reproduction of the economic bases of the symbolic economy in the future.

Bourdieu notes that it is all a matter of style that separates the gift from the counter gift and allows the ‘deliberate oversight, the collectively maintained and approved self-deception, without which the exchange could not function’ (105). Playing with the tempo of the exchange through the interval of time offers an accomplished social agent unlimited scope for strategy, delay, or alternatively, to force the pace and play on the resources whilst at the time strengthening their hand in how they bargain and underwrite ‘the agreement once it is concluded’ (1977:15,1990:116).

**The Habitus and Exchange of Symbolic Capital within Art Education**

The art classroom becomes the site for creativity to function as the exchange of the gift and counter gift between art teachers and their students as symbolic capital. This capital, denied like that within the archaic economy, is unable to recognise the economic ends to which it is objectively orientated (1990:113). It is therefore not surprising that the teachers’ pedagogical role is misrepresented within this economy. It is in this repression that the non-creative presuppositions of the creative narrative can take place. The maintenance of the subjectivist narrative of the autonomously originating student provides considerable scope for strategy on the part of both teachers and students (Brown and Thomas 1999).

**Design of the study**

The design is unique to this study and activates the theory and the methods employed. It is a fully triangulated ethnography that is augmented by visual means. It is Bourdieu and his theories of the habitus and symbolic capital, including his notion of gift exchange, that suggest the idea for the study. His theories offer a compelling way to revisit teacher-student relationships as a series of transactions or symbolic gift exchanges, at moments of creative origination, within the social context of the art classroom. As Bourdieu notes, as with any social practices, there will self-deception, collective deception and misrecognition amongst the agents. The design and methodology seeks to uncover the concealed practices of creativity in the transactions between the teacher and students and through various means attempts to catch out the respondents. This does not imply that there is any reproach
intended towards the teacher and students for their actions. On the contrary, the study seeks to understand the social logic of these transactions and their causal functions.

This study is empirical, emergent and experimental in design and is well suited to discovering the rich and complex contextual detail of the social transactions between the teacher and students, and the students and students at moments of origination. The design recognises the paramount importance of fieldwork in that, following Bourdieu’s explanation, the habitus defies totalisation and generalisation and must be studied within the practical constraints within which it occurs (Bourdieu: 1972). Ideographic and qualitative research methodologies are selected because of their theoretical and instrumental capacity to characterise the complex social dilemmas and exchanges in the classroom and to capture the qualities of the temporal transactions (Guba: 1978, 1985; Bourdieu 1990). These methodologies, which are a kind of practice common to qualitative studies, provide an effective means of validation. They assist the reader to confidently engage with the claims, results and their interpretations and to understand the distinctive properties of the transactions between teachers and their students within the classroom and their causal nature (Boyd 1984: 197, Bourdieu: 1990). The methods used in this study are detailed below. Further, the emergent and experimental design is vindicated by the counter intuitive findings that are emerging and briefly commented on within this paper.

Population

Following consultation with the Supervisor of the study it was initially proposed that the population would comprise two teachers and their senior classes of visual arts students in two high schools in NSW. The focus would primarily be on the teachers as the main respondents with attention as required, given to the senior students. These teachers would be selected from different schools in different locations. Diversity was also to be represented through consideration of the school’s socio-economic composition and the school sectors from which respondents would be drawn. It was intended that one of the teachers would be female, the other male. The sample changed as the study progressed and emergent variations are noted below.

Timing of the study

It was estimated that the fieldwork conducted in these two schools would conclude by late 2000. This aspect of the design was amended as the investigation progressed and emergent variations are noted below.

The role of the investigator

In ethnographic studies of this kind a researcher must be sufficiently knowledgeable to distinguish the significance of events and actions of the respondents. Researchers and theorists posit the researcher in qualitative research in different ways. Unlike the ‘objective’ researcher who is believed to sit outside the object of study, Rosaldo (1993), Guba (1978, 1985) Punch (1994) and Bourdieu (1998) question whether this objectivity is possible by raising the importance of the researcher’s understanding of the complexity of a social context in which the research is undertaken. The investigator is suitably qualified and has the reflexive awareness to undertake this research. She is a PhD candidate and Inspector of Creative Arts at the NSW Board of Studies. A professional member of the field of art education she has a public profile amongst art teachers in NSW. She has a detailed knowledge and has contributed to the development of the Visual Arts syllabuses, the HSC examination, HSC marking and ARTEXPRESS. Her institutional links are relevant for the access and involvement of respondents and to the investigator’s discrimination of the qualities that characterise creativity as a form of symbolic gift exchange.
The use of a digital video camera

The use of a digital video camera is a significant aspect in the design of this study. Used as the primary methodological tool for the collection and analysis of data within the cultural context of the art classroom it is well suited to further analysis and interpretation of the embodiment of the habitus, its products and the distribution of symbolic capital within the respondents. Documentation of this social and material context is rich in detail and complexity and is of both visual and semantic interest. Morphy and Banks note how visual anthropological methods extend the possibilities for ethnographies:

‘Visual recording methods [and sound recording methods] have properties such that they are able to record more information than memory alone, or notebook and pencil… they are indexically related to the reality they encode’ (1998:14).

The technology lends itself to the study of visible systems and visible culture as well as to audio and oral culture within the classroom contributing to its rich description and contextualisation.

Documentary footage provides an ostensive acquaintance with the transactions between the teacher and his students, the students and each other, the teacher and other teachers and so on. It allows for the capturing of the native language used by the respondents including statements, comments, jokes, commands, suggestions and inferences. It is well suited to the documenting of material data within the classroom including its organisation, order, images displayed, material resources and other ephemera. It is also highly suited to the materiality of the expressive forms encountered, towards properties that emerge in context and the processes associated with their production (1998:18).

Over time, the video footage provides a record of the ‘episodes’ encountered in the interviews and in the observations of the transactions between the respondents and the researcher. Data can be analysed and re-analysed in an unprecedented way. Documentation offers a reasonably permanent record of the cultural and material context that can be used reflexively, along with transcripts and other notes, to further explore inferences and new connections between language and action. It is also used to elicit further information from respondents. Digital records further assist in the triangulation and corroboration of data.

Confidentiality

Protocols of confidentiality are observed as part of the design and reporting of this study (Punch 1994). Confidentiality of the video footage was not raised with the teacher or students at the commencement of the study. When the study was designed it was not altogether clear how this footage would be used. However, it has become more pressing to keep this detailed information confidential as the fieldwork and development of results has emerged to protect the interests of the teacher and his students. The identity of the respondents, including the school at which the study is conducted, is withheld. Each respondent’s identity is disguised and all respondents are only identified by codes eg R2, S1-S11. Confidential transcripts correspond to information transcribed from the video footage. Therefore, this documentation, of critical importance to the study, remains unavailable for public scrutiny. Only the investigator and her Supervisor have viewed the video footage of the interviews and observations. Confidentiality remains a constraint within the study.
Emergent variations to the initial design of the study

The researcher fully intended to work with two teachers and their students in different schools. However, due to the emergent reasons following, the study did not proceed according to the initial design. The investigation in the first of the selected schools required further extension. The main respondent’s role within the study altered. Although he remained a key respondent in his own right, his relationships with individual students became the central focus. In other words, twelve respondents have been key agents within this first site (R2 and S1-S11). The culture of the classroom context was more complex and rich in nuance and meaning than expected. Relationships were complex and subtle between the teacher and students and students and each other. The meaning of a transaction or event may appear to be obvious although few could it be taken at face value. Timing was critical — for example, the teacher and particular students might be out of camera range, move in and out of focus or even deliberately avoid the camera. Multiple negotiations were required from acceptance and agreement of the initial purpose of the investigation to the cautious agreements from the teacher and students and other teachers to be part of the study and to be observed and interviewed.

The design was altered due to the effects of the use of the digital technology in the investigation. Video footage offered the possibility of investigating events with a certain precision of the teacher, students and their exchanges and the classroom spaces. Episodes could be reassessed and reinterpreted and comparisons made between different events which would not be possible through comparison of written notes and other records. It also provided rich documentation on the emergent artworks. Nevertheless, other qualitative methodologies were also including the use of structured questions with the main respondent and observational notes developed independently of the video data to ensure that data could be cross checked and corroborated.

Beginning with a second teacher respondent and group of students could corrupt the study. There was an emerging potential risk whereby emergent findings from the first school might inadvertently be used either as a way to anticipate the context of the second site or to foreclose on findings too quickly.

Methodology

Respondents

The male Visual Arts teacher (known as R2) teaches in a high school in Sydney. His students in the Year 12 class (referred to as S1-S11) are generally academically able and almost all will pursue tertiary education. The teacher has a degree in art education, has been teaching for over ten years and is an experienced teacher of senior art students. He has also marked the HSC examination. He teaches in this school with three other art teachers.

Instructions and materials

The teacher respondent agreed, somewhat cautiously, to be interviewed and observed with his senior class initially for a period of around six weeks. In the preliminary discussions and at the time of interviews the confidentiality of the investigation was confirmed although the significance of the video, at this stage, was not realised. Students also agreed to participate in the observations and to be videoed following an initial observation. The teacher agreed to be video taped in interviews and observations with his students and had sought his students’ and the Principal’s agreement before proceeding. The researcher indicated to the teacher and students that she was interested in finding out what was going on within his classroom and to observe his interactions with students. Students were also aware of the intentions.
and while not altogether sure of the reasons were willing to proceed. Due to the complexity of data emerging, observations were renegotiated with the teacher and extended incrementally to around eight months.

Validity

This study uses an emergent qualitative design methodology that rests on two planks of validity: the first is triangulation, the second semantic analysis. Triangulation subjects a variety of discreet observational methods to cross-checking and mutual reinforcement, assisting in objectifying the interpretive methodologies and keeping them independent of their theoretical explanation. Video documentation of interviews and observations offer further possibilities for the corroboration and triangulation of data (Brown and Thomas, 1999:13).

Semantic analysis offers the advantage of the systematic recovery of local or folk definitions used in particular cultural contexts. Following Spradley's premise outlined in more detail below, semantic analysis does not force interpretations of documented texts but brings out the system of micro-cultural references that underlie the local usage of spoken and written utterances and other available texts within the classroom. These methods assist the investigator to avoid imposing their own ethnocentric, naïve or self-realising interpretations or biases in what respondents have said (Brown and Thomas, 1999:13).

The use of ideographic methods

The study of complex detail of social transactions requires the use of multiple approaches to singular samples. Ideographic methods are sufficiently objective to produce results that are independent of their theoretical explanations. They offer an effective means of observing and analysing the complex transactions of concepts such as creativity.

The ethnographic interview

The approach to interviewing the teacher respondents within the selected context draws on Spradley's explanation of the 'ethnographic interview' as a 'particular kind of speech event'. Whilst the ethnographic interview resembles the friendly conversation (Spradley, 1979, 80; Dexter, 1970:7). Over time, in follow up interviews that are more structured, and in addition to an explicit purpose and direction being established with respondents, other ethnographic elements are introduced into the interview by the interviewer. These include ethnographic explanations and ethnographic questions designed to elicit a respondent's cultural knowledge in their own terms. An unstructured and structured interview was conducted with the teacher in early 2000 and a further structured interview, following the observations in early 2001. Another unstructured interview was conducted in late 2000 with the co-teacher of Year 12 Visual Arts.

Observations

Spradley distinguishes participant and non-participant observation as kinds of observations, which he notes, may overlap in practice. Participant observation is connected to the context whilst non-participant observation is a more detached observation. Observations can be focused, selective, broad, general and descriptive (1980: 32-33). They also offer the possibility of analysing and interpreting the physical and social context in which the respondents function as well as the respondent's physical and intellectual capacities, characteristics and feelings. Observations include the scrutiny of documents, records and other data that is available within the social context.
Over time, the observer develops a heightened awareness of things usually blocked out. The role becomes increasingly introspective actions, and events are pieced together and their consequences considered (Spradley 1980:54). Observations were conducted over eight months in 2000. Each observation was recorded using the video camera and written notes and other points of interest were recorded. Observations included scrutiny of the materiality of the classroom spaces: the general organisation of working spaces, media and equipment, the selection of prints and ephemera on the walls, the reference books and videos in use, the teacher’s annotations and references on the blackboard, the resources and equipment regularly used including overhead projectors, tripods, cameras and computers. Importantly, observations focused on the teacher’s interactions with students over time and included his interactions with students individually and collectively. Students responses were also observed including their questioning of the teacher, their need for reassurance, their jokes to gain his attention and so on. The teacher’s practical engagement with students was scrutinised as they worked on developing the artworks. The students’ attention to their work was also observed.

Transcripts of interviews and observations

Transcripts were made of each of the interviews and observations. These were subject to further description and some initial interpretation. Connections between events and episodes were noted. All data collected was coded by page and line reference, footnote reference and by video reference number. The development of the transcripts and further description and interpretation assisted to uncover the particularities of the semantic meanings and relationships used in this cultural context. The transcript from the initial unstructured interview was used in the semantic analysis that followed to develop questions for the structured interview. Transcripts from the observations were used in an ongoing way to maintain the connection with the teacher and students and in the longer term were used for further semantic analysis and the development of the follow up structured interview in early 2001.

Semantic analysis

The design is informed by semantic analysis. Semantic analysis is generally concerned with the interpretation of cultures and the texts that they produce. ‘Culture’ in this sense refers to what people do, what they know, the things they make and use which are learned and shared by members of a group — their cultural actions, knowledge and artifacts (Spradley 1980: 5). ‘Texts’ refer to signs/symbols against which other signs/symbols can be checked and referred to. The meaning of signs/symbols is dependent on its relation to other parts within the symbol system. Bourdieu (1980), Spradley (1980) Giddens (1984) amongst others note that often the meanings of these signs/symbols are taken for granted and remain tacit or go unrecognised. While semiotics was initially concerned with language (Saussure, Pierce) Barthes (1975) and Foucault (1973) note that language is only one of many sign systems. Language can be analysed and interpreted as a text as well as non-verbal gestures, social situations, documents and material data (Manning and Cullmann-Swan: 1994).

Spradley advances a ‘relational theory of meaning’ within his ethnographic research that recognises the value of semantic analysis. According to Spradley the meaning of any symbol is its relationship to other symbols. Cultural knowledge — intricately patterned symbol systems within a culture — is made up of the meanings of symbols related to other symbols within the same culture (1979: 97). He indicates that this relational theory of meaning can be applied to various social contexts: the interview and observation of respondents, the study of non-verbal symbols and their use, the artifacts and actions that people take. The task of the researcher is to discover and decode the relationships between
symbols and their use within a culture, in this case the culture of the art classroom in the language, actions, knowledge and artifacts produced. A relational theory of meaning is sought within the classroom, the premise being that respondents’:

‘Cultural knowledge is more than random bits of information; this knowledge is organised into categories, all of which are systematically related to the entire culture’ (Spradley; 1979:93).

Domain analysis

Spradley notes (107-119) that domain analysis makes use of semantic relationships to uncover cultural meanings which offer the investigator clues to the structure of meaning in a culture. According to Spradley they lead to larger categories of folk domains that ‘reveal the organisation of cultural knowledge learned by informants’ (112). These relational concepts assist to decode the meanings of symbols used within a culture. Semantic relationships generally lie hidden beneath the surface of apparent folk terms for things and actions and offer great subtleties of meaning.

Unstructured interviews and observations (Spradley 1979, 1980) of the teacher and his students, and exchanges between the students and researcher and teacher and researcher over time formed the documented texts which were semantically analysed and subject to a domain analysis (Guba and Lincoln 1975, 1985; Spradley 1980). This involved selecting extracts of text from the interviews and observations that indicated an exchange, or series of exchanges of interest. Building on the practice used by Carroll (1998) the semantic analysis involved the use of a system of recording each word or short phrase used by the teacher or particular student on a separate index card. Each word or short phrase was then analysed to uncover the semantic relationship. Cards were then reconstructed into emergent domains under the guidance of their shared local meanings (folk domains) which were identified by emergent cover terms.

Emergent cover terms were subsequently used for the purpose of developing a set of structured questions with R2 which sought to validate, verify, extend elaborate or falsify the cover terms and challenge the consistency of the respondent’s reasoning (including the extent of their understanding of concepts as intentional relations). These questions attempted to uncover the cultural references proposed by the teacher respondent within each of the emergent cover terms. The also set out to test the extent to which the respondent’s responses to questions verified, extended, elaborated or falsified the emergent cover terms. They offered hypothetical situations in which the respondent considered how they might potentially respond or intervene in a particular event (Manning and Cullman-Swan, 1994, Carroll and Brown 1998). Further analysis was then undertaken of extracts of texts from observations using the same methodology. This proved difficult. More detail is provided below in problems encountered.

Speech Act Theory

Consideration of Austin’s Speech Act Theory (1962) provided the further grounding for the semantic analysis of these texts. Austin identifies different kinds of forces within speech acts that have a conventional force. He explains how illocutionary utterances are intended to secure an uptake, invite a response or take an effect (150-163). He distinguishes between the force of these utterances. Verdictives include the giving of verdicts, estimates, appraisals and so on. Exercitives include statements such as decisions in favour or against a course of action and the exercise of power, rights or influence. Examples include urging, ordering, and appointing and advocating. Commissives are more concerned with promising and include declarations and announcements of intentions. Behabitives include apologising.
committing, condoling, cursing and challenging. *Expositives*, Austin notes are probably the most difficult to define and include statements that postulate, argue, reply and assume. He notes that these kinds of utterances, in particular must be considered in terms of how they fit into a course of an argument or conversation.

These distinctions were particularly important for considering the intentionality and force of the speech acts of the teacher respondent and his students as the semantic analysis of texts continued and folk domains emerged.

**Problems encountered**

Three broad areas were problematic. The investigator attempted to analyse the shared meanings of words, short phrases and references and to sort these under their apparent local meanings into ‘local’ or folk domains using the methods of semantic analysis described. This proved to be a difficult task and required further assistance from the Supervisor. Whilst possible cover terms appeared to emerge from interviews and observations they were insufficiently refined. There appeared to be great inconsistency and ambiguity. Selected extracts of text were analysed and re-analysed for cover terms to be retrieved. Further coaching was required to improve on discerning these semantic relationships and gauging the illocutionary force of respondents in their linguistic utterances. Each emergent cover term will be subject to further scrutiny and triangulated with other data.

The use of a digital video camera in the classroom posed particular problems including the possibility that responses were ‘framed’ for the camera, which to some extent might inauthenticate data. Nevertheless, other qualitative methodologies, including the use of structured questions with the teacher and observational notes developed independently of the video data of the teacher and students, ensured that data can be cross checked and corroborated.

Qualitative studies of this type generate a significant amount of complex data that must be closely analysed. The use of the digital records further contributes to this. The results of qualitative studies do not lend themselves to abbreviated formats of conventional reporting.

**Independent observer analysis**

The Supervisor of the study has had a particularly important role. As a qualified observer and as an outside auditor, while the study was in progress he functioned as an independent observer and analyst of the project. The Supervisor regularly reviewed and discussed the emergent data and procedures for analysis as it developed. He coached and trained the researcher in qualitative methods prior to, during and following the fieldwork and provided regular advice in areas such as the quality of the semantic analysis, checking that procedures were appropriate and properly carried out and advising of the finer analysis required. He offered critical advice in broadening and deepening the researcher’s knowledge base to continue with the project and to interpret the findings. He has continued to provide the specialist instruction throughout the project and as the interpretation of results has commenced.

**Initial Reporting of Results**

Initial extracts from the summary of results of two of the emergent cover terms are reported. These two cover terms provide evidence the shared folk domains emerging from the data. Both cover terms appear to be dominant. Each has emerged, over time, from the semantic analysis of the unstructured interviews and further semantic analysis of selected observations. At this stage each cover term has been cross checked via the follow up
structured interview and triangulated, to some extent, with the semantic analyses of selected observations and the further review of transcripts and video footage. Further analysis and triangulation is required.

**Cover term 1: Directions as assertions of influence**

It emerges from the semantic analysis of the initial unstructured interview and selected observations that a considerable amount of R2’s time involves asserting his influence over students, some more than others. In the structured interview that follows the observations R2 represents his directions as ‘discussions’ where he offers options to assist students in the making of their artworks. He believes that these options can be either accepted or refused by students and he notes how he tries to conceal his own judgements within the options suggested. He says ‘we’ll discuss it there and then’ (SI 2, P7, L43-44) and ‘I might suggest something and say a possible reading of this could be this… and [in] that way… I’m giving them a variety of areas… to come to their own conclusion of what I’m trying to say’ (SI 2, P9, L14-27).

R2 indicates that he thinks that it is important for the students not think he is too judgmental. He comments ‘I mean sure I am judgmental… if I can perhaps… hide those judgments within options’ (SI 2, P9, L14-27). He remarks ‘they [students] are the authors of their work so you’re just coming in and offering them things’ (SI 2, P9, L30-33). This view is consistent with his comments in the first structured interview where he speaks of the ‘scatter gun’ effect of his ideas and how students may take them up (SI 1, P1, Q3). However, in the structured interview following the observations, he is prepared to admit, in a qualified way, that [he] ‘probably come[s] to the point of saying that we’ll do particular things’ but remains convinced that this is too ‘is an offering’ (SI 2, P9, L30-33).

In triangulating his comments within the structured interview with selected observations two aspects of his directions are unexpected. Firstly, these assertions of influence are not as readily available to all students in the class as may be expected. The semantic analysis of the observations of events early to mid way through the fieldwork (O 3, O 6), corroborated with the video footage of these events and other observations, indicate that while selected students (eg S1, S2) have the benefit of his direct influence, and his informed and professional judgement and commitment to the progress in their artworks, others do not to the same extent. One student (S6 as observed in O 3), attempts to seek R2’s direction through a variety of ploys such as referring to what she has learnt in previous experiences with him, clicking her fingers to indicate the urgency of her need, and asking him directly what would he propose. R2 withholds his direction about how she should proceed. His tact is quite significant here. Whilst he is prepared to offer judgements to this student about the properties he values more highly over others in her work, he denies her his direction and transfers the responsibility of decision making back to her uttered in comments such as ‘my suggestion is think about it and see what you want’ (O3, P3, L22-25). Whilst satisfying the rhetoric of ‘they are the author’s of their own work’ (SI 2, P9, L30-33) he simultaneously denies the student the advantages offered to others.

Secondly, R2 and selected students misrecognise the instrumentality of his technical influence in the students’ subsequent thinking, actions and artworks. In the semantic analysis of the same events referred to above his exercising of power over particular students (S1, S2) is noteworthy and reveals how his decisions in directing students simply just have to be. As a consequence the students are compelled to proceed in a certain way in the next stages of their making of artworks. R2 says to S2 in a tactical, skilful, discreet yet apparently open exchange ‘because hopefully, you will be working from the one transformer point…its in a parallel circuit so it shouldn’t be a problem’ (O 6, P8, L16-17). He also says within the same conversation ‘the long pieces are going to be the ones at the top of the
pyramid' (O 6, P8, L27-28) directly asserting his influence on how the student should proceed.

**Cover term 2: Teacher preferences and judgements**

Observations over 2000 indicate that R2s students have considerable interest in producing artworks developed with a contemporary look. In the structured interview (SI 2, P3, L8-25) R2 is questioned about his students' interests in manipulating photographic and digital imagery in their artmaking. He is quick to point out that the students’ reasons for wanting to work with photo-based and digital imagery is due to their ‘visual literacy’, their ‘intuitive aesthetic sensibility’ and immersion [in contemporary culture] — something they have grown up with. At this point he makes no reference to his own interests in these media or the more conventional interests of students in the other class in painting, drawing and printmaking. However he has noted in this same interview and at different points throughout the year how he is ‘impassioned about a particular area — contemporary practice’ (SI 2, P1, L32). Later in this interview he also notes ‘I mean I’m more excited about pushing digital interests or temporal interests’ (SI 2, P19, L17-18). R2 acknowledges a dilemma within the same interview that some of his students do not necessarily recognise photo-based and digital imagery as legitimate contemporary art practice. He cites how parental views and the views of other staff members contribute to the more conventional views of some of his students who hold the view that art should be ‘hung on the family wall’.

Whilst he might misrecognise how his interests are transferred to those of his students in the structured interview he acknowledges the importance of working with students over a two year period in their senior years of school. He states that for ‘really positive outcomes’, students need to get used to thinking about art like their teachers, as well as their idiosyncrasies and their mindset. From the observations this manifests itself in his different exchanges with students. He, if necessary, overrides students’ suggestions, which may have positive or negative consequences. He says to S6 when referring to a techniques she has used on her photographs ‘it looks better than the scratching… yeah, I don’t like the scratching’ (O 3, P1, L7-9). On another occasion he says to S2 when she makes a suggestion of where her work could be installed ‘I don’t think the room is suitable’ (O 6, P9, L13). A number of other events from the observations are significant. He says to S1 ‘well lets start with those’ when referring to some of her photographs (O 3, P3, L27) and in quite an explicit way says to the same student ‘don’t you think that perhaps has a little more interest than a plain photograph?’ (O 3, P3, L23). We see how his estimations and calculations as kinds of judgements inform the students’ future actions. He indicates to S2 that she will need a certain amount of wire to connect the various parts of her installation (O 6, P8, L31-32) and he sets out how she should proceed ‘you’d go from each point to the wire’ (O 6, P8, L33).

In the structured interview (SI 2) R2 is questioned on the factors that would be taken into account in deciding whether students photographs could be further manipulated. Following the kind of reasoning noted in Cover Term 1 where he distinguishes the differences between critical and technical advice, he now argues that most photographs could be further manipulated (SI 2, P12, L29-35). He proposes that manipulations are technical refinements, which involve procedures like the use of spot toning or changing the scale of an image. He also briefly concedes that the further manipulation of a photograph can assist in concealing a problem citing an example where plastic sleeves, used to envelop photographs, ‘covered the problem’ (SI 2, P12, L35-36).

R2 recognises that the extent to which students can be offered suggestions to further manipulate their photographic works is constrained by their psychological states (SI 2, P12, L37-41). He also acknowledges his aesthetic ideal for their artworks (SI 2, 13, L1) that is
related to his knowledge of contemporary photographers and qualities in his ex-students HSC artworks (SI 2, 13, L15-19). He factors these aspects strategically into the incremental suggestions offered to students, instances of which are evident in the observations. Students use the computer to manipulate their photographs; others variously use food dyes, shellac, and staples and blister the surface of photographic papers. However, his suggestions within the classroom and the students’ subsequent performances remain unsatisfied by an explanation of technical improvement although at the moment of the exchange with a student and subsequent exchanges, they might be perceived as such.

**Interpretation and discussion**

The results emergent in these cover terms are sustained in others. The significance of the social transactions between the teacher and his students is overwhelming in these emergent results. The teacher’s pedagogical role as an agency in the students’ production of artworks, their conceptualising of what they do and how they proceed is unequivocal in what is emerging in this study. There are many instances of the sincere fiction of the disinterested exchange and interested relations between the teacher and his students are retrospectively transfigured into generous acts. Yet these findings would be discredited or misrecognised under the terms of more conventional theories of creativity.

As an exchange of symbolic capital the giving and receiving of gifts within the classroom at moments of creative origination functions within the logic of surprise and uncertainty and defies universalisation. R2 is never entirely predictable in any mechanised sense in how he proceeds with particular students nor are they although there is a demonstrable practical logic and habitus at work within the classroom.

Like Antilochus who is keen not to miss any chances in the horse race described by Homer in The Games in the Iliad, the teacher is keen not to miss any opportunities with his students. His acute contextual knowledge of the classroom and the broader conditions — of his students, including their psychological states, the technical and art world knowledge he can offer them as well as his knowledge of the syllabus, HSC examination and ARTEXPRESS — all contribute to how he and the students tactically proceed. R2 exhibits surprising scope in his strategy in his continuous improvisation with students and the practical action entailed. He is acutely aware of the importance of time and playing on the tempo of the exchange within his transactions with students.

Some students are the recipients of R2s attention on a regular although informal basis and it is the giving and receiving of the little, hardly noticed gifts as directions and/or preferences and judgements that, in a number of instances correlate with the aesthetic value of their artworks (eg S1 and S2 in particular). At these moments his exchanges are more like those of King Nestor, Antilochus’ father, who takes his son aside before the race and in a few helpful hints points out what Antilochus must watch for — the dead tree stump and the narrowing of the road at the turning point. He wisely confides that his son has the necessary skills as a cunning driver to watch for the post, and the position of others, and his son must use his wits to hug the road in his chariot at the turning point leaning it a little to far to the left. In the classroom context R2 indicates his preferences and judgements to students in a similar way. For example, he indicates to S1 which images she should begin with and suggests that some photographic techniques are more interesting than others that should be considered. He shows S2 how to work with the parallel circuits in setting up the installation and offers other practical advice about how proceeding. But these are by no means mechanistic exchanges. They inform the students future action and add to their competitive advantage. They bind these students, as well as the large majority of others, to the teacher and visa versa. They assist the teacher to be recognised and honoured by the group for his expertise. R2 in turn recognises and is respectful of the students’ intelligence, uniqueness
and age related interests. This aspect conforms markedly to Bourdieu’s notions of symbolic
capital where capital is recognised as symbolic power and profit and contributes to the
accumulation of prestige for the teacher and the group.

Other students (eg S6) overplay their hand in seeking his direction too overtly and demand
his guarantee of success. R2 withholds his insights as directions on these occasions and
utilises other kinds of tactful strategies to alter the pace of the exchange.

There are many instances within the interviews and observations where misrecognition and
self and collective deception are in evidence. It is in these very acts of misrecognition and
deception between the teacher and his students that the social, linguistic and practical
transactions entailed in creative performances and their resultant artifacts can proceed. In
regard to R2s Directions (Cover Term 1), while various options are regularly given at certain
points at others they are less disguised when R2s strategic urgency overrides his concern
for discussion and the possibility of options. When asked in the structured interview following
the observations (SI 2) about his bearing on the direction of particular works produced by
students, R2 misrecognises the causality of his involvement indicating that this is kind of
advice is just ‘technical rather than critical’. In so doing he appeals to the honour associated
with his position and indicates how he makes it his business to know the ‘mechanisms
behind’, the technical properties of different materials and processes. In his view this
knowledge is absolutely necessary because he must be able to assist the problems students
face in making their artworks and he must keep up with his interest in contemporary
practice. He notes that he wouldn’t like to let them down commenting on the good faith
placed on him. Yet, such knowledge imparted to students’ falls outside the constraints of
what he recognises as directions.

He is not explicitly aware that he excludes some students like S6 from his direction. He
would possibly be alarmed that this had been observed given his view that like a shark he
keeps circling and moving around and assisting students where necessary (SI, 1).

In regard to R2s Preferences and Judgements (Cover Term 2) he indicates his excitement
about contemporary practice although he can simultaneously acknowledge that some of his
students may have difficulty in understanding such work as art although he has also
indicated that contemporary digital and temporal works are part of the students’ intuitive
aesthetic sensibility. In another example he indicates how the further manipulation of
photographs can improve the quality of almost any photographs citing the improvement
possible in changing of scale, the use of spot toning or covering a problem. And yet,
manipulations mean markedly more to he and his students in a competitive and creative
sense as indicated in the types of experimental works they produce. He is insistent that
when he offers advice about whether a photograph should be further manipulated it is
technical rather than critical and in so doing misrecognises, here and on other occasions, his
critical role in these irreversible although pre-supposed non creative aspects of the students’
production. Similar patterns are evident in his calculations and estimations of a technical
nature offered to the students. It is simply the thing to do.

Students such as S1 and S2 wait for R2s direction to proceed but these exchanges are
handled modestly and intelligently with a certain respect and tact so as not to push the
teacher too far. Suggestions are offered by students (eg S1 and S6) but overridden by R2
although he, within the structured interview, maintains they are the authors of their work.

While the emergent results presented focus primarily on the teachers symbolic gift exchange
with students at moments of creative origination there is ample evidence to indicate how
students play their part, in varying degrees, in reciprocating with the teacher. These aspects
of the study and further interrogation of the teacher and students in these and other
emergent cover terms are currently underway. Further investigation is also planned of the relationships between the teacher and students’ performances within the HSC examination and ARTEXPRESS.

References


