Creativity as a Kind of Inferential Social Reasoning in the Transactions Between Art Teachers and their Art Students in the Final Year of Schooling

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Abstract

This research reports on selected findings from the author’s qualitative analysis of creativity in senior art classrooms. The study examines the transactions between art students and their art teachers as students make artworks that are assessed in the NSW HSC Visual Arts examination. The investigation is theoretically underpinned by Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of the habitus and symbolic capital. Bourdieu’s theories are demonstrably relevant for understanding creativity as a kind of inferential social reasoning that is transacted between teachers and students in the social context. The study provides for the concept of creativity to be extended beyond current accounts as evidenced in everyday use and as represented in theoretical interpretations of genius, talent, dispositional traits, divergent thinking and problem solving. It identifies the importance of the history of interactions and how circumstances are continually reassessed. Such iterative adjustments have the power to not only transfigure the social standing of the participants and their relations with one another but the creative attributes of the artworks themselves. The paper concludes by questioning the voracity of evidence-based assessment which accepts a logical means ends relation between the artwork, achievement of a standard and a student’s acquisition of knowledge.

Background to the Study

This research involves an ethnographic and qualitative study of creativity augmented by visual means. The study seeks a resolution of the dilemma of how modernist expectations of the student as creative artist as an intentionally autonomous agent can be reconciled with the obligations of teachers to meet instructional outcomes. Attention focuses on the transactions between art teachers and particular students in a senior art classroom at moments of creative origination as students make artworks in diverse media including photography, digital media, textiles, installations and printmaking for their Higher School Certificate Visual Arts examination.

Theories of Creativity

Creativity is a notoriously difficult concept to explain. Historically it is linked to the Enlightenment and Romantic tradition. The idealistic and Romantic philosopher Emmanuel Kant views the artist as the genius whose talent or gift of creativity is bestowed on them by nature as an inspirational guiding spirit (Kant in Cassirer, 1970: 168-169). The gift of nature includes imagination, reflective judgement and understanding. For Kant genius cannot be explained by rules but genius made the rules. Thus the genius has little idea of how ideas enter his head but his works nonetheless act as models for others to follow (1970: 169).

For the late C19th philosopher and educator John Dewey, creativity is concerned with experience. Experience is primarily a matter purposive and aesthetic action, full of emotion and volition although primarily non-cognitive (Dewey, 1980: 37). Nevertheless, intelligence is also brought to bear on experience when actions and their consequences are imaginatively and aesthetically perceived and connected, affording a significant meaning to experience (1980: 44).

The highly influential art educator Victor Lowenfeld draws on Dewey in proposing creativity as a process, which is designed to promote self-expression and mental growth although it is non-
cognitive in its focus (1947). For Lowenfeld, play and experimentation with materials become major organisers in art for the purpose of fostering self-expression. Lowenfeld is deeply resistant to any intervention on the part of art teachers in exposing students to the work of mature artists, copying or in correcting a child’s efforts in art making (Lowenfeld, 1982: 15-16). In Lowenfeld’s view this kind of interference severely hampers the child’s experience, imagination and expression (Lowenfeld in Pappas, 1970: 53). Lowenfeld’s emphatic stance has contributed over time to the fostering of guilt and repression amongst art teachers should they be revealed as usurping their students’ creative endeavours.

More objective traditions also exert their influence. The eminent psychologist Joy Paul Guilford emphasises a correlation between intelligence and the creative personality (1968). Guilford conceives of creative thinking in the visual arts as a set of divergent production abilities or problem solving abilities/traits that include fluency, flexibility, elaboration and originality (Guilford, 1968: 114). The distinguished art educator Elliot Eisner (1966) advances the view that creativity can be identified as different typologies of behaviour which include boundary breaking, inventing, boundary pushing, and aesthetic organising (Eisner, 1966: 323-324). David Ecker, a colleague of Eisner with a keen interest in Dewey (1966) proposes that qualitative problem solving involves qualitative and aesthetic intelligence and experimental behaviour. For Ecker, this process is rarely neat in its steps. What the artist does is to think in the medium towards a controlled resolution (Ecker, 1966: 58). The influential psychologists Jacob Getzels and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1978) advance the proposition that creativity is more concerned with problem finding than problem solving. For these psychologists there is a significant relation between the problem finding behavior of art students and the aesthetic value and originality of what they produce (Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi, 1976: 81-82).

More recently, systems perspectives on creativity take into account the cognitive abilities of the creative person and their relation with a field of practice and a domain of knowledge. Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, Howard Gardner, Doris Wallace and Howard Gruber make use of experimental studies and case studies of highly creative individuals to advance this position. For Csikszentmihalyi, creativity becomes a kind of persuasion (Csikszentmihalyi in Sternberg, 2004: 314-316). For Gardner, it is the reciprocity between the nodes of the individual, field and domain, which enhance the likelihood of creativity (Gardner, 1993: 41). For Wallace and Gruber, the creative person must reconstruct and take possession of whatever her or she needs for the work while retaining a social awareness of the relation between the work and the world (Wallace and Gruber, 1989: 5).

In art education, explanations of experience and the creative process as self-expression and experimentation retain a particular currency (Weate, 1990: 241; Clark and Zimmermann, 2001: 15). Despite their continuing appeal this study asserts that these theories appear to be theoretically insufficient to explain what is valued as a creative performance and furthermore what actually occurs in the reality of the context of senior art classrooms.

**Creative Kinds of Performances**

The term creativity refers to a particular kind of performance that includes the artefacts and products it enacts. Creative performances are always produced in an historical context and are thus invested with cultural as well as intentional causes and properties. They derive their extension from a combination of semantically related properties and empirically underlying traits (Gardner and Nemirovsky, quoted in Brown and Thomas, 1999: 1).
The Identity of Art Education in the Senior Years of Schooling in NSW

The identity of art education is a reality that exists as a complex, inter-woven composition of culture, language, knowledge and values (Searle, 1995:27). The NSW Visual Arts syllabuses (Board of Secondary Education, 1987; Board of Studies, 1999) and HSC examination including the recent focus on standards of assessment exert a powerful force on curriculum choices and the decisions made by teachers in schools. In effect they create the very conditions and possibilities of certain activities that are particularly pertinent for art making.

ARTEXPRESS, the high stakes annual exhibition selected from HSC artworks scoring in the top 14% of the state exerts a force, perhaps even stronger than the HSC examination, in constituting the attributes of a creative performance in the minds of students, teachers and the wider public. At the Art Gallery of New South Wales alone ARTEXPRESS attracts annual audiences of more than 100,000 with large numbers of Visual Arts teachers and students visiting the exhibition. Students whose artworks appear in this exhibition tend to be represented in the catalogue as autonomously originating artists (Board of Studies, 1999). Such a view underplays the context in which the artworks are produced. Artworks exhibited in this exhibition are consumed by teachers and students and the public alike and invade the economy of the classroom (Baudrillard, 1996).

The Ambiguity Surrounding the Art Teacher’s Role in Art Making

The domain of art education is notorious for the ambiguity of the teacher’s pedagogical role in the production of students’ artworks. In the literature of art education at different historical moments the art teacher is represented as one who corrupts the creative activity of students (Lowenfeld, 1947, 1982), or appropriates their students creative originality. Consider for instance the apprenticeship of the youthful Michelangelo to Ghirlandaio.

Nonetheless in modern and more contemporary accounts the agency of the teacher is generally absent from the underlying causes of students’ creative traits. Current external or phenotypical divisions which focus on the outer features of the teacher and student begs a more iterative or genotypical explanation of the causal influences each one exerts on the other. Vygotsky argues these emerge in the history of the performance (1978: 84). Thus it is reasonable to assume an ongoing reference to the context as the relation between the creative performance and performer is developed and transfigured over time by the recruitment of new agencies. What is generally missing, as Gardner intimates, is the way in which the semantic properties of the teacher are entertained as empirical traits of performers (1982). In considering this relation between the creative performance and the performer we may ask ‘how is the agency of the teacher represented as an intentional trait of the student and in the artworks they make?’

Theoretical Framework

It is the French Realist philosopher and social theorist Pierre Bourdieu whose theory of practice provides the socio-cognitive framework for this investigation. Bourdieu challenges the assumption that ‘the intentional actor is the sole originator of the cognitive resources that people bring to bear in the practices of their lives’ (Brown and Thomas, 1999: 2). He relies on two central concepts of social competency — the habitus and symbolic capital.

The Habitus

Bourdieu explains the habitus as a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures which generate and organise practices and their representations for the social agents. Their interests are defined by the habitus as well as their objective functions and subjective motivations without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends. The habitus is full of
improvisation, like the strings of moves of agents who have ‘a feel for the game’ without a conscious aiming at ends (Bourdieu, 1997: 56, 57).

**Symbolic Capital**

Symbolic capital serves as the primary currency of exchange in a social economy. This capital, any kind of capital that the agents value, is recognised for its power and potential profit while its ‘price’ is individually and collectively misrecognised. Bourdieu likens the exchange of symbolic capital to the archaic economy and to gift exchange. Everything takes place as if ‘.. economic activity cannot explicitly recognise the economic ends ..to which it is objectively oriented’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 113). The cognitive competencies of the agents, those who are ‘socially disposed to enter.. the game of exchange’ involves the ability to participate in the transaction of symbolic capital while preventing the economy from being recognised ‘without intention or calculation’ (1998:98). Nevertheless, the reciprocity of symbolic transactions entails expectations about the motivation or ‘causality’ of other social agents by each of the participants. To be respectful of others is to possess subtle social reasoning, which reveals the agency of the social order hidden within the agents’ actions.

**The Application of Bourdieu’s Theories to Misrecognition in the Art Classroom**

Bourdieu’s theories of the habitus and symbolic capital are demonstrably relevant for understanding the dilemma of what is for students in learning to be creative as a product of denying the art teachers’ explicit function in the repressed economy of creative origination. This concealment occurs in the interests of maintaining the subjectivist narrative of the autonomously originating student. Transactions within the habitus of the classroom become sites for the exchange of symbolic capital. These transactions contribute to the accumulation of creative capital, which is manifest in the transfiguration of the students’ artworks over time while building the collusion, trust and social standing of the participants within the group.

**Hypotheses of the Study**

Following Bourdieu, the inquiry poses the following hypotheses:

- Misrecognition of creative autonomy will occur in various emergent forms in the transactions between art teachers and their art students.
- Students will respond with differing degrees of ‘social tact’ in the misrecognition of creative autonomy during exchanges of symbolic capital.
- Social reasoning is inferentially sensitive to different contextual points of view expressed as ‘open secretiveness’, ‘euphemisation’ and ‘denial’.
- The students artworks will evidence degrees of creativity that vary consistently with the emergent subtlety of misrecognition that the protagonists are capable of exchanging in transacting symbolic capital.

**Design and Methods**

The design activates the theory and the methods employed. The study is a fully triangulated ethnography that is augmented by visual means. It has an ideographic and emergent qualitative design, which remains grounded in Bourdieu’s socio-cognitive framework. As a study of complex detail of social transactions it requires the use of multiple approaches to the samples studied. Ideographic methods are sufficiently objective to produce results that are independent of their theoretical explanations. The design recognises the paramount importance of fieldwork in that, following Bourdieu’s explanation, the habitus defies totalisation and generalisation and must be studied in real time within the practical constraints within which it occurs (Bourdieu, 1997: 103).
Fieldwork includes observations and unstructured and structured interviews with four art teachers and their Year 12 art students in art classrooms in four secondary schools. The field of art education generally regards these teachers as expert performers as evidenced in the previous performances of students in the HSC and the art teachers’ contribution to the field more generally. The most extensive fieldwork is undertaken in 2000. Further fieldwork occurs in 2005. More recent fieldwork is used for the purpose of seeking an external validation of the findings of the original study. While results from this more recent work are not finalised compelling similarities have begun to emerge which, despite some local differences, lend validity and truth to the findings of the original study. Further scrutiny of the results will occur over the next few months.

A digital video recorder is used to capture events, and the verbal and non-verbal language used in the transactions between the art teachers and their students. Documentation also includes footage of emergent artworks, student diaries, objects and ephemera in the classrooms. Digital tapes offer a permanent record that is retained for subsequent analysis, reanalysis and interpretation. As Banks and Morphy confirm the major advantage of this method over more conventional ethnographic approaches in that ‘visual 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’ (1997:14). In other words, these recordings function as signs or tokens, and may direct attention to certain facts, conditions or properties of things.

Protocols of confidentiality are observed as part of the design and methods. Thus, few details are offered in this paper about the art teachers, students or the locations of the schools.

**Semantic Analysis**

Emergent results are developed from the observations and interviews making use of the digital video records and a form of semantic analysis, which takes into account the force of the linguistic utterances of respondents derived from Spradley, (1979), Austin (1981), and Searle (1984).

Semantic analysis, based on Spradley’s relational theory of meaning, offers the advantage of the systematic recovery of local or folk definitions used in the particular cultural context of the classrooms. Spradley argues that 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). It follows that the task of the investigator is to uncover the relationships between symbols and their use within the culture of the art classrooms, the premise being that respondents’ cultural knowledge is not random but organised into categories that are systematically related to the entire culture (1979: 93). Language, along with non-verbal gestures, social situations, documents and material data can be analysed and interpreted within the culture (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994: 464).

Austin and Searle extend the ways in which the conventional force of linguistic utterances can be understood beyond their semantic relationships. Identifying the force of the utterance is extremely relevant for analysing the intentionality of the linguistic exchanges between the art teachers and their students. This assists in developing a deeper understanding of the categorisation of cultural symbols and their use.

The method of semantic analysis involves the use of a system of recording each word or short phrase used by an teacher or particular student on a separate index card (Carroll and Brown, 1998). Each of these is analysed to uncover the semantic relationship, the illocutionary force of the utterance and its propositional content. These relational concepts assist in decoding the meanings of symbols used within a culture. Semantic relationships and the linguistic force of the utterances generally lie hidden beneath the surface of apparent folk terms for things and actions and offer great subtleties of meaning. Cards are reconstructed into emergent domains under the guidance of their shared local meanings or folk domains taking into account the force of the respondents’ utterances and the propositional content of what they say. These emergent domains
identified by their emergent cover terms reveal how cultural knowledge is learned and used by the respondents. Cover terms and included terms are used to structure the reporting of results and the characterisation of events.

**Triangulation**

Triangulated endorsement of claims made by the teachers and students is sought through the use of concomitant qualitative methods including the digital video records of events, unstructured and structured interviews, descriptions of events and the artworks including factors contributing to their emergence, and other documentary evidence. The use of these attendant methods forms an important aspect of the reporting of results and points to signs of misrecognition in the blind spots and oversights that emerge.

**Problems Encountered**

The use of a digital camcorder raises validity and confidentiality issues. For instance, there is the distinct possibility that respondents’ might hyper dramatise their performances for the camera. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison recognise the need for ‘reactive effects’ to be minimised to ensure that data collection is valid (2002: 116). Multi-method approaches and triangulation of data over time builds the validity of the evidence without sacrificing its complexity (2002: 115). Qualitative studies of this kind also generate a significant amount of complex data that must be closely analysed and interpreted. Such studies do not lend themselves to the simple reporting of results.

**Results**

Six domains of cultural knowledge are retrieved from the documented texts of the observations and interviews from the initial fieldwork undertaken in 2000. With their included terms they offer an insight into the cultural logic and relations at work in the transactions between teachers and students. Results include categories of promising, advising, warning, and requesting among others. For instance, in promising, the art teachers declare their intentions to do certain things for the students in the making of their artworks. This places them under certain obligations that they anticipate the students would wish for and hope others may recognise. In contrast, in advising, the teachers advise on the overall appearance of the artworks in their belief that what is proposed will benefit their students. More specifically the results uncover the importance of the micro-contextual history of events in the classrooms, which underlie the ongoing functional transactions between the teachers, the performances of students and the attributes of the artworks.

**Interpretation and Discussion**

The interpretation seeks a resolution of the dilemma of how the art teachers and students can hold onto their beliefs about the students’ creative autonomy while they act in contradictory ways. The interpretation is not presented as an instance of Bourdieu but as an interpretive extension of his theories suited to the very reality of creativity in art education.

Four distinctive dimensions of creativity are converted from the results and interpreted in terms of the meanings of events and the motives of the teachers and students. The interpretations reveal the generative and organising schemes of the habitus at work in the very realities of the classrooms which function as self-regulating mechanisms. They provide for the art teachers to transact creative capital with their students that is accepted as an open secret, or collectively denied, repressed and euphemised.

Each of these generative and organising schemes entails symptoms that are similar and contradictory. It is in the very ability of the teachers and students to manage what is recognised as well as these contradictions through their social tact, dexterity and delicacy, or inferential social reasoning that causes the creativity of the artworks to escalate (Bourdieu, 1997: 80). Furthermore
these same competencies of practical tact contribute to the collusion amongst the group and the esteem in which the teachers and students are held in their local context and in the broader field of art education.

Despite their contradictory appearances these generative schemes must be taken seriously. As Bourdieu shows the ‘habitus performs while concealing it in and through practice’ (1997: 56). He also refers to what might be regarded as duplicity as the ‘double truths of practice’, which is rendered possible through the self and collective misrecognition inscribed in the objective and mental structures of these art teachers and their students. This necessary duplicity excludes the very possibility of them thinking and acting otherwise while contributing to the realisation of the same tacitly repressed or concealed purposes or goals (Bourdieu, 1997: 53; 1998: 95).

Authoring as one of the generative and organising schemes is characterised in further detail below. While the focus is on instances as they are interpreted in the first school others are provided from the semantic analysis and initial interpretations of the more recent observations and can be traced back to the documented transcripts and digital video references. Due to the restrictions of word count in this paper this referential detail is not included.

**Authoring**

Under the allure of authoring as a generative and organising the art teachers and their students engage in transactions of symbolic capital, which make a significant contribution to the creativity of the artworks. In particular, their technical accomplishments, stylistic qualities and the fertility of ideas. Authoring occurs in an atmosphere of open secretiveness or as a sincere fiction of a disinterested exchange. Everyone knows but doesn’t want to know that everyone knows the true nature of the exchange (Bourdieu, 1998: 192). Retrospectively the force of authoring is euphemised or denied.

**The Force of Authoring is Recognised when:**

The art teachers as a matter of routine get caught up in publicly telling their students what to do and how to go on in the making of their artworks as events unfold in the art classrooms. The art teachers find it difficult to hold back in what they can offer caught up in the generative scheme and lead on by opportunities as they present themselves and their obligations to the students. Each teacher’s proposals are infused with a powerful legitimacy and authority, lent weight by their teaching experience, knowledge of art, practical know how and reputations. For instance, one of the art teacher’s advises a student in front her peers in the classroom of an artist that she should recall as a way of telling her how she should proceed and less directly providing the scaffolding for how her artwork will ultimately look. Another one of the art teachers advises a student of different ways that she could proceed in attaching fabric to a mixed media work with the effect of narrowing the options available and sureing up to some extent a particular graphic outcome.

Advice in each of these instances, as Searle shows, is premised on the belief that the teachers have good reasons to believe that the students will benefit from what is on offer. Nonetheless neither the teachers nor students would anticipate that the students would do what is proposed in the normal course of events. What the teachers propose is thought to be in the students’ best interests (Searle, 1984: 66-67). In these exchanges the students anticipate their teachers and the teachers their students. All the same, both parties refuse to declare the price of these exchanges. To declare the price as Bourdieu shows in his explanation of the project of the gift would be to destroy the exchange. The students know that it is worth their while to act on what their teachers suggest. Wanting these benefits contributes to their submission and obedience in what is proposed for them (Bourdieu, 1998: 104). And yet the teachers and students must manage these exchanges with considerable charm and tact to sure up their chances of material and symbolic profits.
What each art teacher proposes inscribes the students’ future action as if it were already in the present. For instance, one of the teachers advises a student on how she should proceed in wiring up the electrical components of her large installation in the belief that she would want this advice. But his telling her what to do is then further transfigured as he sets out how she should proceed in the belief that she is capable of what he requests of her. He desires her to do what he requests. But is not obvious to the teacher or student that the student would do what the teacher requests in the normal course of events (Searle, 1984: 66-67). Any yet the student, mindful that the teacher’s proposal is beautifully suited to the dilemma she faces with her limited technical knowledge, then proceeds with achieving that which is requested of her. In effect, as a result of the teacher’s advice and request she transforms her own beliefs and desires about what she can do under the spell of the teacher’s authority and the relations built on trust between them. This then manifests itself as a distinct advantage in her artwork. Another student tactfully takes the teacher’s lead in agreeing with the photographic images she should proceed with using in their further manipulation through toning and other special effects. The decision, taken out of her hands, paradoxically and powerfully builds her confidence and licenses her future action. Another of the art teachers in a beguilingly simple way sets out what she intends the students to do on her artwork in the lessons observed. This very matter of factness disguises the teacher’s authority while imprinting in the student’s mind how she should go on. Thus the students take ownership of what their art teachers propose with the effect that their thinking and actions are transformed with the benefits also accruing in what they make.

In their various guises the teachers’ proposals are responsive to the collective expectations of the group. These transactions occur within the logic of surprise binding friendships and building cohesion. Proposals present as continuous acts of exchange, small tokens that act as signs of recognition of the underlying social values, which ‘weave social relations’ while contributing to the reproduction of the group (Bourdieu, 1998: 100). For instance, one of the teachers makes a point of indicating to the students the order in which she will see them on the morning of an observation. But she seeks their affirmation before proceeding with what she intends by drawing them into her plans and recognising them in the most affable of ways. Recognising the strain they are under in finalising their artworks but offering her unconditional support. Another is keen to introduce the students and their work to me in a way that offers an insight into their ongoing relations over time. Remembering events from the past, students’ conversions from being painters to fabric artists or sculptors to printmakers. Mutually recognising changes in the artworks that have occurred over timer but which on some occasions resist explicit explanation as to how these adjustments have been made.

These exchange conserve as well as contribute to the building of material and symbolic credit amongst the students and their artworks. At the same time economic interests are repressed in the binding of the relations (Bourdieu, 1997: 99). For instance, one of the students is delighted by her teacher’s attention as he cajoles her into using a computer program with which she is unfamiliar. Her use of this program, made possible by his attentiveness, ultimately has a significant bearing on the layered effects in the photographic portraits she makes. Another student attempts to divert the teacher’s attention as he tries to steer her into being more committed to her artmaking. The teacher humouring the student into wanting to spend more time on her work but does this by appearing to be vitally interested in her weekend plans. While another tries to hold the teacher accountable in seeking to ensure that what is proposed is worth her effort. Nevertheless, these exchanges with their tension and humour bind and further oblige the participants to one another with the effect of ensuring that the art teachers and the students are credited (materially and symbolically) for their actions. The investments made rest on the honour of the group. This honour is inculcated into the teachers and students thinking and actions. It is demanded and reinforced by the group. Thus participation in these everyday encounters is made all the more desirable as the economy denies itself in order to maintain and reproduce itself (Bourdieu, 1997: 103; 1999: 49).
Paradoxically, the teachers’ injunctions do not appear to compromise the students’ intentions although what is initially desired may be amended and re-desired as events unfold. For instance, the student who makes the installation discussed above holds on to the belief that the ‘inspiration’ for her artwork stems from a contemporary artist at one point and her family history at another overlooking how her ideas are transfigured over time by the teacher’s advice, warnings and requests. Another remains committed to the view that fruitful experimentation over time causes her artwork while at another it is her study of the Latin poets that causes her work. On both occasions she represses the advice the teacher offers in assisting her with the overall look of her large digital portraits. Another remains committed to the view that her experience of a particular contemporary industrial precinct causes her artwork. While others claim their ancestors as causes for their artworks. Each in their own ways downplays the navigational adjustments transacted with their art teachers that contribute in a significant way to the shaping up of the final artworks. Retrospectively, these same students take the credit for their actions and their artworks recognising for instance, their good fortune in experimentation with materials or the transformational nature of their experience while concealing the generative force of authoring and the forward looking adjustments made over time. These are well suited to the context and anticipate the students’ future audiences for their artworks. At the same time the students fondly recall their teachers’ generosity but forget the actual details of what occurred. Bourdieu sheds light on their concealment. ‘Everything occurs as if there were an agreement [between the teachers and their students] to avoid reaching an agreement about the relative value of the things exchanged… by refusing the price’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 96).

The students’ interests in the materiality and conceptual aspects of the artworks accord with their teachers in degrees, which incrementally conform with their abilities to infer and negotiate the social reasoning at work in the classroom. While being differentiated from each the artworks have a ‘house style’, a set of conventional recipes that are economically employed and which contribute to advancing the interests of the group and the teachers’ reputations in the broader field of art education. While one school focuses on works in a series, others are more interested in installations, site-specific works and temporal works. Some are preoccupied by surface and the texture of things. The students perhaps unknowingly are caught up in their teachers’ projects. While they may sense some similarities between their artworks they are nonetheless sufficiently differentiated from one another so that the students in each of the schools feel unique. The students hold fast to the trust their teachers bestow on them and are entranced by the unexpectedness of the experience and what they make.

**The Force of Authoring is Misrecognised when:**

Teachers assume control over the direction and production of their students’ artworks. In particular, those students who are attuned to the teachers thinking and actions and whose artworks accord with their teachers’ interests are favoured. For instance, installations in two of the schools accord with the contemporary artworld interests of the art teachers. In effect these students lose out in what they may have intended themselves. But all the same, what is offered transfigures the students’ desires and ‘makes’ the identity and the status of the students and their artworks — well beyond their own expectations. This control nonetheless, is denied in the teachers’ representations of the attributes of their students’ artworks. Using the language of denial the teachers with an interest in disinterestedness downplay the economy in the classroom (Bourdieu, 1998: 99, 101). Each of the art teachers euphemise their authorship. They overlook or deny the effects of their advice in their interactions with the students. One asks the student to show me what she has done as if it had been accomplished on her own. On many occasions the teachers use the term ‘we’ rather than ‘I’ to explain their sometimes tacit but mutually agreed to actions in the making of the artworks.

Retrospectively the teachers keep implicit the representation of how they operate, shrugging off the control exercised and the undeclared obligations they place on the students to respond to their desires. ‘A bit of technical assistance’ one says refusing to acknowledge their agency in the
sequence of actions that cause ongoing benefits to accumulate in the students’ artworks. Another comments that this [student] turned from painting to working in textiles downplaying their influence. The teachers expend energy on elaborating these euphemisms and denial assuring actions while suggesting that it is the students’ personalities or their innate abilities that are the cause of their creativity.

Students increasingly submit to their teacher’s intentions. This results in an ongoing dependence and a sense of obligation to the art teachers. All the same it is an obligation these students wish for despite the taxes that are mutually placed on them. Retrospectively a number of students fondly recall the acts of kindness of their teachers while repressing how their own proposals are usurped at different points. And yet it is important to realise that these social relations are never entirely stable. They can be upset at any time with significant consequences for the possibilities of future action. For instance, a teacher casts doubt if students assume they can take on too much of the creative control in realising their own intentions in their artworks. One for example, insinuates future difficulties in what a student proposes and generate fears about the possibility of a negative assessment in the HSC examination. This kind of doubt causes the student to feel uncertain and alienated. It provokes their desire to return to the solidarity of the bond with the teacher.

Implications of this Investigation and the Issue of Standards

HSC assessment standards adopt an evidence-based approach. Standards assume a symmetrical and invariant relation between the performance and the performer and the instantiation of conclusions relative to predetermined outcomes (Brown, 2005: 3, 22). This relation is commonly expressed in terms of what students ‘know and can do’ (Board of Studies, 1999: 4). The findings of this study reveal that there is a real difficulty in accepting that a performance can be reduced to a logical means ends relation as if assessment offers an immutable measurement of the psychological evidence of standards of knowledge acquired (Brown, 2005: 3). Rather this study shows that an asymmetrical relation between the student, the teacher and the artwork offers a more compelling explanation of the creative performer and the performance. It recognises the importance of desire, which acts as a commitment in the reasons and motives for action (Brown, 2005: 4). Thus the practical reasoning tactfully negotiated at different intervals between the art teachers and their students is ‘contingent and purpose built’ and cannot be reduced to sequential rules or principles or to axiomatic knowledge (Brown, 2005: 3–4). The study points to the importance of the context, the navigation of knowledge, the timing of events and the significance of efficacious relations between the art teachers and their students which are full of obligation and commitment (Brown, 2005: 4, 22). Managing these variables assist the protagonists to deny their own and one another’s investments which, as Bourdieu shows, is the best way of securing up their chances of profit in causing performances that are regarded by the HSC examination and the field of art education to be highly creative.

The study also uncovers how if the students were to rely on their own psychological resources as Lowenfeld had championed few if any would achieve this same level of performance. Furthermore if these same students were in the unfortunate position to have art teachers with less strategic insight, the creativity of their artworks could not be as assured. Perhaps after all assessment measures the wiley intelligence of the teachers in their capacities to manipulate the habitus by framing up and realising what is possible for their students while further adapting and adopting what is developed as the need arises (Detienne and Vernant, 1978: 13). This capacity is made all the more irresistible because the teachers’ actions that are translated into the students thinking and actions and artworks are realised and claimed as the students. At the same time these options are well suited to the context of the examination, the wider interests of contemporary art and advancing the interests of the field of art education. But is questionable whether assessment provides the warrant of a student’s performance as is currently claimed.
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