

Creativity as a Misrecognised Investment in the Transactions Between Art Students and Their Art Teachers in the Final Years of Schooling

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Background to the Study

This study seeks a resolution of the dilemma of how modernist expectations of the student as an intentionally originating artist can be reconciled with the obligations of teachers to meet instructional outcomes. Attention focuses on the transactions between art teachers and particular students in four Year 12 art classrooms 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 (Board of Studies, 1999).

Theories of Creativity

The inquiry mounts a challenge to more conventional theories of creativity. Theories of creativity focus on the creative subject as genius (Kant C18th), the revolutionary (Nietzsche C19th), and experience (Dewey C19-C20th). Creativity is theorised as an instinctive capacity for self expression (Lowenfeld 1947, Read 1958), and as a set of psychological traits and behaviours (Guildford 1966, 1968; Eisner 1966). It is also explained as a predictable and observable process (Wallas 1926, Tomas 1979), a kind of visual thinking (Arnheim 1962), qualitative problem solving (Ecker 1966), and problem finding (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi 1976). More recent cognitive theories propose a confluence of factors is more likely to cause creativity (Gruber & Wallace 1989, Gardner 1993, Csikszentmihalyi 2004). Other theories focus on the product. It is the product that presents itself as novel, intelligible and of value to a field of practice retrospectively encountered by a knowledgeable audience that anticipates the likelihood of creativity (Glickman 1978, Hausman 1981, Best 1983).

Historically, theories of creativity as experience and process have been appropriated by art education and adapted for the purposes of representing the subject in syllabuses and in the curriculum (Weate 1990: 241).

Theoretical Framework

This study proposes that creativity can be conceived of as a social practice. It identifies a gap in current theories and seeks to extend how creativity can be explained. The study is based on the socio-cognitive framework of the Realist philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. In particular, Bourdieu's central concepts of social competency: *the habitus* and *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu 1997: 56, 112). Misrecognition provides a critical subset of these social competencies

(113, 114). Bourdieu's theories challenge the assumption that 'the intentional actor is the sole originator of the cognitive resources that people bring to the practices of their lives' (Brown & Thomas 1999: 1).

The Habitus

Bourdieu explains the habitus as a socially constituted:

system of cognitive and motivating structures that generate and organise practices and their representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends. (Bourdieu 1997: 53)

The habitus is full of 'improvisation', like the actions and thoughts of players who have a 'feel for the game' (57, 67). It is an 'embodied history', although a forgotten history, and an 'accumulated capital' (56).

Symbolic Capital

Symbolic capital is the currency of a social economy. It is any kind of capital that 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 (112). In the archaic economy, 'economic activity cannot explicitly recognise the economic ends ... to which it is objectively oriented' (113). Agents will do all they can to ensure that the economy remains repressed. It is precisely because its economic value is misrecognised that its social value is collectively recognised as legitimate. Nonetheless, reciprocity of symbolic transactions entails expectations about the motivation of other social agents by 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.

An Application of Bourdieu's Theories to Misrecognition in Art Classrooms

Bourdieu's theories of the habitus, symbolic capital and misrecognition are demonstrably relevant for understanding the dilemma posed in this study. His theories assist in formulating the hypothesis that transactions between teachers and students in the habitus of art classrooms will become sites for the exchange of symbolic capital. Further these transactions will be misrecognised as capital. Misrecognition will occur in various forms of open secretiveness, denial and euphemisation. Students' artworks will evidence degrees of creativity that vary consistently with the emergent subtlety of misrecognition that the teachers and students are capable of exchanging in transacting symbolic capital.

Design and Methods

The study is an ethnographic and qualitative study augmented by visual means. It has an emergent qualitative design that is grounded in Bourdieu's socio-cognitive framework. The

design seeks to capture and reveal how misrecognition is at work in the practice of creativity in these classrooms. It is not the object of the study to expose the tacit misrecognitions with the purpose of exposing them as hypocrisy. Rather, the intention is to understand them and the complex social reasoning that is exercised in support of the artworks that are made, art teachers, art students and the institutions of art education.

As a study of the complex detail of social transactions, the design makes use of multiple approaches, through valid ethnographic methods, to uncover what is recognised and misrecognised in creative transactions. Fieldwork involves the collection of data from observations and unstructured and structured interviews with four art teachers and their Year 12 art students in art classrooms in four secondary schools. A digital video recorder is used in the fieldwork to capture actions, events, material culture, the artworks and diaries and the verbal and non-verbal language used. The most extensive fieldwork takes place in 2000 with an extension of the original study in 2005. Protocols of confidentiality are observed. Thus, few details are offered here about the art teachers, students or the locations of the schools.

Semantic Analysis

Results are developed from transcripts of the data using a form of semantic analysis augmented by the digital video records. Briefly, semantic analysis is based on Spradley's relational theory of meaning (Spradley 1979, 1980). Semantic analysis enables the systematic recovery of local or folk definitions used in a particular cultural context. 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). The method is extended by reference to speech act theorists including Austin (1955) and Searle (1984). These theorists shed light on the importance of the linguistic force of utterances, which may contribute to their symbolic use.

The method, well suited to the analysis of classroom transactions, involves selecting episodes from verbatim transcripts of observations and unstructured interviews. Words or short phrases used by a teacher or particular student are systematically recorded on separate index cards (Carroll & 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 the culture. Semantic relationships 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.

Triangulation

Triangulation subjects a variety of discreet observational methods to crosschecking and mutual reinforcement, assisting in objectifying the interpretive methodologies and keeping them independent of their theoretical explanation. Documentary evidence from the digital video records, and a further analysis of the observations, unstructured and structured interviews and descriptions of events contribute to the triangulation.

Results

Six domains of cultural knowledge are retrieved from the semantic analyses and triangulation of the observations and interviews in the first classroom. With their included terms these domains offer an insight into the cultural logic and relations at work in the transactions between the teacher and students. At this stage of the study there is mounting evidence to suggest a confirmation of the original findings despite some local differences in the further schools studied.

Results include domains of *promising* and *advising* amongst others. For instance, in promising, the 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. Results reveal the importance of the micro-contextual history of events in the classrooms, which underlie the ongoing transactions between the teachers, the students and the attributes of the artworks.

Interpretation and Discussion

Four distinctive generative and organising schemes of creativity are converted from the results and interpreted in terms of the meanings of events and the motives of the teachers and students.

These schemes function as self-regulating mechanisms and while not objectively known to the respondents, structure and organise their practices. They permit the teachers to transact creative capital with their students. This enhances the possibility of future profit while the subjectivist narrative can be tactfully maintained. Misrecognition acts as the buffer and lubricates the very possibility of these ongoing transactions (Taussig 1999: 63). This occurs through various means. In open secrets, collective denials and euphemisms that take place and work towards keeping the economies repressed while ticking over in these classrooms.

Provocation is revealed as one of these schemes and is characterised in the detail below. It is intended that the other schemes will be discussed in future papers.

Provocation

Under the allure of provocation, the art teachers and students engage in transactions of symbolic capital that make a significant contribution to the creativity of the artworks. The teachers beguile the students with sincere generosity that appears so well suited to their interests. These provocations take on an urgency that cannot be overlooked (Bourdieu 1997b: 173). At the same time they permit domination and exploitation to be exercised in but in ways that the students desire.

The teachers' inducements contribute to escalating the students' doubt in their own intentions. In effect, these teachers interfere with and manipulate the students' goals causing a significant interruption to the status quo of the trajectories of the artworks. For instance, in two of the schools studied, students abandon their own intentions in painting or drawing. They are allured by the more contemporary appeal to make works using photography and digital media spurred on by their teachers. In another school, students forgo their experience in painting to make artworks with textiles, sculpture, printmaking and mixed media.

Paradoxically, the teachers misrecognise their agency to a considerable degree. One teacher claims that it is the students' intuitive aesthetic sensibilities and immersion in contemporary media that causes them to make artworks like these. But at the same time the teachers build the students' confidence and sense of purpose in what they propose. As Bourdieu helps us to understand the teachers, selectively and in a highly targeted way, engage in transactions loaded with a symbolic violence with those who are considered to be able to play the game and play it well (Bourdieu 1997: 56). In what appear as duplicated actions, the teachers become the spokespersons for their students in their public representations of the trajectories of art making. They protect their students' choices and praise their daring in making artworks that defy strict categorisation.

Students also deny or euphemise the force of provocation. Those capable of nuancing the social reasoning at work become the spokespersons for their classes. They renounce their own intentions and take on their teachers' with a passion that is redescribed as their own experience and intention. Rescued from the possibility of mediocrity they take up options that outstrip what they had decided on for themselves. Nonetheless, they need to repress their own anxieties in taking up these challenges. As Bourdieu explains, the students are consecrated by their teachers' recognition. This offers them the transferred power to also state what is. They crave this recognition in an egoistic sense and through their fascinated pursuit of their teachers' approval (Bourdieu 2000: 166). Being consecrated to speak elevates their status within the group and permits them to represent their own actions and those of others with an authority and belief in what they make, do and say is important to others.

At the same time the students' accounts are sufficiently subtle to nuance their teachers' interventions in socially acceptable ways. This contributes to maintaining the collusion of the groups (Bourdieu 1997a: 113). Students retrospectively honour their teachers' actions. These are represented as acts of kindness while the students down play the targeted assaults on their own creative autonomy.

Conclusion

The theme of this year's ACUADS conference theme builds on the recent Australia Council Symposium 'Backing our Creativity' (Melbourne, 2005) and the UNESCO World Summit on Arts Education (Lisbon, 2006). Each of these conferences has sought to reinforce the role and value of art, design and creativity in contemporary learning and their contribution to the building of positive social and economic value.

The findings of this study reveal that an investment in creativity in art education paradoxically requires this very capital to be denied, repressed or euphemised. It is only through this tactful capacity of the teachers and students to misrecognise what might otherwise be accepted as evidential truths in the classroom that the greatest chance of shoring up a social and economic profit can be realised.

Acknowledgement

Support for this paper was made possible by a 2004 Early Career Researcher Grant, UNSW and a 2005 COFA, UNSW Staff Grant.

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