
Pedagogy, subjectivity and mapping judgement in art, a weakly structured field of knowledge

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Abstract

The generally acknowledged play of subjectivity in the judgement of art makes the concept of achievement in the discipline a complex one. In this paper I show that there are sought-after albeit tacit criteria for secondary school art in a south-western region of South Africa, and that these features are similar to criteria in art assessment literature. I describe attempts to elicit the existence and nature of criteria from the teachers and moderators responsible for evaluation of learners' final-year exhibitions, these displays being the only school art graded by teams rather than single individuals. Delineation of criteria is based on interviews and a ranking task administered to teachers and moderators. While results show broadly similar criteria, rankings are not uniform. Rankings are, however, patterned in a finite number of ways traceable in terms of art traditions. I argue that this existence of broadly structured tacit criteria, while rendered sensible with reference to Bernstein's theory of knowledge and art as a weakly structured discipline, has implications for pedagogy. The transmission-acquisition process needs to include establishment of and induction of acquirers into, shared sought-after criteria. It is expected that findings of the study will have relevance for other weakly structured disciplines.

Introduction

In this paper I report on part of a larger sociological study into factors linked to achievement in art in the final year of secondary school in a south-western region of South Africa. The study was conceived at a time when social justice was paramount. In South Africa historically, the education system with its separate policies for different racial groups perpetuated social division with respect to race, but also with respect to social class, gender and ethnicity (Department of Education, 1997). Curriculum reform instituted in post-1994 democratic South Africa sought and continues to seek redress of these imbalances, part of redress being equal access to assessment criteria for all learners.

The paper focuses on criteria and judgement processes delineating the concept of achievement in art. It describes attempts to map sought-after criteria and aesthetic judgements made by various individuals grading the final (twelfth)

year exhibitions in schools studied. Respondents include secondary school art teachers and moderators, the latter individuals being responsible for ensuring comparable standards of judgement across schools. The paper relates efforts to address the difficulty of identifying criteria that are tacit.

In the paper I sketch the context within which sought-after criteria are selected for secondary school art, referring to the art world and school art curricula in general. I draw on Bernstein's (1996, 2000) theory of knowledge to describe art as a particular type of knowledge form. I define art and school art in Bernstein's terms, as weak knowledge structures made up of series of non-comparable paradigms or 'languages' or approaches.

I suggest that despite the complexity and potential for subjectivity introduced by the simultaneous existence of different approaches to art, there are common criteria informing artistic judgements *in the institutions studied*. I present my efforts to elicit judgement criteria through interviews and administering a ranking task to teachers and moderators. I analyse the interviews and task results to ascertain judgement patterns. The findings as well as the fact that accessing criteria and judgement patterns required extended exploration, have import for pedagogy and the achievement of social justice. The paper concludes with a brief discussion of these implications.

The field of art: aesthetic judgement in context

The importance of context for artistic judgement is frequently attested to (see for example Tilghman, 1984). I conceive of assessment in secondary school art as nested in the field of art. I sketch my position below.

The paradigms of modernism and post-modernism inform current art making. The question as to what constitutes 'art' or 'good art' is a modernist one, the post-modern equivalent being enquiry into the construction of meaning in relation to a given text. Essentialist accounts of art focus on underlying principles (see for example Collingwood, 1963; Rosenberg, 1967; Wolfflin 1950).

From a post-modern point of view addressing definitions of art or quality in art is inadvisable (Atkinson, 1999): from this standpoint authoritative voices are refused (Goldstein, 1996). Post-modernism's legacy of the collapse of certainty regarding boundaries aesthetic, intellectual, pedagogic and otherwise is frequently argued (see for example MacDonald, 1970 and 1991; Tagg, 1992; Staniszewski, 1995; Marriner, 1999; Burton, 2004; Stankiewicz, *et al.*, 2004).

Current history of art texts interrogate and contextualise cultural productions rather than treating them as homogenous or evolutionary (see for example Brookes, 1992; Panofsky, 1995; Staniszewski, 1995; Goldstein, 1996; Freeland, 2001). In ‘*But is it art?*’ for example, Freeland (2001) analyses art as ritual; art as imitation; art as expression; art as communication; diverse cultural manifestations of art; art in relation to money, markets and museums; aesthetic versus contextual analysis of art; and Dickie’s (1974) and Danto’s (1981) theories in which art’s status is conferred by art institutions and interpretation respectively.

There is on one hand an embrace of local context, eccentricity and an absence of guiding principles where “each artist is forced to invent a personal history of art” (Perl, 2000, p.121) and successful artworks have their own ‘internal logic’. The reality on the other hand is that art institutions continually judge, and accept or reject, art. My stance is midway between Perl’s relativism and essentialist accounts. Gombrich’s (1979) concepts of style and canon support this position.

The idea of style reduces relativism in that artistic knowledge is seen as being acquired in particular traditions, and cumulative. Artworks are measured against performances in kind; different styles have different “yardsticks of success” (Gombrich, 1979, p.154).

The concept of style alone is not however sufficient to quell charges of relativism: Gombrich’s (1979) example of three descriptions by distinguished art historians, of Streeter’s painting of the Sheldonian Theatre ceiling illustrates this insufficiency. In all three descriptions the writers have an ideal image of Baroque ceiling painting against which they judge Streeter’s image but their judgements still vary, because of the differing emphasis they place on different stylistic points. A further concept is needed to describe structure in the art field. Gombrich’s (1979) metaphor of ‘the Olympus of art’ is useful here.

Artists or artworks atop this ‘Mount Olympus’ constitute the ‘canon’ or the ‘peaks’ by means of which the field is structured (Gombrich, 1979). These peaks offer ‘points of reference’ for sought-after qualities without which direction is lost. A canon is constituted when there is high quality in a *wide range* of stylistic features. I conceive of aesthetic judgement as taking place within traditions, each of these traditions having canons. But what are the implications of a partly relational conception of art for teaching art at secondary school level? Are there some common sought-after criteria across styles? Are certain traditions privileged over others?

It is not surprising that different versions of secondary school art have been noted (see for instance Fuller, 1990; Karpati, 1995; Eisner, 2002; Chalmers, 2004; Elfland, 2004; Stankiewicz, *et al.*, 2004; White, 2004), and that curricula have been shaped by social and economic trends (Karpati, 1995; Stankiewicz, *et al.*, 2004; White, 2004).

When talking about art and art curricula, Durkheim's distinction between on one hand 'sacred', non-empirical, conceptually ordered or 'idealized'¹ knowledge, and on the other 'profane' or sensual, common-sense systems of meaning deriving from bodily contact with the world – as sketched by Muller (2000) – is useful. I use neo-Durkheimian Basil Bernstein's (1996, 2000) theory of (sacred) knowledge to delineate art and art curricula as forms of knowledge.

School art as knowledge: Bernstein's theory of knowledge structures

Bernstein's (1996) concepts of 'horizontal' and 'vertical' discourse parallel Durkheim's 'profane' and 'sacred' knowledge. Horizontal discourse is local, context-dependent, and contradictory across contexts, and is not of concern here. Vertical discourse which comprises coherent, explicit, systematically-principled, and hierarchically-organised specialised languages or modes of interrogation with specialised criteria, is useful for describing (school) art as a form of knowledge.

Vertical discourses can have 'hierarchical' or 'horizontal' knowledge structures (Bernstein, 1996). Hierarchical structures are motivated by an 'integrated code' in which knowledge is integrated into increasingly general propositions, and are exemplified by the discipline of physics (Bernstein, 2000). In horizontal structures there is a 'serial' or 'collection' code in which non-translatable, non-comparable specialised languages are accumulated (Bernstein, 1996). Elfland's (2004a, p.756) categorisation of domains mirrors Bernstein's: "well-structured" domains such as science "are organised around laws and generalisations that cover numerous cases", while in "ill-structured" domains such as the arts, "learners are forced to organise their understanding by assembling knowledge from individual cases".

¹ Durkheim's 'idealization' means at least two things (Muller, 2000). It refers first to the cognitive or speculative activity in which objects and relations are manipulated in virtual space and second, projection towards ". . .that which is more desirable. . ." (p.78)

Bernstein (1996) divides horizontal knowledge structures into those with 'strong' and 'weak' grammars. Horizontal knowledge structures with strong grammars, as exemplified by economics and linguistics, have explicit formally articulated concepts, conceptual relations and procedures (Bernstein, 2000). Those with weak grammars are less formally articulated: examples are sociology and cultural studies (Bernstein, 1996, 2000). Further, transmission in horizontal knowledge structures with weak grammars can be explicit such as in the social sciences, or tacit such as in crafts (Bernstein, 1996; Gamble, 2001). Acquirers experiencing the latter pedagogy 'know' by acquiring an appropriate 'gaze', the correctness of which is not always clear (Bernstein, 2000).

I argue that art is a horizontal knowledge structure with weak grammar. Different styles or traditions can be seen to constitute different 'languages' – examples of these languages being classicism, romanticism, realism,

modernism, and post-modernism, amongst others.² I position secondary school art *between* on one hand, horizontal knowledge structures with weak grammar and explicit transmission, and on the other, horizontal knowledge structures with weak grammar and tacit transmission since art is constituted through the visual *and* the verbal: art is taught through modelling *and* talking.

The visual aspect of art is ‘non-verbal’ and ‘irreducible’ to verbal language (Atkinson, 1999; Elfland, 2004a), and apprehended through an ‘aesthetic mode’ (Eisner, 1998). The metonymical or metaphorical character of descriptors of the visual illustrates their partial untranslatability into the verbal (Eisner, 1998; Stibbs, 1998). There is evidence that learners recognise visual qualities without being able to use associated verbal terms (Bennett, 1990).

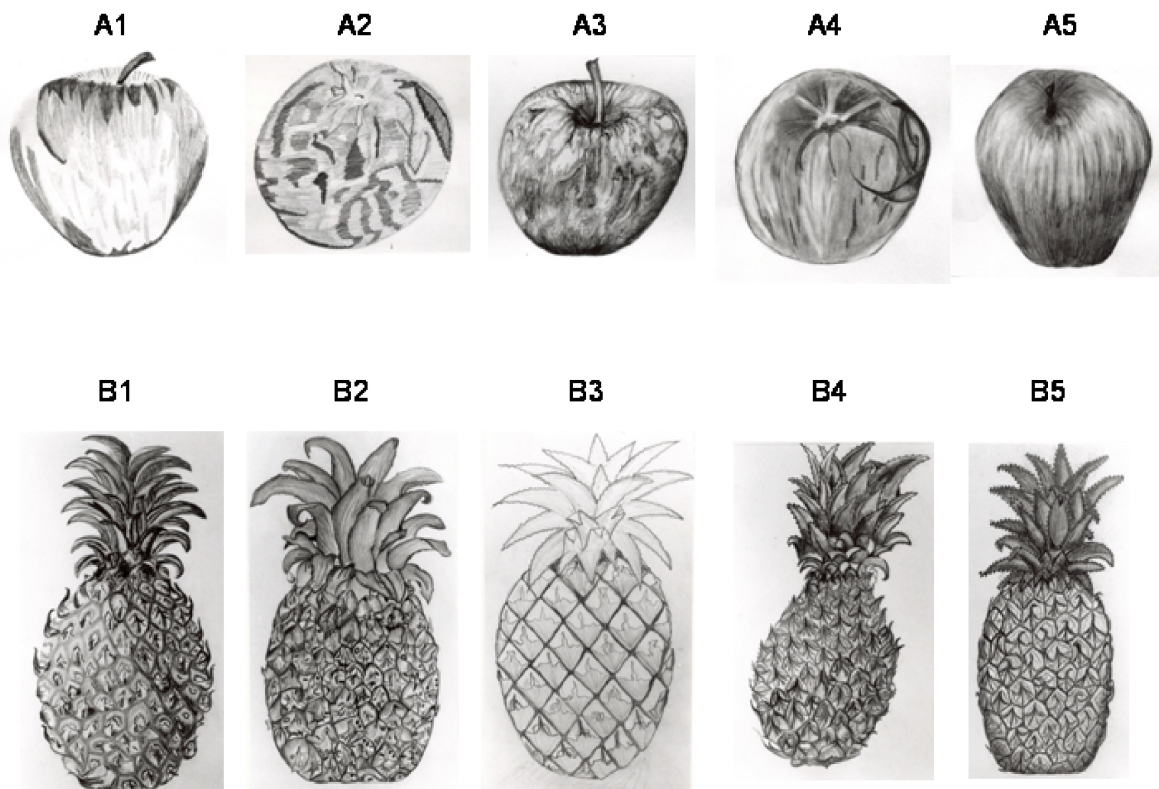
Art’s verbal aspect is also attested to in the literature: art is described as ‘partly constituted’ or ‘mediated’ through verbal language (Berger, 1972; Atkinson, 1999). The verbal in art teaching develops and expresses ideas (Bennett, 1990; Hughes, 1999), locates artworks within visual traditions (Fuller, 1986; Abbs,

² I describe as classical, an approach in which importance is placed on principles such as form, balance, harmony, proportion and perspective – as exemplified in Greek art of the fifth century, High Renaissance paintings in the style recommended by Alberti (1425), eighteenth-century principles of form (see the art of David, Ingres, and others), and in drawing from life from the sixteenth century to the present day. The classical can be contrasted with the romantic ‘language’ (see history of art texts such as Hartt, 1977; Arnason, 1978). A romantic approach as exemplified by Hellenistic sculpture, Mannerist and Baroque art, the works of Goya, Gericault, Delacroix, Blake, Turner, Friedrich, Corot, Millet, Daumier, other nineteenth-century Romantic painters, and expressionist art, privileges emotionalism over form, colour and texture above line, open over closed spatial organisation, and feeling above intellect (Hartt, 1977).

Another example of a Bernstein-type ‘language’ in art is constituted by the modernist paradigm to which styles such as Fauvism, Expressionism, Abstract Expressionism, Bauhaus, Cubism, Futurism, and De Stijl are assigned. I describe this paradigm as a ‘language’ because although there is no single modern mode (Jencks, 1989), in this idiom value is consistently placed on abstraction; ‘truth to materials’; ‘logical consistency’; aesthetics; and ‘the essence of each art language’ (Gombrich, 1979; Jencks, 1989, referring in part to Clement Greenberg’s definition of Modernism). In this mode art-works are ‘self sufficient’ or autonomous, and separable from their contexts (Marriner, 1999). I offer Post-modernism with its eclectic selection and synthesis of aspects of traditions, layering of texts on top of one another, and hybrid styles – as exemplified by Pop Art, Hyperrealism, Allegorical and Political Realism, New Image Painting, La Transavanguardia and Neo Expressionism amongst other styles (Jencks, 1989) – as a contrasting ‘language’. Post-modern art-works have “double coding”, “a strategy of communicating on various levels at once”; elements of distant and recent past styles, and popular and elitist signs are often used within the same works (p.19).

1992; Hughes, 1999; Cunliffe, 1992; 1999), and broadens critical activity (Brookes, 1992; Allison and Hausman, 1998; Stibbs, 1998; Wilde, 1999).

If art is understood as a range of traditions or ‘languages’, each constituted by the visual and the verbal, how do teachers draw on criteria when making artistic judgements? The paper attempts to address this question by focussing on evaluators’ verbal articulations of criteria. This focus is not to belie the importance of the tacit dimension, but to take advantage of the verbal interface with the visual in light of the difficulties of recording visual apprehension. The main verbal data in this paper are based on the visuals in figure below.



Criteria for aesthetic judgement at secondary school

There are calls in the literature – perhaps because of the existence of different art paradigms – to distinguish core values for art education (see Hope, 2004; Smith, 2004), or to establish shared criteria (see Barrett, 1990; MacGregor, 1990; Hermans, 1991; Macdonald, 1991; Davies, 1992; Blaikie, 1994; Steers, 1994; Cannatella, 2001). In a sense, as Hope (op. cit.) points out, definition of content and purpose to distinguish school art is a matter of its survival.

Further, if all learners are to have equal access to significant disciplinary knowledge, knowledge and values worth acquiring need to be delineated.

The basis of key art knowledge and values could be extrinsic or intrinsic to the field. While there is some evidence of the value of the arts for non-arts cognition, this evidence is not compelling (Hetland and Winner, 2004; Smith, 2004). Other extrinsic bases for art curricula include the usefulness of the arts for the world of work; and art education for what Burton (2004) refers to as Chapman's 'enlightened citizenship'. Current South African art education policy calls for equal opportunities for all South African learners, for "creative growth and development" related to personal needs and the communities in which they live, as well as "access to the world of work and arts-related industries" for "participation in a dynamic and rapidly changing global society" (Department of Education, 1997, p.AC 2). The policy also seeks active preservation, development and promotion of indigenous arts and cultural practices, previously dominated by Eurocentric art and culture.

What then constitutes value intrinsic to art? It has been suggested that the arts develop aesthetic sensibility³, refining individuals' creative, perceptual and reflective capacities (Elfland, 2004a; Smith, 2004) or their cognitive, perceptual, reflective capacities (Burton, drawing on Gardner, 2004); affording aesthetic experiences in processes and products (Eisner, 2002) and providing deliverance from "mundane world views" (Gee, 2004, p.132).

I posit that in the literature on assessment in art, described sought-after criteria can be grouped into four broad categories, all of which could be said to have both intrinsic and extrinsic value. The first category comprises originality, or the demonstration of creativity or imagination. The second relates to technical competence, or an ability to manipulate the elements of art and art materials. The third encompasses conceptual content, or ideas and feelings conveyed. The last constitutes an ability to criticise art or to make visual analyses. The criterion of aesthetic sensibility pervades all of these areas. These criteria are common to the Scottish National Secondary School Curriculum (MacGregor, 1990; Macdonald, 1993); the national schools' curriculum in England and Wales (Steers, 1994); Dutch schools' national assessment (Hermans, 1991; Schonau, 1991); the 'National Assessment of Educational Progress' (NEAP), 'Advanced Placement' programme, and 'Project Zero Arts PROPEL' in North

³ While the privileging of aesthetic experience, value and judgement has been challenged as Euro-centric (see for instance arguments in Clarke, 1996; Carrier, 1997; Smith, 2004), counter-claims to these accusations have been made by pointing to the pre-occupation in Chinese and Indian art, with art for its own sake (Smith, 2004, drawing on Blocker, 2004). Further, there are ways in which the aesthetic can be incorporated into multicultural arts education (Blocker, 2004).

America (Blaikie, 1994); assessment for the 'International Baccalaureate' (Blaikie, 1994), and Eisner's (2002) qualities to look for in learners' work in general.

The grammar of school art knowledge appears to be stronger than that in the art world: sought-after criteria in the literature on art assessment reviewed are fairly uncontested. Artistic judgements based on such criteria will however be multi-layered (Davies, 1992) and complex (Barrett, 1990; MacGregor, 1990; Davies, 1992; Blaikie, 1994; Cannatella, 2001), opening the possibility of varying judgements in any given context. The current study explores the existence and nature of art performance criteria in a sample of South African schools.

Art assessment criteria in a sample of South African schools

The larger study of which this paper forms part explores pedagogy associated with high levels of achievement in art in the final year of secondary school, by learners in different social class, race, and gender positions. In order to investigate achievement patterns, it was necessary to articulate the notion of achievement in art. Achievement was conceived in terms of learners' productions as well as their ability to make aesthetic judgements.

The study focused on evaluation of learners' final exhibitions created in curricula for which assessment criteria were not clearly delineated (see Western Cape Education Department [WCED], 1995, 1995a). Final exhibitions comprised the strongest pieces of work made by learners over the two final years of secondary school. Exhibitions were independently graded by the teachers of the learners and two external examiners. Moderators then moderated marks to ensure evenness of standards across schools.

There were two samples in the larger study. One comprised the final-year art classes at fourteen of fifty schools moderated by a single moderator, selected to span a range in terms of the social class, race and gender of their learners. The second sample of six of the fourteen classes was selected for detailed study of pedagogy and achievement, on the basis of patterns found in the larger sample.

The existence and use of judgement criteria were explored in three ways in the study. First, moderators and teachers were interviewed for verbal descriptions of sought-after features. Second, moderators were asked why they had awarded 'A' grades to specific exhibitions. These interviews revealed that

individuals varied in the degree to which they worked intuitively, some never explicitly identifying criteria of judgement, and others referring to mentally constructed grids. The latter grids included three of the four criteria identified in the art assessment literature, namely, originality, technical skill, and conceptual content. However, neither the qualities making up these criteria nor mechanisms by means of which some qualities were privileged above others, was clear. A third process was needed to clarify teachers' judgement patterns as 'standards' against which learners' judgements could be described. Moderators and eight teachers from the sample were thus given a task in which they were required to rank drawings and explain their ordering of the images.⁴

Judgement-mapping task

The instrument for the judgement-mapping task consisted of two sets of numbered images (see figure on page 65). The sets comprised five photographs of drawings of apples, and of pineapples, respectively. In all of the drawings there were attempts at realism and creating an illusion of three-dimensionality. Teachers and moderators were asked to rank images on each sheet from strongest to weakest, by entering their numbers on additional sheets provided.⁵ Once the task had been completed, respondents were asked to give reasons for their rankings in follow-up interviews.

⁴ It was expected that there would be patterns in teachers' and moderators' judgements, and that learners would recognise these to differing degrees. Drawings were chosen for the task as it was expected that all learners would have been exposed to drawing, and because drawings could be used to create a relatively standardised range of images for comparison.

⁵ Selection of drawings for inclusion in the task was carried out as follows: two teachers not otherwise in the study were asked to do life-drawings of apples and pineapples with learners in their senior secondary art classes. Learners were to take into consideration tone changes and textures on the surfaces of the fruit, and to create an impression of three-dimensionality. Sizes of the drawings and instructions to omit background detail were specified. Black-and-white photographs were taken of the resulting 60 pineapple and 30 apple pictures, to increase similarities in their appearance. To reduce subjectivity in the selection of drawings for the instrument, a further three art teachers not otherwise in the study were independently asked to grade the 90 photographs using symbols 'A' (denoting 80 per cent and over) through 'F' (30–39 per cent). I selected images for the instrument, ensuring that they spanned a range in terms of quality, and using only those for which grades did not vary.

Patterns in teachers’ and moderators’ rankings

There were broad patterns in teachers’ and moderators’ sequencing of drawings in the ranking task. In ordering the images of apples, respondents always placed drawings A3 and A5 in the first two positions, and usually put A1 and A4 in the second pair of places and A2 last. With the pictures of pineapples, two thirds of evaluators placed drawings B1 and B2 in the first two places and images B4 and B5 in the second two places, with picture B3 last (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Ranking of drawings of apples and pineapples by teachers and moderators

Ranking of drawings of apples (Total number of respondents = 13)	Ranking of drawings of pineapples (Total number of respondents = 13)
13 (100%) of the respondents positioned drawings A3 or A5 in the first pair of places	8 (62%) of the respondents positioned drawings B1 or B2 in the first pair of places
12 (92%) of the respondents positioned drawings A4 or A1 in the second pair of places	8 (62%) of the respondents positioned drawings B4 or B5 in the second pair of places
12 (92%) of the respondents positioned drawing 2 in the last place	13 (100%) of the respondents placed drawing B3 in the last place

Ranking patterns are almost unanimous for the apple drawings. Patterns for the ordering of pineapples are strong but more varied than those for the apple drawings, possibly because the pineapple images include strong pattern or design features in addition to qualities displayed in the apple pictures, making judgement more complex. Because an attempt is being made to map judgement patterns, the following discussion focuses on the more unanimous rankings of the apple drawings.

Patterns in justifications of rankings

Despite efforts to narrow the focus of respondents’ judgements by choosing relatively simple drawings, ranking patterns remain broadly rather than uniformly similar.

Reasons given for the ranking of apples are easily grouped into strengths and weaknesses in seven areas. These areas are 'use of tone', 'use of line/pencil-mark/texture', 'form', 'realism', 'unity', 'decoration' and 'originality'. Strengths and weaknesses mentioned by individual respondents are shown for each drawing in Table 2 below. Table 2 has been used to identify patterns in reasons given.

Two patterns have been identified *within* the judgements of individuals (see columns in Table 2), one of which is reference to different strengths when assessing drawings of differing quality. Respondents mention strengths such as 'form', 'use of tone and texture' and 'realism' in relation to higher-ranking drawings, while 'decorativeness' is seen as a strength in lower-ranking images. Another trend within judgements is a decrease in numbers of strengths and increase in weaknesses named with progressive lowering in the ranking of images.

Comparing judgements *across* respondents shows some that some consistently mention certain weaknesses such as 'form' and 'realism', across judgements. Other respondents give different weaknesses for different drawings.

When comparing judgements passed on the 'top two' and 'bottom three' images, some variation can be seen in reasons given for placing drawings three and five in the top two positions, but most respondents mention one or more of 'use of tone', 'use of texture', 'form' and 'realism'. Weaknesses in the same four criteria feature most commonly in judgements of the lower three images.

Placing of the top two images appears to involve discrimination between *different types* of skills in the presence of generally high skill levels. Those placing A3 first did so because of control of 'texture' and 'originality', qualities perhaps rooted in the romantic tradition. Those for which A5 was the strongest image praised 'unity' and 'form', features highly esteemed in classical modes since the Italian Renaissance (see top two rows of Table 2). Positioning of the second two drawings appears to involve judging different *types and amounts* of skill (see second two rows of Table 2).

In summary, it can be seen that the ranking of apple drawings in the sample is based on a relatively small and bounded set of shared, sought-after features. These features are strong use of tone and texture, a sense of form, realism, and originality. Differential privileging of these features is visible.

Table 2: Strengths and weaknesses in apple drawings assessed by teachers and moderators

Respondent	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Drawing in first place	(A3) 1,2,3,7 -	(A3) 1,2,7 -	(A5) 1,2,3,4 -	(A3) 1,2,3,4 -	(A5) 1,2,3,4 -	(A3) 1,3,4 -	(A3) 1,2,3,4 1,4	(A5) 1,3,4,5 -	(A3) 1,2,3 -	(A3) 2,3,4,7 -	(A3) 1,2,7 -
Drawing in second place	(A5) 1,4 7	(A5) 3,5 1,2,7	(A3) 1,2,4 4	(A5) 1,2,3,4 2	(A3) 1,2,3,4, 5,6 3,5	(A5) 1,2,4 7	(A5) 1,3,4 2,3,4	(A3) 2,4 3,5	(A5) 1,3,5 3,7	(A5) 1,2,3,4 4	(A5) 1,3,4 7
Drawing in third place	(A4) 1,2,3,7 3,4	(A4) 3 3,5	(A4) 1,2,7 2,3,4, 6,7	(A1) 1,6 1,4	(A4) 1,2,3 3,4	(A1) 2 1,3	(A4) 1,3,5 3,4	(A4) 1,2,3, 5,7 4	(A4) 1,3,4 1,4	(A4) 1,7 2,3,4,6	(A4) 1,3,6 1,3,4
Drawing in fourth place	(A1) 3 3,5,7	(A2) 6 3	(A1) 2,3 1,2	(A4) 1,2,4 1,2	(A1) 4 2,4,6	(A4) 1,3,6 2	(A1) 3,4,6 2,3,5	(A1) 4,6 1,3,6	(A1) 1,2,3,4 1,3	(A1) 3,4 1	(A1) 1,3 3,5
Drawing in fifth place	(A2) 6 1,2,3	(A1) - 2,7	(A2) - 1,2,3, 4,5	(A2) - 1,2,5	(A2) 6 4	(A2) - 3,4	(A2) 1,2 3,4,5	(A2) 2,6 1,3	(A2) - 1,2,3,6	(A2) - 3,4	(A2) - 1,3,4

LEGEND

T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6 = teachers of school classes in the sample

M1, M2, M3, M4, M5 = moderators

(A1)/ (A2)/ (A3)/ (A4)/ (A5) = drawings of apples

1 = strong use of tone

2 = strong use of texture

3 = strong form

4 = strong sense of realism

5 = strong sense of unity

6 = strong decorative qualities

7 = originality

1 = weak use of tone

2 = weak use of texture

3 = weak form

4 = weak sense of realism

5 = weak sense of unity

6 = weak decorative qualities

7 = lacking in originality

Discussion and conclusion

On one hand, different versions of school art have been noted (Fuller, 1990; Karpati, 1995; Eisner, 2002; Chalmers, 2004; Elfland, 2004; Stankiewicz, *et al.*, 2004; White, 2004;). There are on the other hand calls for core or shared criteria for school art (Barrett, 1990; MacGregor, 1990; Hermans, 1991; Macdonald, 1991; Davies, 1992; Blaikie, 1994; Steers, 1994; Cannatella, 2001; Hope, 2004; Smith, 2004). Shared rather than varying criteria would make answering current South African art education policy calls for equal opportunities for all, in art education (Department of Education, 1997), possible.

When juxtaposing sought-after qualities for secondary school art articulated in the literature and those given in response to the various interviews and task outlined in this paper, it appears that there is broad agreement regarding criteria. In other words, it could be said that there is currently broad agreement on a worthwhile version of school art. The criteria of technical competence, originality, and conceptual content are privileged. However these criteria are complex, and can clearly be interpreted in various ways. The visual nature of art and the simultaneous juggling of a variety of elements in aesthetic judgement places limits on establishing tightly-defined criteria.

Mapping judgement using very simple life drawings and detailed descriptions of criteria revealed patterns in judgement. These patterns were broadly similar rather than uniform, and increasingly varied as the complexity of artwork increased. It appeared that judgements were located within styles or traditions. Ranking of the apple drawings appeared to be framed by classical or romantic traditions – the former privileging qualities such as form and balance, and the latter, expressiveness. These findings allow an argument to be made that the subjectivity in aesthetic judgement lies not with individual idiosyncrasy but with selection of tradition(s) within which judgements are contextualised.

Teachers and moderators in the study differed in that although all referred to a range of skills when ordering the images, some respondents described a small number of strengths across drawings, while others drew on a greater variety of strengths, describing different drawings in terms of different skills. Some individuals ‘imposed’ certain criteria more readily than other individuals who allowed the drawings to define the parameters within which they would be judged. Underlying these differences may be conscious or unconscious allegiances to the ideas of ‘standards to be upheld’ and ‘the value of different approaches’ respectively.

Interestingly, the higher the ranking of drawings in the task, the greater the number of different types of strengths mentioned. This recalls Gombrich’s (1979) idea of a canon embodying the best examples in particular traditions.

An important finding of the study is that there is a hierarchy of skills. In the ranking task, strengths mentioned in relation to top-ranking drawings were different to those described for lower-ranking images, and were often pointed out as weaknesses in the lower-ranking drawings. The most notable of the highly respected skills are ‘a sense of form’ and ‘awareness of mark-making’, competences dependent on the prior skills of ‘control of tone’ and ‘tone range’, and associated with the manipulation of pictorial space or three-dimensional illusionism central in the history of Eurocentric art. A sense of form is often associated with ‘realism’, a quality expressed as ‘an ability to draw’ or ‘talent’, and one useful in the world of work.

Bernstein's (1996, 2000) theory of knowledge structures provides a useful framework for describing art as a form of specialised knowledge admitting different forms of 'correctness' or appropriateness. It is useful for explaining variation in judgement patterns in relation to the structuring of the body of knowledge in which this variation occurs. His inclusion in the theory of the tacit-explicit dimensions of transmission of knowledge lends further clarity to the issue of why art judgements can vary to a relatively great degree.

If judgement of school art is linked to current art-world theory in which authoritative voices are refused (Goldstein 1996), can it be argued that some traditions are more worthwhile than others, and on what basis will worth be established? It could be argued that whether the worth of art traditions is based on refining artistic sensibility or personal creativity, usefulness for the world of work, preserving particular cultural traditions, or a combination of all of these paradigms as is the case in current South African art education policy, assessment criteria need to be agreed upon, specified and made explicit (Schonau, 1991, 1999; Davies, 1992, 1996). It is only with the explication of criteria that they will be accessible to all learners. Further, it has been shown that judgements move towards concurrence over time when criteria are made explicit (MacGregor, 1990; Schonau, 1991).

The question arises, as to the judgement of complex artworks such as paintings, sculptures, or three-dimensional installations. Are there patterns in the way in which these works are judged? If so, can patterns be traced to particular traditions, and are a finite number of traditions referred to? Both the answering of these questions and articulation of ways in which criteria can be verbally and non-verbally explicated, call for further research.

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