

DRAWING FROM OBSERVATION

The Pedagogical and Epistemological Context

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the current context of art education in the UK. It also examines the origins of thinking and beliefs in relation to the epistemology and pedagogy of the subject, and the positioning of drawing from observation within this discourse. The interrelationships between these are highly significant for this discussion since it is the situated nature of participants' experiences of drawing from observation that is the focus. In outlining this context, I will offer an examination of the origins of current compulsory art education practices analysing the role of a skills-based art education which places drawing from observation as a central practice.

Teaching skills is identified as a defining aspect of compulsory art education, and 'observational drawing' is offered as an essential component within this set (Downing and Watson, 2004). This constructed activity, based on drawing and observing, will be deconstructed, and representation, through the act of drawing, discussed as a central, hegemonic practice. I will argue, however, that it is not only 'conventional visualities' (Atkinson, 2002:80) that may be contested, the reading of the marks that we make 'of the world', through systems of representation, but also the nature of the marks that we make 'in and on it' (Dexter, 2006:6). For participants in this research, it is the situated nature of this particular practice that takes on significance in the ways in which their concepts of ability are framed by themselves and others. Drawing from observation, although open to semiotic and hermeneutic readings for example (Atkinson, 2002), may also be explored as a situated activity, located within specific types of practice such as an examination or for a piece of homework, significant as different contexts associated with learning. The relationship between drawing from observation and particular educational situations will therefore be explored.

Although frequently described as problematic (Usher and Edwards, 1996; Hardy, 2006) a postmodern perspective on current and historical practices in respect of art education may offer a useful means of interrogating the source of the possible connections between pedagogy and dominant practices such as drawing from observation. Contemporary art education is critically examined in this chapter as composed of systems of thought that have become both implicit and dominant (Foucault, 1980:81). Maclure (2006) discusses the role that postmodernism might play in educational research as a means for disrupting established and traditional perspectives. She discusses her interest in its 'capacity for unsettling the arrangements of the disciplines or domains it tangles with'. She continues:

postmodernism's dubious gift to educational research, and in particular to methodology: to unsettle the still core of habit and order in the uncertain hope of

shaking things up, asking new questions, estranging the familiar.(Maclure, 2006:223)

This capacity for ‘estranging the familiar’ will be drawn on as a means of interrogating the origins of practices and beliefs about art, drawing, observation, achievement and ability. Hardy (2006:7) makes a specific and direct connection to postmodernism, as a way of thinking about art education, by offering the potential for ‘resistance to the exclusivity implied by long-held aesthetic principles’. In drawing on these post-modern perspectives I aim to challenge the potential of absolute definitions of engagement in relation to drawing from observation and the exclusivity Hardy describes.

Hardy also suggests that learning and teaching theories and postmodernism are complementary in providing a set of principles for an effective pedagogy. He claims that postmodernism provides a context for Socratic dialogue, for example, where ‘modernist’ concepts, in comparison, appear to be aligned with absolute ways of knowing. This emphasis on dialogical rather than transmissive approaches to learning (Atkinson, 2008; Poerksen, 2005) is of particular relevance to the participants’ narratives and the final discussion, as well as being significant to particular philosophies of art education explored here.

For this chapter it is, however, important to acknowledge my aim to employ a Foucauldian approach to unearthing ‘subjugated knowledge’ forms that may be obscured by the ‘formal systemisation’ of art education practices (McHoul and Grace, 1993:16; Foucault, 1980:81). These may appear, on the one hand, to exemplify a centre of ‘safe and static’ practice (Hughes, 1998:41), yet this may also obscure the hierarchical and dominant nature of such systems of thought which through particular hegemonic practices may form the basis of ‘normalising’ judgements about learners (Foucault, 1977:184).

In exploring the nature of observational drawing and its relationship with learning, through formal systems of education, it is useful to begin with a short exploration of this potential connection. Art education should, by its very nature, imply a relationship between art and learning, yet this relationship is not necessarily assured. For some, learning and art engagement are inextricably linked. Read (1970:1) begins with this argument: ‘The thesis is: that art should be the basis of education’, positioning art as a means by which we might know the world and understand our experiences of it. Matthews (2003) offers art activity as central to the way in which children begin to make sense of the world. He is explicit in referring to development rather than learning, suggesting that art has a role to play within the way we grow into the world and make sense of our experiences of it. Our physical engagements with art activity enable us to explore the world around us, and these interactions form the basis of our learning. An alternative perspective would suggest that we use the visual arts as a means of reflecting what we know of the world as a summative rather than formative action. However, art education may be perceived of as the way in which we come to understand and enact our understanding of ‘art’. In this respect art education becomes a means of exploring itself by using particular methods and processes that are themselves the subject of the curriculum. These concepts of art education are not necessarily as polarized as I have described them here, yet these reflect some evident tensions.

Art education, as a formal combination of education and art also appears to have at its centre a tension between the individual and society that resonates with the earlier discussion of inclusion and participation in Chapter 3. Read (1970:2) suggests that a person may be educated 'to become what he is' or 'to become what he is not'. Here, education relates to nurturing the latent potential of the individual or changing the individual since in becoming what we are not, Read describes the eradication of 'idiosyncracies' or individual differences. It is possible to understand Read's discussion as the tension between 'normalisation' and conformity through organised social training versus the development of individuality. An art education, with an emphasis on creative individuality, appears to offer the potential for the acknowledgement of difference within Read's argument and education through art appears to offer this capacity for learning. However, we must also be aware of the social, political and institutional organization of education and the ways in which the concepts of individuality are framed, particularly where individual difference 'needs' to be managed.

Art activity, providing a physical and sensory engagement, Matthews (2003) argues, is at the heart of learning, yet he describes the ways in which the discipline is 'harnessed' within curriculum structures as potentially damaging in its effects on a child's development. Baldacchino (2008) goes further to explore the paradox of art education and the distinction that inevitably exists between education and learning when what can be learned 'with' art must be sacrificed for what can be 'made useful' and quantified as countable within the qualitative systems of education. Eisner (1972) discusses 'contextualist' (art education for utilitarian purposes) and 'essentialist' (art education as a unique contributor to human experience) justifications for the teaching of art where individual and societal consequences are evident in both. Drawing on the work of educationist and philosopher John Dewey, Eisner stresses the intrinsic value that art education can have in the development of human experience, suggesting that this can be distorted by moves to utilize art education for other means. It could be argued that Dewey's appreciation of the aesthetic as a central aspect of child development, and the wholeness of experiential understanding that could be facilitated by art education, is substantially challenged when subject to the structures and organization of contemporary compulsory education.

Specific practices, such as drawing from observation, can be subject to these considerations since, as a practice employed within art education, it may be associated with being a means of learning, a way of enhancing experience or as a process by which pupil ability might be assessed. It may also be considered as an essential skill, transferable to particular work contexts. However, the ways in which particular practices are employed may contradict presumed relationships to learning. To some extent drawing from observation appears to have a clear connection with learning of and about the world, yet within certain settings it is possible that it may not contribute to learning at all. Matthews questions this strong adherence to drawing from observation as a means of enabling children to learn. He suggests that representation of objects at the heart of drawing is 'completely wrong' (p. 207), and continues:

... simply forcing children to draw from life will not itself speed up development. Indeed, my evidence and experience convince me that the reverse is

CHAPTER 5

true – premature instruction in drawing from observation damages development (2003:109)

Although there is a clear connection between observation and drawing, their relationship with learning may well be complicated by the context and systems employed to structure such activities.

Before considering the central role that drawing from observation has in art education it is useful to consider the culturally dominant role played by observation within Western systems of thought since this has shaped the epistemology of the discipline. Jay (1988:3) refers to sight as the preferred sense of the modern era, connecting the visual with the ‘modern’ ontological emphasis on factual accuracy and truth. Within his discussion of ocularcentrism, he establishes the connections between the visual and the principles of modernity, exploring the hegemony of Cartesian perspectivalism as ‘*the* reigning visual model of modernity’ (p. 5), and associated with what was perceived to be the ‘natural’ experience of sight. Of significance also was the relationship between this ‘scopic regime’ and the development of scientific investigation via the visual observation of evidence (Jay, 1993:70). What Jay is anxious to explore here is that although there was not only one ‘true vision’ it was the Cartesian view that came to shape Western knowledge concepts and forms of representation. This visual tradition characterised by the use of perspective from a single static viewpoint, and privileging the observer as distanced physically and emotionally from the subject, was aligned not only with truth and knowledge but also with the divine, in representing a God’s-eye-view.

The development of perspectival representation had a further impact on the ways in which particular visualities could be communicated. Jay discusses the de-narrativisation or de-textualisation of painting and the shift from the representation of ‘ennobling stories’ to the representation of skill in the use of the technologies of Cartesian perspectivalism, where the skills in representing stories began to take on more importance than the stories themselves:

That is, as abstract, quantitatively conceptualised space became more interesting to the artist than the qualitatively differentiated subjects painted within it, the rendering of the scene became an end in itself (Jay, 1998:8)

Within this visual system the ways in which the observer and the observed are positioned is significant and the use of technology is evident in the development of these ideas. Crary (1988:31) discusses the role of the camera obscura between the late 1500s and 1700s as:

... an apparatus that guaranteed access to an objective truth about the world. It assumed importance as a model both for the observation of empirical phenomenon and for reflective introspection and self-observation

The camera obscura also assumed ‘an infallible vantage point’, creating an authoritarian role for the isolated and private observer that was detached from other sensory experiences, a concept that shifted with the development of physiological research that supported the ‘visionary capacities of the body’.

Observation, in this reading, may be identified within a positivistic paradigm and associated with 'truth' and knowledge of unquestionable 'facts' and therefore aligned with the scientific empiricism outlined by Jay (1993) and associated with a white, western male view (Mulvey, 1975). Dalton's discussion of the relevance of art education for working class girls (2001:43) also supports connections between objective observation and the male gaze. It is worth noting however, that within Foucault's exploration of the Benthamite panopticon, the observer is also subject to observation and is equally constrained and empowered by observation.

Foucault's (1976) exploration of social organisations and disciplinary power (Rabinow, 1984:189) recognises the dominance of the visual, and forms of knowledge, monitoring and surveillance that situate the role of observation within the power/knowledge discourse. Foucault's discussion of the medical gaze, for example, positions the role of the observer as one who has knowledge (through what has been observed) and therefore power over that which is being observed, as a result of the types of knowledge that can be gained via the act of observing:

So many powers, from the slow illumination of obscurities, the ever prudent reading of the essential, the calculation of times and risks, to the mastery of the heart and the majestic confiscation of paternal authority, are just so many forms in which the sovereignty of the gaze gradually establishes itself – the eye that knows and decides, the eye that governs. (Foucault, 1976:88–89)

Further to this, however, is the subjugation of another knowledge form in that which can be imagined, which is discussed here as a potential disruption to the 'purity of the gaze'. This will be a significant factor in later discussions of the role and importance of developing images from the imagination rather than observed starting points, for some of the participants, and the dominance of observation as a means of confirming or denying drawing ability and, by implication, individual concepts of ability in art as a discipline. Foucault suggests the clinician needs to reduce the imagination in order to observe more effectively. His description of the imagination as something that can 'anticipate what one perceives, find illusory relations, and give voice to what is inaccessible to the senses' suggests that within the work of the clinician, and therefore scientific and medical discourse, what can be imagined is unreliable and undesirable (Foucault 1976:107). This subjugation of the imagination acts to prioritise and validate what can be observed as relating to direct physical experience and reality rather than illusion.

Cannatella (2004) makes a direct connection with the way in which observation appears to offer the potential for the development of drawing skill because of the public nature of imitation and the concept of observing perceived of as a common and universal activity. He argues that the object, always there for comparison, acts as a means of enabling us to refer to the original object whilst striving to represent it as accurately as possible. This perspective suggests a direct and unmediated line between the observer and the observed, defining the activity as one of perception and connecting with Jay's exploration of a dominant scopic regime (Jay, 1993). The resultant drawing, although recognised as a representation, is considered to have a direct link with the original object with observer as conduit for simply re-presenting

the object. The suggestion here is that each observer not only sees the object in a similar way, but also shares the means of interpreting it with others. The differences occur in the ways in which these perceptions are re-presented and these differences might be interpreted as describing a range of ability. However, this observation of a 'universal vision' (Bryson, 1983) fails to acknowledge any concept of cultural determination and interpretation of the external, which removes the objective role of the observer as well as the object as an external referent and the reproduction of the image is open to a greater degree of subjectivity and interpretation.

Observation relates to the way in which we see and take notice of the external world, yet the ways in which we see and interpret an object result in subjective interpretations rather than objective analysis and representation of a universal view; Hockney's discussion of the impossibility of objective observation - 'we always see with memory' - (Hockney, 2009) is relevant to this discussion. Observation appears to be connected with truth, knowledge, and a direct connection with the 'natural' world. It is argued by some that it is an unmediated way of experiencing the world, and that drawing from direct observation relates to the representation of a physical and unchanging reality via our sensory perception of that external place. The observation and representation of a universal reality relates to what Husserl describes as the 'natural attitude' (Bryson, 1983), the basis of scientific knowledge, from a concept suggesting that there is a constant and fixed idea of reality. Atkinson (2001a:67) makes the distinction here between vision and visuality, where seeing (and representation) is a situated activity. In discussing the work of Crary, Atkinson refers to the etymological root of 'observer' as not 'to look at' but 'to comply with', suggesting that the ways in which we look are defined by 'specific codes of visual representation'. Atkinson suggests: 'An observer is not one who sees the world 'as it is' but one who is formed within specific conventions and codes of visuality' (p. 68). The relationship with concepts of truth, honesty and objectivity are therefore disrupted by the connections we make between the way we see and the social conventions that determine particular types of visuality.

The connection with what can be observed and definitive concepts of truth is evident in the work of John Ruskin as well as here, for example, in a pamphlet produced by the Royal Drawing Society in 1928, some time after Ruskin's death, which claimed that drawing was of 'supreme value in general education' since it 'facilitates the learning of unchangeable *facts* of nature...[my emphasis]' (Carline, 1975). Bryson argues, however, that 'reality' is subject to cultural constraints and therefore cannot be fixed, and suggests that to believe otherwise fails to acknowledge the historical context for the evolution of such concepts as well as the cultural processes that result in the different ways in which we interpret the world.

Atkinson (1999, 2002), drawing on Bryson (1993), discusses the implications for art education where the teaching and assessment of skills related to the representation of reality from this concept of the 'natural attitude', essentially represent the adherence to a false doctrine that fails to acknowledge the role of culture, society, the individual and the use of technologies. This has particular relevance for this study in view of the significance attached to drawing from observation and the accuracy of representation as a significant determining factor in the identification of ability and,

subsequently, knowledge of the discipline. In this next section I refer to my own teaching practice to provide some further context for this discussion of art education and drawing from observation within the secondary sector, allowing for a discussion of subject pedagogy and epistemology within a contemporary context.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT

A range of literature related to art education is concerned with a reappraisal of the subject as an area of study within compulsory mainstream education. One central theme within this discussion is the nature of subject pedagogy and epistemology including questions regarding what constitutes knowledge of the subject, how teachers might teach such a body or bodies of knowledge and the ways in which pupils might best learn of, about or through the subject (Matthews, 2003; Hope, 2008; Atkinson, 2002). There is also a concern that art education is based on a tradition of teaching a specific set of practical skills (Downing and Watson, 2004; Hughes, 1998; Swift and Steers, 1999; Matthews, 2003). This approach to art education centres on teaching pupils how to acquire and potentially master the techniques and skills traditionally associated with the subject. Formal curricula (National Curriculum and programmes of study) and informal curricula (particular teachers' and departmental practices based on official and unofficial frameworks) are built around a set of skills which appear essential for pupil engagement with the subject. It is significant that I am placing my writing within this context since, although there is a good deal of discussion about skills development, within prescriptive curricula, the relevance of this in terms of inclusive educational practices and the social model of disability has been less well explored.

I recognise the 'static, safe and predictable' practices described by Hughes (1998:41) and the limited and limiting approaches to learning and teaching in the subject explored by Swift and Steers (1999). Dated as these references may now seem, such practices are also evident in more recent work (Atkinson, 2002, 2004, 2006; Matthews, 2003; Downing and Watson, 2004; Mason and Steers, 2006) and also in my own teaching. I offer the anecdote below as a summary of some of my own experiences with a view to positioning myself and my own readings of these texts. This personal reflection on professional experience, extolled by Schön (1991) is a useful way of connecting lived experience with evidence from a range of literature, writing oneself from the outside to the inside (Carlson, 2005). It is therefore a means by which I can reflect on both my inclusion within a centre of practice and my exclusion from the participants' experiences. The following reflections are useful in providing some acknowledgement of the particular systems that may shape department and individual practice.

Pupils, on entering my class in year 7, were initially given a short test which, on reflection, was highly problematic for a number of reasons. This was usually their introduction to me and to the subject in their secondary school and was based on an aim to try to provide a numerical level to describe their competence in the subject. Following the introduction of the requirement to report a level of achievement for all pupils at the end of Key Stage 3, it was deemed necessary to provide an 'accurate'

CHAPTER 5

level as a starting point for each pupil, on the move from their primary school. Some pupils transferred with this information but it was often mistrusted for a range of reasons, including doubt of primary specialist subject knowledge, the prospect of inflated grades at the end of Key Stage 2, and the fear that this would create an unrealistic target grade for our own performance management of the 'value added' at the end of Key Stage 3. A test appeared to be the most effective way of identifying each pupil's level of ability, since it was time bound to one lesson and provided the same range of activities against which pupil 'ability' could be 'measured'.

The test included drawing an object from observation, questions about colour theory, a small piece of design work and a question to identify any knowledge or recollection of looking at the work of others. The role of examinations will be developed later in relation to the narratives, but it is useful to recognise here the role these tests had within a discourse of 'normalisation' (Foucault, 1991). Foucault discusses the ritual of the examination:

The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. That is why, in all the mechanisms of discipline, the examination is highly ritualized. In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth. (Foucault, 1984:197)

The role of drawing from observation, as a ritualised activity within processes of examination, has significance here for the ways in which pupils were asked to perform as learners in their first art lessons. Pupils were assessed against teacher concepts of what might constitute a particular level ability in the subject and comparatively against others in the class within a nationally recognised framework of age related expectation, measured against text based descriptors. In this way, those performing above, below or at a national standard could be identified, recorded and 'treated' accordingly. These decisions, however, were based on a limited range of activities with pupils encouraged to respond in specific ways that were governed by time, space and their ability to read and interpret instructions.

The examination is a significant process in terms of identifying a 'norm', but the particular activities are also significant in their inclusion as the technologies by which 'the norm' may be identified. Observational drawing was employed as a technology for identifying 'pupil ability' via a 'ceremony of power' (Foucault, 1984:197), with individuals in a controlled environment required to demonstrate both their 'visuality' and technical control. Although drawing from observation was an activity employed in a range of formal and informal teaching situations, it can be read as both controlled and controlling activity in the way it has been described here, and this is significant for the way in which this specific activity produces the 'ideal pupil'. Drawing from observation, as it is described by Edwards (1982), requires (and creates) a particular type of silent, concentrated behaviour. Edwards outlines medical theories to support the different roles of the left and right hemispheres of the brain, arguing that, with particular exercises, the right hand side of the brain

can be trained to draw more effectively. The scientific explanation she offers for training the brain to switch from the dominant left to 'less dominant' non-verbal right side of the brain produces a pupil who, when drawing, is still, compliant, obedient and silent. In observing they can become almost invisible, yet they are also easily observed.

This first term at school provided a significant focus on drawing from direct observation, using and practising mark-making techniques, different qualities of line, tonal shading and cross-hatching and developing these in sketchbooks in order to keep a record. I used a number of drawing exercises to encourage pupils to develop their observational skills and the lessons built up over the first half term culminating in a number of studies and sketches. Following a spiral curriculum design, where 'core' skills were introduced, revisited and built on for each of the first three years, pupils developed their skills via directed, prescriptive projects designed to enable them to develop these practical competencies.

Research by Downing and Watson (2004) aimed to identify the content of the curriculum in secondary schools, and levels of engagement with contemporary art. Although a relatively small study, the findings can be described as indicative of contemporary practices in secondary art education and provide useful research within which to frame the pupils' experiences within my own department. All schools included in this research were described as having a clear attachment to the development of skills, with painting and drawing identified as the dominant medium. They also identified the centrality of skills, including the use of materials, particular techniques and observational drawing:

Observational drawing featured as a specific skill taught in 13 (38 per cent) of the modules in the randomly identified schools and was frequently highlighted as a valuable skill.

The work of artists was more likely to be drawn on to support the development of skills rather than ideas or concepts. Art skills are described as the 'bedrock' of the curriculum particularly at Key Stage 3 where the curriculum focus is on the development of a set of skills to be applied as part of a more independent approach at Key Stage 4. A comment from a teacher participating in this study, 'School is about teaching skills, and from there pupils go on to produce more conceptual work' (p. 61) reinforces this concept as fundamental to a pupil's initial experience and the essential knowledge required before independent, ideas-based work can be attempted. It also suggests both a hierarchy of learning and a distinction between the mechanical and intellectual aspects of art education.

Potentially there are a wide range of elements that a pupil might be taught, but specific skills such as drawing from observation and painting are identified by Downing and Watson as being prioritised as a main focus for development. Other areas appear to be given less priority. The ability to work in three dimensions, less easily accommodated within poorly resourced departments, appears to be less important, as do those aspects connected with crafts such as printmaking, for example. The preferred skills set identified here suggests that there is an adherence to a specific and definitive set of techniques that are potentially exclusive, based on a canon of

CHAPTER 5

western fine art (Downing and Watson, 2004). The assessment of pupil learning via aesthetic decisions about these culturally defined and limited range of products, may also be described as exclusive, since it is based on this limited frame of reference. The constructed activity, ‘observational drawing’, is identified as an essential part of the curriculum and could be described as an exemplification of these practices.

There are contrary perspectives which reflect a concern that contemporary art teaching does not prioritise the teaching of observation and skills to the extent that it should (Cox, 1993). These arguments do not discuss the place of formal skills as a contested area but accept that they are central to art education and practice and see their demise as a failing. Cannatella (2004) for example provides a justification for an adherence to drawing from direct observation as an underpinning skill for art education, claiming that this appears to be becoming an outmoded form of practice, under attack from contemporary approaches to art practice. Similarly an online discussion thread (see appendix) suggests some frustration on the part of a small number of art teachers in the secondary and further education sectors, regarding ‘a worrying trend’ evidenced in a lack of basic skills in relation to drawing from observation. Although an informal discussion, the postings here position observational drawing as a practice central to the teaching of art. For those contributing to the forum, these skills appear to be a reification of the discipline, and there is a sense that they are being eroded. This posting by ‘cheeky pea’ introduces some of the main themes of concern in the discussion:

As the first criteria is specific in Recording from Observation, there were very few pupils who had actually done this, sat down & looked at something and drawn it. There didn’t seem to be any connection in how important observing things were. We have a selection of excellent books in both the art department and school library, yet these were not utilised. It seems that fast food culture has crept into our area, in that pupils want things instantly, at the click of a button and are not prepared to sit and spend the time drawing. We are addressing this very issue throughout our Key stage 3 and 4 teaching, by introducing all of our projects with an observation drawing start to it, so hopefully by Year 11 they should be experts.

There is an implication of a decline on the part of teachers and pupils alike, and a sense that this loss of a central skill is detrimental to art education. The discussion emphasises frustration with pupils who appear to want instant results and a reference to a ‘fast food culture’ resulting in the decline of traditional skills which, in contrast, appear to demand a degree of time and effort that a new generation of pupils is unwilling to give. The relationship between the use of new technologies for research and a discussion of observation are interlinked with both aspects identified as evidence of a cultural shift that appears to have resulted in a decline of traditional skills. Interestingly, although the discussion appears to be based on aspects of art education, it is the generic nature of the learners that is questioned. The issues appear to centre on a particular set of expectations regarding pupil behaviours and a particular work ethic rather than discipline specific concerns related to art.

The lack of evidence of this skill appears to indicate a lack of tenacity on the part of the pupil, reflecting poorly on teachers who themselves appear unable to

draw with confidence. The ability to master these skills, it seems, can define the learner as 'expert' in the subject, and the implication is that those who do not must remain as novice. To some extent this expectation to engage with observational drawing appears to operate as a process of normalisation since it creates a sense of homogenised experience or standardisation operating as the basic diet for pupils whose ability can be matched against an expectation to at least engage in this type of activity. Interestingly, the discussion thread does not focus on the quality or nature of pupils' observational drawing but rather the lack of attention being paid to it almost as a ritual act or rite of passage, a labour that must be given due time and respect on the road to 'expertise'.

This discussion, whilst suggesting that such skills are in decline, in contrast to research by Downing and Watson (2004), in fact serves to reinforce the importance of drawing from observation as part of the 'bedrock' of formalism. There is a range of potential reasons for such an emphasis and adherence to the development of particular skills usefully explored by Atkinson (2006). Specific practices, such as drawing from observation, offer a solid point of identification with the subject and such practices are so strongly identified with the discipline that they 'become' the discipline. Atkinson (2006) argues that such approaches prioritise teaching above learning, resulting in dominant teacher roles and the subjugation of the learner. The emphasis on teacher voice obscures the learner and potentially denigrates them as idle and uninformed.

Atkinson explores teachers' and trainee teachers' attachment to particular practices providing a rationale for the ways in which they are reproduced as beliefs about learning and teaching in relation to the discipline:

... it is through these specific discourses and practices that they are able to identify art practice, themselves as teachers and their students as learners. They recognise who they are and what they do within such discursive practices and their limitations (Atkinson, 2006:19)

Teachers and trainees identify with the frustrations of being an art teacher and recognise their roles and the need for their interventions by a concept of deficit. They can effectively be defined by what is absent in their pupils or colleagues.

Formal documentation, it is argued, is a significant factor in the development and maintenance of such pedagogical and epistemological beliefs. Miles (1999) refers to the curriculum as identifying a body of knowledge that must be transmitted, connecting its function clearly with the pursuit of skills but also with a particular form of teacher-centred pedagogy.

Formalist approaches to teaching art are based on a concept of art education that prioritises the transmission of a set of particular, culturally specific, skills.

Maclure's (2006:224) discussion of the degree of uniformity emerging from the dominance of the curriculum suggests that there is little space for individuality on the part of learner or teacher, where there is 'fear of uncertainty, suppression of dissent, diversity, complexity and unpredictability'. However, Downing and Watson (2004) suggest that individual teachers and departments do have a degree of autonomy and power over both what is included in the curriculum and how the subject is taught (see also Hulks, 2003 and Burgess, 2003). Although the individual teacher

might act independently, the extent to which they are influenced by assessment and monitoring processes, including the inspection cycle and examination specifications is also significant (Hardy, 2006). Atkinson (1999:139), in his critical analysis of the National Curriculum for Art, argues that it reinforces a formalist interpretation of the subject and contributes to the construction of specific practices, but also to particular definitions of pupil ability. He explores the use of language here, identifying the influence that national frameworks have in relation to the development of both teacher and learner identities. The potential limitations of the curriculum, as a formal package of a definitive set of ideas, to be delivered in a specific way, are also recognised.

If art education has a central concern with the development of specific skills there are implications for the way in which the learner (and teacher) is positioned and defined. Within the skills-based paradigm pupils in their first year of secondary school need to be taught specific skills. By definition they are viewed as unskilled and this positions them largely within a deficit model of learning. Atkinson (2006) describes the subordination of learning to teaching within this context, where teaching is transmission-based and pupils lack agency. The teacher, demonstrating their role as technical expert, transmits their knowledge to pupils who passively receive it through repetition and the physical rehearsal of the specified skills. Such a model of learning does not encourage the learner to contribute to the construction of their own understanding but rather to replicate specific physical acts in an unquestioning and uncritical way (Poerksen, 2005).

The philosophies underpinning the models of learning outlined above are also significant for the types of learner and teacher identities that are formed (Atkinson, 2002; Atkinson, 2006). Atkinson's work on pedagogised identities is significant here since it provides a useful discussion of the ways in which such practices can position or subjectify learners. He suggests that learners within such contexts can become 'pathologised', producing work that does not match a particular teacher (or national) expectation and that this subsequently provides a starting point for remediation as opposed to teaching. Also of significance is what this betrays of our concepts of the child learner as fundamentally flawed and one who needs correction and training on the road to adulthood, discussed more fully by Matthews (2003).

If learning through art places such a focus on skills development, the emphasis on the physical re-enactment of specific practices and judgements about the success of the learning taking place is also connected very firmly with the physical and aesthetic expression of this learning. A drawing, for example, exists as an aesthetic product defined by level of skill. The concepts, processes and development underpinning the work are obscured by the finished product. Skill and technique are connected strongly with ideas of physical competence and conceptual development. Skills are identified with particular types of cognition, yet these emerge from evolving systems of thought that position both learner and teacher (Atkinson, 2002). The dominance of specific taught skills are therefore replicated in the ways in which pupils' work is assessed and technical ability can be described as a dominant discourse in that it becomes a significant factor in determining a pupil's level of ability within the subject.

Art teachers and pupils are, arguably, subject to the immediate constraints of a formal curriculum as well as to the regular surveillance and monitoring of the

assessment and inspection systems, yet the belief systems that underpin these practices are also developed over time in less immediate ways. As I have reflected on the centrality of drawing from observation within both my own drawing practice and teaching, I have had cause to consider the origins of such views regarding the value and essential nature of such work. Beliefs about these ‘systems of knowledge’ (Foucault, 1980) that confirm formal skills and observation as central practices in art education are developed over time, and an exploration of some historical background is therefore useful in attempting to understand the development of these systems. Such structures, Foucault argues, are not devised by one body and imposed on another but are developed as ‘discursive formations’ through power dynamics or relationships, with both bodies contributing to the development of such systems (McHoul and Grace, 1993:21). The dominant role of formal skills and drawing from direct observation are not imposed by a central powerful body, but have evolved into a dominant discourse in art education as a result of the interrelationships of a range of players who have generated and confirmed the validity of these dominant practices over time. Read (1970) also comments on the social dynamic of educative practices, anxious to avoid the implication that there is a centre that exercises power. Using this framework, it is possible to consider teachers, pupils, educationalists and theorists as active participants in co-constructing and reinforcing particular discourses.

Of further interest, in Foucault’s (1980) discussion of the identification and recognition of dominant discourses, are ‘subjugated’, ‘unofficial’ or ‘occluded forms of knowledge’. In this discussion of the development of dominant practices in art education, it is possible to draw some conclusions regarding forms of knowledge and methods and processes that are considered less influential (the role of the imagination, for example) by referring to the historical context for the development of the leading epistemologies and forms of pedagogy in relation to art education.

BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Several centuries would have to elapse before the child’s real needs in art would be recognised, and before it would be realized that these needs lie in the broader field of art rather than in the mere acquisition of skill with pen or pencil or in accuracy of hand and eye. (Carline, 1975:23)

I start this part of the discussion with a quote from Carline (1975) largely because of the irony evident in light of the preceding discussion. It would seem that, writing in the early 1970s, Carline had a sense that art education had begun to recognise areas of significance that did not rely purely on notions of technical skill. This statement and the subsequent discussion suggests that although this might once have been the prevailing belief, concepts of art education had in fact broadened from a very specific formalist focus to include a greater emphasis on the development of ideas and imagination. Dalton (2001:87) discusses the way in which the distinction between progressive, related to self-expression, and rational ‘the formal traditions of objective and academic drawing and realism’, began to be integrated into secondary art education. However, the apparent emphasis on current teaching of skills in

CHAPTER 5

compulsory art education suggests that one of the prevailing epistemological beliefs about art education still positions the subject as relating to ‘mere acquisition of skill with pen or pencil’ and that the development of ‘accuracy of hand and eye’ determines curriculum content as well as a concept of pupils’ ability.

Although I do not aim to provide an extensive historical survey of art education, Carline offers some useful thoughts on early pedagogy in respect of drawing. Dalton (2001) describes the foundations of contemporary art education as based on nineteenth century industrial modernisation, yet a consideration of earlier less formalised art education is also useful. The dominance of a formalist approach to art education is evident in this discussion of 17th Century art practices where early experiences were based on learning technical skills. Carline refers to a description of some introductory activities for pupils learning to draw:

for the space of a week or thereabouts to draw circles, squares of all sorts, a cylinder, the oval form with other such-like solid and plain geometrical figures with a swift hand (Carline, 1975:26)

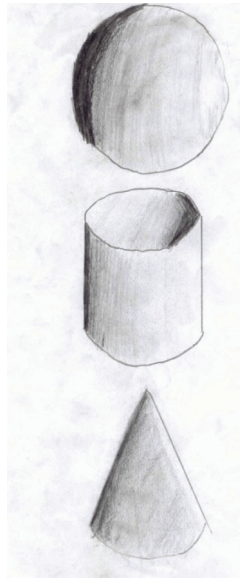


Figure 1. Matthew's tonal studies.

Looking at the drawings (Fig. 1, included above) produced by one of the participants in this research, the description of a 17th Century introduction to practical skills appears to offer a neat parallel with this more recent experience of art lessons in the first year of secondary school. The emphasis on ‘a swift hand’ is significant in this description, with the aim to develop rapid, almost intuitive, skill rather than a slow and deliberate style. Carline suggests that these types of practices did little to

encourage originality and imagination but he also indicates that there was also little room for these aspects in the 1970s, at the time of his writing.

It appears that there was a very clear reason for the focus on these technical aspects in the 17th Century. The explicit aim was not to encourage expression but to refine technical skills. The goal from the outset appears to have related to the development of skill through the teaching of drawing with a clear connection with writing development, from as early as the 16th Century. With the advent of industrialisation and the need for a technically skilled work force, the focus became more clearly defined and was based on a utilitarian aim more than an aesthetic principle or desire for cultural enrichment and individual development. The emphasis on working from observation by Alexander Cozens in 1749, for example, (Carline, 1975) is described as a departure from these traditions not only for the focus on working from observation but also in light of the way in which he encouraged the development of imaginative responses. Cozens' approach is suggestive of his concern that anybody could be trained to copy from nature but that the value of art was in being able to imagine and interpret. He appears to have been concerned with more than technical skill, and the connection between imagination, observation and the development of the artist is evident here.

Drawing as a 'genteel accomplishment' existed alongside technical training but there appears to have been a class distinction identified by Denis (1996) who discusses a clear division in practices in the 19th Century in terms of art education. Dalton (2001) also indicates a gendering of art education at this point, for male public education and female private pursuit. The middle and upper classes were more likely to undertake art education (and specifically drawing) that related to the development of 'high' or 'fine art', whilst others were more likely to be trained via the transmission of craft based skills and copying. The working classes needed to be trained and skilled for industrial processes and the way in which they were taught to draw reflected this type of education. Within this model, the role of the imagination and individual creativity appears to have had as little relevance as the need to work directly from observation.

John Ruskin's work in the 1850s signalled a distinct shift in art education and this was aligned with a more specific focus on the educational value of drawing and the role of recording from direct observation with his classes for 'working men' (Haslam, 1988:155). There was a greater concern with the contribution that art education could make to the spiritual and moral as well as the cognitive development of the individual. Read (1970:3), in outlining two hypothesis of education, relates his discussion to the development of a 'moral conscience':

This moral conscience has been responsible for the development of those finer qualities in man [sic] which make up civilisation, and our object as educators is not to eliminate those qualities, but to encourage their growth.

Within Read's discussion of education as a moral discipline here is the 'educator's dilemma' between the realisation of individuality and the societal requirement for conformity, a discussion already introduced in Chapter 3. However, the recognition

of a focus on education as the basis for individual development as a ‘birthright’ is also significant to Read’s philosophy of education through art.

The centrality of first hand or direct observation shifted art education to a position where individual response was promoted and the cognitive aspects of image development became as essential as the physical and technical. Drawing from observation was directly connected with a means of experiencing and learning about the external environment as well as training for work, although this was still a contributing factor in the education of men at the Working Men’s College. Read (1972) discusses Ruskin’s writing of *Modern Painters* (1846) and the recognition of an adherence to observation with strong connections with empirical forms of knowledge and truth and the scientific method. However, Read also recognises the transformative nature of the imagination discussed by both Ruskin and William Blake. Although observing the external world was a significant element, there was also some recognition that striving to merely imitate or reproduce was inadequate without ‘the central fiery heart’ of the imagination (Ruskin in Read, 1972). What seems significant in Ruskin’s approach is the connection between art education and the development of thought via a combination of the physical and cognitive but more specifically through looking and drawing. Central to this belief was the value of teaching perception. Haslam (1988:154) says Ruskin understood perception ‘as a sort of visual thinking with association as part of, and not subsequent to, the act of seeing’, emphasising that his central belief was in the value of teaching perception since ‘once we see keenly enough there is very little difficulty in drawing what we see.’ Haslam also explores the way in which Ruskin connected looking and drawing with the development of analytical skills and communication, and working from observation was a central aspect to the way in which Ruskin’s philosophies of art and education came together (Ruskin, [1857] 2007).

Ruskin’s influence can also be seen in the work of James Sully and Ebenezer Cooke who developed research into children’s art and art teaching in schools. Cooke and Sully laid the foundations for the recognition of stages in drawing development which was summarized and continued by Sir Cyril Burt in *Mental and Scholastic Tests* (Read, 1970:116) where he made connections between medical and educational discourses to develop influential yet contestable frameworks for determining intelligence (Chitty, 2007). Within these stages, drawing is firmly connected with age progression and cognitive development and control is also viewed as progressive. Cooke was also to lead reforms of child art education which prioritized an understanding of the particular nature of the child and acknowledged this as being as important as the specifics of the teaching systems employed (Read, 1970:169).

A further significant development relates not only to the way in which art education became a central aspect in educating young children but also to the redefinition of children as intrinsically capable of artistic endeavour and creative expression. The emergence of child art coincided with a shift in emphasis from a specific focus on skill as a central tenet. The emphasis on the development of practical skill and drawing from observation was challenged by the emergence of the New Art Teaching Movement and the New Education Movement of the 1930s and 1940s as well as

the work of Richardson and Cizek who worked with pupils to develop imagination based art work (Richardson, 1948; Carline, 1975 and Holdsworth, 1988). Richardson rejected the technical focus of her own art education, and examples of pupils' work, with an emphasis on working by visualizing imaginative responses, appear far removed from some of the more traditional skills-based concepts of art education. She commented:

In the past, when drawing was a hand-and-eye training, there were seldom more than half a dozen children in class who excelled. Now that we have the loftier aim of finding and freeing the potential artist in every child, our task of teaching drawing, though difficult, is far more worthwhile and full of hope. (Richardson, 1948:61)

Drawing was recognised for its educational value but this coincided, in the early twentieth century, with the development of child psychology and the use of drawing as a means of identifying aspects of cognitive development. The emerging concept of the child as 'artist', in the work of Froebel, Sully, Ablett, Cizek and Richardson for example (Carline, 1975 and McDonald, 1970), ran parallel with the use of drawing to identify stages of development (and by implication, departures from a norm, as discussed in the previous chapter). Read's child centred approach to the creative development of the individual was also influential in this respect. Based on empirical cataloguing of drawings, Read developed a system of identification of psychological types based on stylistic classification. Advancing learner focused rather than teacher led approaches, Read emphasised art education as an arena for creative outlet rather than directed input (Read, 1970; Eisner, 2002). However, the categorising of the work is not unproblematic due to the authoritarian approach employed and the social context which was undeveloped. Viktor Loewenfeld's work is also significant in this respect for its emphasis on individual meaning making and expression of experience and the connections made between psychology and the physical 'autoplastic' or bodily experience (Golomb, 2004).

The role and position of drawing provides an interesting exemplification of the ways in which scientific and educational discourses began to intersect at a time when formal education became compulsory from an early age. Drawing, recognised as a means of educating children, could also be used as a means of tracking child development, enabling it to function as a means of surveillance, monitoring and identification of those children who might not fit specific age-related expectations. A drawing produced as part of a learning activity might also provide evidence for those charged with identifying individual deficits and subsequent remedial support.

Although expressed here as parallel developments, the 'child as artist' and 'child as developing adult' present tensions for the way in which art education has evolved and continues to swing between the polarities of a skills based national curriculum and an open-ended child centred approach. Learning a specific set of formal skills appears to have been dominant in evolving concepts of art education and I would argue that this is now bound by the medical discourse as well as the educational and art-based. Richardson's concepts of art education with a pedagogy of 'love' as a central tenet seems idealistic yet exciting and vital, far removed from the regulated and controlled systems associated with recent practices.

DRAWING FROM OBSERVATION AND 'THE' PREFERRED
AESTHETIC OF THE SKILFUL HAND

A sketchbook... can obviously fit into pocket or bag to be available at all times, making it possible for the owner to record any unexpected but visually worthwhile moment. It can be an aid to training the powers of observation and the visual memory in such a way that no one day should pass without some observation having become part of the students storehouse of visual material for future use as appropriate. (Taylor and Taylor, 1990:60)

It is a central purpose of art education that pupils should learn to look at things to the point where the eye sees clearly and analytically. It is one of the art teacher's responsibilities to organize experiences in such a way that their pupils pay close attention to what is in front of them in contrast to merely glancing. (DES, 1983)

Drawing from observation, within more recent literature, is identified as one essential skill with the two activities 'observing' and 'drawing what is being observed' clearly connected. However, in discussing drawing from observation, we are considering two distinct activities that have become subsumed into one form of practice. As a construction of these two activities, it appears to have become representative of a focus on specific taught skills and an essential element of the prevailing orthodoxy of the formalist tradition (Hughes, 1998; Atkinson, 1999; Atkinson, 2001; Matthews, 2003; Mason and Steers, 2006 and Downing and Watson, 2004). There are therefore two distinct, yet connected, lines of discussion: the first concerning the nature of the observation tradition, and the other relating to definitions of drawing and the subsequent expectations that appear to reflect a very particular and specific aesthetic style and/or representational practice.

In attempting to explore why observation is considered an essential and fundamental element in contemporary art education, it appears difficult to separate it from concepts of drawing skill. The manner in which observation is practised is often through the vehicle of a very specific approach to drawing, and the drawing product, it seems, has to 'look good' for it to be considered evidence of 'good looking', or to 'look real' in order for it to be considered 'real looking'.

Observation appears to have become defined as *the* way of knowing, and the representation, or drawing in this case, appears to reflect the quality of the way in which the object is observed and understood and, subsequently, the way in which the discipline is learned. Drawing from observation suggests creating a record of the way in which an object has been seen and therefore understood, and the quality of this understanding appears to be defined by the aesthetic product. It needs to reflect a sufficient degree of resemblance to the original object and also needs to possess particular physical qualities, in order to be considered successful. Technical or formal skill and the ability to draw accurately from observation appear to be inextricably linked. The next part of this discussion will therefore focus on attempting to explain why there appears to be a preference for particular approaches to a specific drawing aesthetic and why an 'uncoordinated' or slow, awkward or heavy handed approach is undesirable.

Drawing has always taken a wide range of forms and has traditionally been used for a number of different functions and it is beyond the scope of this study to provide a survey here. However, particular concepts of drawing do appear to dominate. Craig-Martin (1995:9) offers a useful historical overview of a range of drawing practices, identifying the position of those that may be identified as deviant:

There are two principal misconceptions about drawing. The first is that there is a single form of 'good drawing, a way of making drawings that is somehow basic and 'common sensical' (naturalistic representation), against which those drawings taking other forms are considered deviant. The second is that all drawing in the past conformed to the rules of 'good drawing', deviant drawing being exclusive to our own century

Of significance here is the range of practices that have existed over time and the suggestion that degenerate drawings are perceived of as relating to more recent practices in comparison to the hegemonic tradition concerned with representation. Craig-Martin offers a view of drawing with the potential for:

spontaneity, creative speculation, experimentation, directness, simplicity, abbreviation, expressiveness, immediacy, personal vision, technical diversity, modesty of means, rawness, fragmentation, discontinuity, unfinishedness, open-endedness

The definition that he uses for drawing appears to offer tremendous potential for this to be used as a vehicle for learning. These characteristics are well aligned to the current national curriculum for art and design, for example which prioritises, amongst other ideas, individual learning, risk-taking and a range of approaches to drawing (QCA, 2007). This aligns with the principles of recent approaches regarding Learning to Learn (Claxton, 2004), for example, where these distinctive features of drawing may also connect it with a technology for promoting learning. However, the association with the observational/representational tradition challenges some of this potential. 'Creative speculation', 'personal vision', 'technical diversity' or 'unfinishedness' may be particularly problematic when drawing is described more specifically as drawing from observation and when this is applied to particular formal learning situations such as examinations. The 'problem' of 'unfinishedness' appears to contradict a view of the 'ideal' pupil for example, a theme that will be discussed later in respect of the narrative case studies presented in the next section.

Dexter (2005:6) suggests that drawing signifies 'honesty and transparency' since:

... all the marks and tracks, whether deliberate or not, are there for all to see in perpetuity. Any erasures or attempts to change the line mid-flow are obvious – drawing is a form that wears its mistakes and errors on its sleeve. Oil painting, by contrast, is an art of accretion and concealment.

However, the positioning of drawing within the 'official' contexts of schooling may mean that such transparency can lead to vulnerability for those learning through drawing. Although as a form it may be constructed as open and honest, the ways in which drawings may be read or assessed may suggest that such transparency is undesirable. The narratives suggest that some might seek to conceal or imitate particular

CHAPTER 5

drawing practices because of the types of transparency indicated here. Drawing is offered as a transparent vehicle for illustrating development or thought, yet this is in itself a socially constructed interpretation. Within art education it is not necessarily the visibility of error that is significant but the importance that this might have for those who decide what constitutes error and what this might signify for the learner. What is also significant is who takes responsibility for acknowledging and defining 'error' and who engages in 'correction' or 'erasure' as well as the degree to which work *can* be erased.

Bourdieu (1984:468) discusses embodied social structures where thoughts, ideas and value judgements are part of this linguistic construction. Within his discussion of this social production he offers a series of 'antagonistic adjectives', some of which appear to be highly relevant to the categorization of individuals in respect of their drawing production:

The network of oppositions between high (sublime, elevated, pure) and low (vulgar, low modest), spiritual and material, fine (refined, elegant) and coarse (heavy, fat, crude, brutal), light (subtle, lively, sharp, adroit) and heavy (slow thick, blunt, laborious, clumsy) free and forced, broad and narrow, or, in another dimension, between unique (rare, different, distinguished, exclusive, exceptional, singular, novel) and common (ordinary, banal, commonplace, trivial, routine), brilliant (intelligent) and dull (obscure, grey, mediocre), is the matrix of all the commonplaces which find such ready acceptance because behind them lies the whole social order. (Bourdieu, 1984:468)

These 'antagonistic adjectives' offer a linguistic framework for the way we might understand the positioning of specific drawing practices within an educational context. The concept of drawing difficulty might reflect a 'difficulty' with representation but may also reflect difficulty in production of a particular aesthetic. Heavy handed but adhering to aspects of western representation may also suggest a type of difficulty – this is the 'aesthetics of ability' – the ways particular drawings are produced that might indicate immature or less sophisticated approaches to drawing. The way that we understand particular aspects of art production sit within these socially constructed domains, polarising the 'light' and 'heavy', for example as more or less able. A drawing displaying heavy, fat, crude and brutal marks, demonstrating a heavy, slow and clumsy hand appears less desirable than a lively and refined approach (Ruskin, [1857] 2007).

Carline, introducing the 'long established respect for neatness and precision', discusses the specific instruction given to pupils regarding the type of pressure to use in a bid to produce a light sensitive mark. Carline's discussion of Elizabethan drawing tuition reflects a concept of the pupil who is unskilled as one who presses too hard, carving lines into the paper. I remember asking pupils to imagine their paper as if seen through a microscope. I would ask them to picture the tiny peaks on the bumpy surface and draw as if they were just touching the tops of these peaks. Carline says:

We can well imagine these boys of Elizabethan times...while they slowly and awkwardly press hard with the pencil as if carving their lines rather than

drawing them, and having frequent recourse to the breadcrumbs. A lighter touch would be constantly urged. (p. 21)

Carline makes a clear distinction between drawing and this ‘carving’ activity employed by the unskilled, claiming that they do this ‘rather than’ draw. It is worth noting the social position of those boys being tutored, who themselves would be trained to be ‘gentle’ men rather than ‘working’ men. He goes on to suggest that another tutor of the time, John Brinsley, advised his pupils to draw ‘leisurely and lightly’. Carline reflects that he ‘urged his pupils to use the pen or pencil as ‘the painter doth’, allowing it to ‘glide or swimme upon the paper.’ (p. 22). Again there is a suggestion that a light touch is desirable, and the reference to working ‘leisurely and lightly’ suggests that being able to work in a seemingly effortless and dextrous way was a central component of what needed to be achieved by a pupil learning to draw and write since both activities were often conflated and drawing viewed as a means of developing the desired skills for writing. Further to this Carline (p. 129) also refers to a quote by Selwyn Image regarding his experiences of John Ruskin:

... when Ruskin saw what I had done, he took the pencil from me, remarking that I might be using a crow-bar, and showed such delicacy and variety in its handling

The heavy-handed use of the pencil as a ‘crow-bar’ is roundly rejected for the delicate touch associated with an ability to draw well. In his drawing instruction book *The Elements of Drawing*, originally published in 1857, Ruskin emphasises delicacy and refinement as a defining factor in ‘good’ and ‘beautiful’ work:

It would be bad advice that made you bold... There is one quality, and, I think, only one, in which all and great and good art agrees – it is all delicate art. Coarse art is always bad art. (Ruskin, [1857] 2007:27)

Within contemporary art education, although we are aware of a range of approaches to drawing, it is possible that we might still consider the leisurely, light, sensitive, delicate and controlled attributes of fine art drawing as more compatible with definitions of ability than the slow, deliberate, erratic and heavy-handed carving of a crow-bar. It is also possible that we might consider the quality of observation evident in such drawings as more effectively achieved than in a drawing that embodies the less desirable aesthetic attributes.

One recurring theme in some of the introductory discussions of drawing tuition by Carline (1975) suggests that a preoccupation with error and mistake-making might have some significance. Peacham’s drawing manual of 1606 advises:

... be not without the crummes of fine white bread, to rub out your lead and coale, when you have done amisse’ (H. Peacham, *The Art of Drawing*, 1606 p. 13, in Carline)

Mr John Smith, a drawing teacher in the 1700s, claimed that teaching drawing was a drain on his time because his role involved correcting drawing mistakes that his pupils had made. His role in relation to pupils drawing was to ‘correct all the errors therein and make them perfect before they can proceed any further.’ It was the master’s role to correct and the pupil could not continue until that particular stage had

been corrected. Outline and proportion had to be done ‘correctly’ before advancing onto shading, again an interesting conception of what constitutes error and the ways in which the pedagogue manages the processes of correction. Similarly, in the 1840s students attending the National School of Design were unable to move from the elementary class unless they could ‘draw with correctness’ (p. 76).

Foucault’s description of the ‘bench of the ignorant’, to where learners, unable to pass to the next stage, were confined, has relevance here (Foucault, 1991). The concept of mistake-making reflects a lack of drawing ability and positions knowledge concepts as relating clearly to the polarities of correct and incorrect, right and wrong. Interestingly, and to return briefly to the earlier discussion of observation, Wolheim describes observation as both ‘honest and correct’ (in Cannatella, 2004) situating it as a definitive activity that acknowledges the potential for inaccuracy also to be positioned as dishonest.

Matthews (2003:35) discusses the ways in which processes of art education connect concepts of error in the drawing with concepts of error held within the individual. He suggests that pedagogy based on drawing development as wholly ‘natural’ may well result in a ‘laissez-faire’ attitude or approach in teaching. However, he continues, if children’s drawings are perceived of as ‘deviant and incorrect versions of a superior form of representation to come’ then both child and drawing will be seen as deficit and in need of correction. The teacher becomes defined as ‘corrector’ and authority, creating a specific pedagogic relationship based on dominance and subjection. The ‘light touch’ and sensitivity advocated in drawing may be associated with the ease of erasure and eradication of mistakes. Drawing practices may therefore also relate to a different type of concealment through erasure, where correction also allows for the removal of the pupil. The individual is potentially removed by erasing idiosyncrasies in the drawing and modifying drawing to an ‘acceptable’ aesthetic. However, the difficulty in erasing the heavy handed mark allows the subject to be made visible and remain so, clearly marked by their errors; drawing in this discussion becomes a technology for individualisation.

In exploring the ways in which participants have experienced drawing from observation, this chapter has helped to provide some context for the positioning of this activity within current subject pedagogy. The main points to take forward from this chapter are that drawing from observation appears to be a practice that, although once excluded from skill development by an emphasis on copying, now occupies a central role in the development not only of technical skill but also the ways in which we can promote a visual understanding of the world around us. A main point of argument is that recording from observation and particular aesthetic approaches to drawing have become conflated and it is not only the cultural activity associated with observing but also the ways in which those representations are conveyed that can be potentially problematic. Of further significance are the ways in which pupils are produced against ‘normalised’ concepts of drawing production, not only in relation to hegemonic forms of representation but also in respect of dominant aesthetic qualities of pupil drawing.

Particular forms of representation and the aesthetic qualities of drawing are associated with the ideal pupil by becoming technologies of individualisation by

which pupils can be normalised. The 'ideal' representational drawing, demonstrative of a skilful hand, becomes a centre for defining particular types of art practice and particular 'types' of pupil. It is against such pupil 'ideals' that the 'dyspraxic ideal' can be produced and described in terms of immaturity and poor coordination in respect of drawing.

The attention paid to observational drawing produces the pupil as one who must seek and acquire certain types of knowledge of the world which prioritise a particular type of visuality. As essential practice, it produces the pupil as visual knowledge seeker, knowledge reproducer and re-presenter of what is observed via a particular concept of technical (physical) ability. Although recent educational rhetoric espouses individualised approaches to learning, the social and cultural construction of a hierarchy of practices, prioritising specific approaches to learning and teaching, appear to militate against such individualised approaches. An imperative for pupils is that they must learn how to observe in certain ways promoting a specific view of the world. It is potentially a physically controlled and controlling technology that encourages a compliant observer and a particular type of ideal learner.

In Chapter 2 I outlined the methodological approach I have taken to researching 'dyspraxic' experiences of drawing from observation. The following chapters make use of the theoretical and contextual context that has been built in Chapters 1–5. The four narrative case studies presented here allow for the interrogation of individual experiences of drawing from observation within the complex sites of art education and the 'dyspraxic' experience.