

CHAPTER 6

MATTHEW

INTRODUCTION

Matthew was 14 years old and was in Year 9 at a community comprehensive school. He was at the point of making decisions about the subjects he would be studying for GCSE. Matthew has 'official' recognition that he is dyspraxic due to an Educational Psychologist's report resulting in regular liaison with the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator and provision of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in recognition that he has a Special Educational Need. This chapter is based on two interviews with Matthew and my initial conversations with him and his parents and includes reference to a number of drawings, as well as comments and grades from his school subject reports for art.

His parents were present for our initial meeting, although not for the recorded interview, and played a part in directing some of the stories that emerged. They contributed to the co-construction of Matthew's narrative and shaped some of the earlier dialogue and I was conscious that the stories told were jointly constructed, and introduced by either his mother or father. Some evolved into shared stories that had begun to adopt an almost mythical quality both in their re-telling and for what the narratives had begun to represent in terms of Matthew's broader school experiences. Bruner (1990) describes this co-construction of shared family stories that begin to represent more than the story as it is told, and I was conscious that this shared telling was different in nature from the account of events that were described to me by Matthew on his own.

Although Matthew agreed to participate in the research, the contact had to be negotiated by one of his parents. It is possible that Matthew might have agreed to participate out of a sense of obligation to his parents', or that he may have been influenced by their motivations for involvement in the research. During the initial conversation with them I was aware that they had some reservations about the ways in which the school had dealt with a number of challenges that had arisen for Matthew as a result of an emphasis on handwriting. The underlying narrative from the parents' perspective appeared to relate to the conflicts with the school about a range of 'mis-understandings' involving tensions between teachers' expectations of Matthew's ability and their perceptions of any specific difficulties. I was conscious that, because of the need for parental permissions, I might well have had a view of Matthew's experiences that were filtered through his parents' seemingly negative experiences of the school. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge the difference in this interview from those conducted with adult participants if only to reference the direct presence of others during part of the interview process.

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My initial conversations with Matthew's father provided me with a view of his experiences that did not seem to be substantiated in the interviews with Matthew. Matthew's dad described his son's experiences of art education in far more negative terms than Matthew, who spoke of some of his art lessons as more fulfilling and enjoyable than my initial contact had lead me to believe. There were inconsistencies that emphasised the differences in perspective between the stories that Matthew told and his father's perceptions. However, it is also possible that Matthew was constructing the stories of his experience differently depending on the purpose, context and reason for telling. This does not create problems in determining the validity of what was said, but it does exemplify the situated nature of this research approach and the facility that we all have for re-telling stories of our experiences from different perspectives and for a different audience.

Interviewing Matthew provided me with a means of challenging my own pre-conceptions of the way a young adult might talk about his experiences. On my re-reading of the transcripts and the field notes made following my first visit, I am reminded of how self-conscious I was in trying far too hard to work towards facilitating the 'telling of stories'. I was also conscious of wanting Matthew to understand that I did not want to talk to him because I thought there was 'something wrong' with him. I was reluctant to address the issue of dyspraxia directly and was trying to avoid any suggestion of contributing to the 'problem learning' discourse that was evident in the conversations I had had with his father. I decided not to mention dyspraxia and to focus on Matthew's art experience and it was he who referred to this directly. I reflected on this first meeting in my research journal, commenting:

Matthew sat down next to me after shaking hands and a few introductory sentences were exchanged. Where to start? So Matthew I want to talk to you because you're dyspraxic! I think not. I started by talking about art and design and what he was doing but he said 'and you want to know about dyspraxia'. I found myself saying 'yes but it's really more about what you're doing in art and design'.

Although I aimed at a relaxed unstructured approach to the interview it was, at times, awkward. I was an adult and a researcher interviewing Matthew because he was dyspraxic, and I was conscious of the problematic nature of the power dynamics in relation to this interview and the ways it differed from the interviews with other adult participants (Blumenreich, 2004). Matthew was extremely polite and cooperative and it was difficult to match this representation of him with his father's account, a few weeks, earlier that Matthew had been in trouble for firing a 'BB' gun on a school bus. There were some stories that would be told in this exchange between researcher and participant and there were others that would be saved for a different audience.

I was also conscious that Matthew's participation in the research might have an affect on his engagement with his remaining art lessons. At our second meeting Matthew suggested that there was a possibility that he would be exempt from the observational drawing element of his Year 9 exam. I wondered about his involvement in this research and the possibility that the Special Educational Needs Coordinator

(SENCo) had made a decision to remove him from this element because of my research. I had met with her briefly at an early stage in the work and outlined the project to her, but I was conscious now that my decision to research the experiences of drawing from observation with Matthew may well have resulted in the SENCo thinking that he would be best served by not actually sitting the exam. He had been required to take part in similar exams in Year 7 and Year 8 and it seemed too much of a coincidence that she had now decided to withdraw him from this aspect of the work. I felt uncomfortable with the suggestion that Matthew might have been marked out for 'special' treatment because of a misapprehension about my work and that this had been based on only a brief conversation.

A further power dynamic existed between Matthew and his parents, and at times I felt uncomfortable when they began to describe Matthew's dyspraxic characteristics and specific school-based incidents. I was conscious that Matthew shifted between being almost invisible during these parts of the conversation and becoming the audience, prompting his parents to tell him more. Bruner's discussion of narrative within families as a means of understanding family politics (1990:84) is particularly useful in considering this co-construction of Matthew's role as audience and narrator. Whilst contributing to an explanation of events, it appeared he was also making sense of them himself by listening to this re-telling.

Although I did not want to problematise Matthew's learning by making dyspraxia the focus of the interview, I was aware that this created a tension in the research relationships that were developing. Matthew and his parents became involved in the research because of what I might have been able to offer in developing others' understanding of dyspraxia and the impact it was having on Matthew's education. As I became more involved in the research I wanted to distance myself from a specific focus on the 'problems' of dyspraxia, yet motivation to participate in the research appeared to centre on the ability to air some of the difficulties that had arisen from specific school experiences. I wanted to concentrate, on a very specific practice in art education, drawing from observation, yet it was difficult to ignore Matthew's other educational experiences.

Matthew's story is characterised by his perception that he is neither 'good' nor particularly 'bad' at art and this is supported by his school reports which indicate that his work and approach are largely 'satisfactory'. What is interesting about the story that emerges from these sources is the significant role that drawing from observation has in his early art education in secondary school. The school reports and his descriptions of the work suggest an emphasis on skills development in these initial experiences. His references to specific pieces of work centre on drawing from observation and the role that this has in determining his ability and that of his peers.

A number of narrative themes emerged in relation to Matthew's experience of drawing from observation. The position that observational drawing appears to occupy as a technology for determining Matthew's ability, particularly in relation to the official discourses of examination and reporting, is discussed using the Foucauldian framework developed in Chapter 3 and the dominance of the observational discourse is offset against the 'facile' qualities of 'other' art practices (Bourdieu, 1984); the ocularcentric nature of Matthew's art and design experiences is discussed in

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relation to particular concepts of vision and visuality as well as technical skill introduced in Chapter 3 and developed in Chapter 4; finally, the role that observational practice has in shaping concepts of comparative ability in relation to teacher perceptions is also developed, and the role of teacher as ‘expert’ and producer of exemplary practice offers a point of discussion for the ways in which this creates tensions for Matthew.

These narratives are discussed under the following headings:

- Drawing from observation as a dominant and regulatory discourse
- ‘cock a la doodle ee doing’ – ocularcentric representations of direct experience
- Observation, representation and perceptions of teacher expectation

In addition there is a dominant breach in Matthew’s narrative relating to his experiences in English where his ‘dyspraxic’ experiences dominate and conflict with the demands of having to handwrite his work. This appears tangential to this study about observational drawing, but is highly significant in the way in which Matthew’s learning is pathologised. This narrative is discussed at the conclusion of the chapter as a ‘gaping maw’, the meta-breach that consumes all others.

DRAWING FROM OBSERVATION AS A DOMINANT AND REGULATORY DISCOURSE

Although there was a good deal of generic discussion of Matthew’s experiences, observational drawing appears to have played a significant in his art education, having a central role in his end of year examinations, for example, as well as being the focus of specific attention in his subject reports. It is discussed within this section as a dominant discourse (Foucault, 1980) in that it is a focus for Matthew’s discussion of his experiences of art, but it also appears to have a central role in examination and assessment and therefore in contributing to judgments regarding ability within the discipline. It is also discussed here as a regulatory discourse, particularly in terms of the ways in which it was experienced during the examination process where regulation also extends to physical control, compliance and ‘ideal’ pupil behaviour. Within this context drawing from observation may also be described as a technology for physical control and normalisation. Matthew spoke about the drawing that he had done for his year 8 examination:

Matthew: In Year 8 we had a scrumpled up piece of paper

- we had a cup
- a mug and we had an apple
- it was like the cup there
- the apple there
- the scrumpled up piece of paper there
- and we had to draw it but each week it was quite hard because you’d put the apple a little bit further than it was last week so it was quite difficult to get all the objects in the right place again

Claire: So how many weeks did you do that for

- that observational drawing?

Matthew: We had two lessons a week and we did it for ten lessons so that was about five weeks

Claire: Right

Oh so it was quite a long time you'd spent on that so what was the finished drawing like?

Matthew: It was quite decent like erm the apple didn't turn out that good – the scrumpled piece of paper was alright but the mug was pretty good

Claire: Were you quite pleased with that piece of drawing?

Matthew: Yes

Claire: So is there anything you've not enjoyed? any particular thing in art and design?

Matthew: Erm observation drawing I don't like doing because they take too much time and she expects so much detail

Claire: So why was that do you want to just what I want you to try and do is sort of like picture yourself in that and tell that as a story about you know what happened when you had to do a particular observational drawing and the sort of things you were asked to do

Matthew: We were asked to make sure we could get all the right we had to make sure we had an ellipse at the top and the bottom ellipse we had to make sure we had the exact shape and then the apple we had to you know how it dips in when it gets to the top we had to try and capture that and then for the scrumpled up paper we had to like shade where like if it folded over another and you could still see under it you had to like shade that bit in and you had to get quite a lot of detail but it was like not actually hard It's boring just looking at something and drawing it

Claire: So you don't find that...

Matthew: No

Claire: Is that cos you're not using you're not doing your imaginative part ?

Matthew: I don't really think it's that artistic cos it's drawing something else that's there you're not like using your imagination it just doesn't feel like your work.

Matthew identifies each of the objects that appear connected only by being brought together for this long examination, lasting for over eight hours (Matthew's lessons lasted for 55 minutes and he had about ten lessons on this drawing). His understanding of this art activity related to his ability to represent these objects and he talks about the degrees of success with each one.

Matthew identified specific aspects that he perceived were required in the drawing. This description illustrates Matthew's understanding of subject specific language and the focus on representation including the particular features that are required (the use of ellipses for example) and he is conscious about getting 'the *exact* shape', the need for detail and the emphasis on being able to 'capture' particular visual elements in his drawing.

A breach in this narrative comes between the official and dominant status of drawing from observation within the school examination structure and the lengthy time spent on it, defining this as a central aspect of art practice, and the way in which Matthew describes it as removed from 'real' art. He suggests that this type of work was not particularly difficult but 'boring'. Having provided this detailed description, Matthew dismisses the work as dull, recognizing it as removed from his own concept of what art should be. Matthew is aware of the teacher's expectation of detail in a drawing from observation (commented on in his Year 8 school report). However, the lack of detail in his work, which may be attributed to a lack of concentration and directly connected with dyspraxia (Portwood, 2003), may also be as a result of his lack of investment in the activity. A dislike of this type of art production appears to be inhibiting his engagement, as does his concept of what constitutes art and his unwillingness to engage therefore appears to be epistemological rather than technical. The art examination may be of importance and significance for the teacher's assessment of Matthew's ability and it could be described as acting as a dominant discourse, yet for him the work appears removed from what he would define as artistic activity. This may well be reflected in his mark which in turn may be interpreted by the teacher as the 'inattention' referred to in his report for Year 9. However, there is a further breach in this narrative when the assessment of the activity is taken into consideration. Matthew gained a mark of 75% for this drawing and it seems to have been comparatively successful for him despite his identification of this activity as removed from his own definition of what art should be.

The significance of drawing from observation to Matthew's art education in secondary school is confirmed by the place it has as the main form of examination in Year 7 and Year 8. In Year 9 there was an additional design element to his exam, but pupils were still expected to make a drawing from observation, and this represented 50% of the examination mark. Matthew's experiences appear to reveal an emphasis on drawing from observation, and the role that this has in the examination process is significant in identifying this as a dominant discourse in terms of the role that it has in determining pupil ability. The end of year examination provides a focus for teacher and pupil, acting as a main form of assessment of achievement and ability. The fact that drawing from observation has a role within the system of examination here emphasises the perceived importance it has within the art curriculum. It also emphasises the role that this specific activity has in defining the very nature of the

subject. Knowing in relation to art education appears to be directly connected with regular regulated engagements with observational drawing.

Matthew's experience of art examinations, with an emphasis on drawing from observation, has a key role here indicated by Foucault (1991) in his description of a 'ceremony of power'. Observational drawing is embedded within the social definition of knowledge fully sanctioned and authorised by the examination process (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Foucault continues with his description of the examination as a means of identifying and authenticating knowledge transmission and providing an archive of documentation (in this case Matthew's school reports based on the National Curriculum level descriptors discussed later in this chapter) that can serve to identify and describe the specific aptitudes of individuals in order to situate their levels and abilities. The examination is firmly connected with the process of normalisation as a mode of exploration of difference and a method of documentation of these differences.

Further to this, the examination, with demands for physical control and overt demonstrations of attention, might also be considered in the context of the production of the 'docile' body and the 'ideal' pupil (Foucault, 1991; Graham, 2007). Pupils are required to sit, look and draw. Movement is restricted, as is communication between other pupils, and a space is confirmed for teacher as 'expert', observer and disciplinarian. The examination creates the 'ideal' environment for the concentration and focus required for observational work and the pupils may be more likely to remain compliant since the space is regulated within the official discourse of school examination and reporting.

Referring to Matthew's art subject reports, it is possible to consider the ways in which they reflect the dominance of drawing from observation and contribute to this narrative reading of Matthew's case. The school reports provide an official and expert view of the judgments made on individual attainment, and secure the connection between drawing from observation as an authorised tool within the processes for determining artistic ability.

Year 7 Subject Report for Art and Design:

Subject: art and design	Set: N/A	Attainment: D	Effort: 2	Exam: 50%/D
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The year seven Art and Design course aims to build on existing skills acquired at primary school, initially focusing on developing a greater understanding of the visual language, whilst exploring a variety of media and techniques and the work of artists, craftspeople and designers

Very good A	Good B	Satisfactory C	Below average D	Needs development E
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Observation skills	D
Creative skills	C-
Research and preparation	C

Matthew has worked with interest this year and steady progress has been made. He has demonstrated some competence in the use of media and techniques, however, projects frequently lacked detail, and help was needed to achieve depth in his artwork. He has been positive in classroom discussions, sometimes giving answers which displayed both knowledge and understanding. He must now aim to build on the new skills learnt this year.

There are limitations on what reports can convey as brief summaries or generalizations, yet they can become a reification of concepts of ability. Although the work of other artists (designers and craftspeople) is referred to, there is a definite emphasis on skills development and this exists within a concept of age related development. The suggestion is that a foundation of skills will have been laid to be built on in the secondary context via the use of a range of media and techniques. Matthew's progress in year 7 is discussed specifically within the skills based discourse outlined in the curriculum content, and the teacher's comment in the second section emphasises the priority given to the development of these technical skills.

Of further interest is the apparent weighting given to observation skills. Although Matthew scored a C- and C for creative skills and research and preparation respectively, he gained a D for his observation skills apparently based on the mark of 50% that he gained for his exam drawing, and he ultimately received a D for his overall subject grade. A point of interest is the way that observation is identified as a discrete skill and the apparent dominance this had in the teacher's overall grading of Matthew's ability. Drawing from observation could be described as a means by which Matthew, working below an average standard, is defined as less than satisfactory or working below the expectation for the 'norm'. Although he is able to demonstrate understanding, a lack of detail and depth is an area for development. He is removed from a 'centre' of practice, defined as less than satisfactory, based on his performance in relation to drawing from observation and more particularly on an insufficiency of detail. The drawing (Fig. 2) is produced in deliberate, broken



Figure 2. Matthew's Year 7 exam - observational drawing of a trainer.

lines and lacks the detail of fastenings, for example, although it is difficult to know the reason for this. If the drawing was done as a time bound activity, it may be incomplete. Lack of detail is highlighted within his reports for Year 7 and Year 8 as an aspect of his work that needs improvement. This emphasis on detail becomes accepted as a means of demonstrating ‘finishedness’ as an ideal characteristic of a drawing.

Included in a folder of drawings was an observed pencil drawing of a plant form (Fig. 3) drawn in heavy outline and shaded. The drawing is made with a good deal of pressure with the feel of the pencil marks deep into the surface of the paper. The ghosts of previous drawings are apparent on the page, since it seemed that they could not be fully erased. This observed drawing could be described as offering a breach from the light, sensitive and fluent marks associated with ‘the skilful hand’ discussed in Chapter 5.

Matthew’s art folder also showed a focus on the development of technical skills, with tonal exercises and the depiction of solids as an example of this (Fig. 4). Matthew commented on having particular difficulty with getting a range of tones with a biro and on the heavy area of dark shading on the sphere and this was some of the first work produced by Matthew in Year 7. Those done in biro could not be erased but here it was the medium that appeared particularly problematic in terms of the way a range of tones could be achieved.

Bourdieu’s antagonistic adjectives offer a useful means of reflecting on these drawings and the way in which they may be read as ‘free’ or ‘forced’ as ‘*coarse (heavy, fat, crude, brutal)*’, ‘*light (subtle, lively, sharp, adroit)*’ and ‘*heavy (slow thick, blunt, laborious, clumsy)*’. His teacher however notes that he has ‘some competence’ and the overriding concern is with detail. The aesthetic dimensions suggested by Bourdieu appear either irrelevant or invisible, possibly obscured by Matthew’s



Figure 3. An observed drawing of a plant form.

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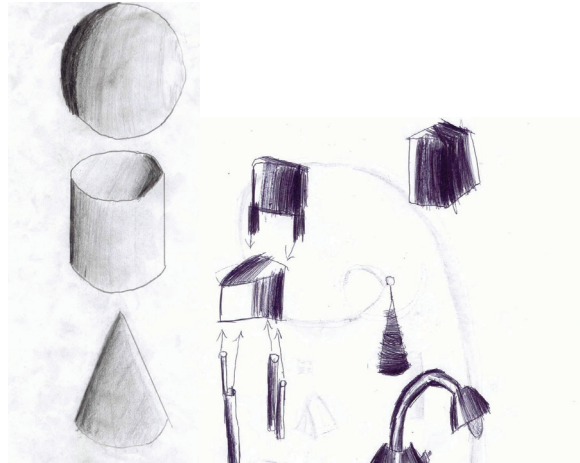


Figure 4. Tonal exercises produced early in Year 7. The drawing on the right was the first piece of work produced by Matthew after his move to secondary school.

positive attitude and level of interest. Matthew's acknowledgement of this struggle to achieve a range of tonal values, with the biro particularly, mark these drawings as labored rather than subtle and lively. The drawings appear to reflect a physical struggle focused on the use of a particular media.

His report for year 8 confirms the staged building of skills from year 7, but now with a broadening of media and techniques, suggesting that Matthew has learnt specific skills and can apply this learning to an increasing range of applications. His year 8 examination, the drawing from observation discussed earlier, appears to have been successful, which perhaps accounts for the shift in grading from a D to a C in this area of his work. Although Matthew still needs to improve 'depth and detail' in his work, he appears to be making progress. The format of this report is slightly different, now including a National Curriculum level indicator, but there is the same emphasis on observation skills, and he appears to have made some progress in this area gaining a C, which marks him out as satisfactory in this aspect of his work. The Year 9 report also included here offers a further opportunity to consider the central role of observation as an essential skill prior to studying at GCSE in Year 10.

Year 8 Report for Art and Design:

Attainment: 4b Effort: 2 Exam Mark %: 75

Subject Outline:

The year eight Art and Design course aims to extend and build on the knowledge and skills acquired in year seven, whilst continuing to explore a wider variety of media and techniques. The projects set, aim to be a little more challenging and will continue to encourage pupils to appreciate and be informed by, the work of artists craftspeople and designers.

	A – Very good	B – Good	C - Average	D – Below average	E – Needs development
Observation skills			*		
Creative skills			*		
Research & Preparation				*	

Teacher’s Comment on pupil’s progress:

Matthew has generally worked with enthusiasm and made pleasing progress this year. He has been receptive to using new media and techniques but sometimes found difficulty gaining depth and detail in his work. He has worked hard and often to the best of his ability. Classwork was often better than homework.

Area(s) for further development:

Try to be a little more organised in your approach to research and preparation. Aim to spend full and quality time on homework.

Year 9 Report for Art and Design:

The year nine Art and Design course aims to extend and build on the skills acquired in years seven and eight, expectations are higher, in preparation for GCSE and end of KS 3 assessment levels.

	1–5
Attitude	2
Behaviour	2
Organisation	3
Presentation	2
Homework	3

	A (V Good)	B (Good)	C (Av)	D (Below Av)	E (Needs Development)
Observation skills			*		
Creative skills			*		
Research & preparation			*		

Teacher’s Comment on pupil’s progress:

Matthew has worked well in most areas competently using a range of media and techniques to express his ideas in both 2 and 3 dimensions. Homework has varied and some projects lacked thorough preparation. He has responded well to most of tasks set the results were of a reasonable standard when he was focused. At times inattention has resulted in a degree of underachievement.

Area(s) for further development:

Aim to be more consistent

Aim to focus more fully

Matthew's subject report in Year 9 provides a similar subject outline, describing this year as the final part of the preparation of skills before formal qualifications in Year 10. The course is effectively described here as preparation for the examination subject and Year 9 provides a particular focus in terms of the examination structure for reporting at the end of Key Stage 3. As a subject outline, this identifies the incremental nature of the course in that it builds on skills and this is viewed as a preparatory stage for both GCSE and the final assessment for Key Stage 3. Skills are viewed as incremental and chronological and the emphasis is very clearly within the regulatory framework of examination and assessment processes.

The written comments and grades suggest that Matthew has performed at a satisfactory level. It would seem that the work was accessible to him and that he was included in this centre of practice in being marked out as satisfactory, yet he did not achieve the target grade (Level 6) which implies that he has underachieved in this subject or at least worked below that target level. His 'inattention' in class is identified as the main reason for his lack of achievement and, on the numerical table below, it is his organisation and homework that are only satisfactory. It is possible to see Matthew's art performance as de-centred from the norm of a national target for achievement as well as from 'ideal' pupil behaviour in terms of attentiveness and organisation (Graham, 2007). It is interesting that observation skills are identified independently from research, although presumably this could also be considered to be a form of visual research. It is also interesting that 'observation skills' and creative skills are separated within this assessment structure, again prioritising observation as separate from and dominant to other activities.

The comments on the report indicate that Matthew has underachieved and that, with more focus and consistency, he would have done better. Matthew is 'average' at art and design and the improving factor is one of application. In considering the teacher comments, it is useful to revisit Bourdieu's ideas on social and cultural practices where actors are not in a vacuum but set within real social situations and relations (Bourdieu, 1993:6). The art Matthew made was developed under the guise of autonomous and aesthetic production, yet it is described within the socially and culturally defined relationship between pupil and teacher. Matthew's drawing can be viewed, therefore, not as the work of an autonomous being but as the product of the social and cultural practices that position him as a satisfactory pupil and his teacher as one who offers targets for improvement that relate less to the production of art than to the production of the ideal pupil.

Homework and thorough preparation appear to be the main areas for development. In comparison, 'observation skills' are positioned firmly as a teacher directed, classroom-based activity independent from the self-directed research work with which Matthew has not fully engaged. The ten lessons over a five week period spent on the observed drawing in Year 8 confirm the centrality of this to the Key Stage 3 curriculum at Matthew's school. The development of observation as a skill is regulated

within the teacher-led domain with greater control over levels of participation than could be afforded if it was situated as homework.

The positioning of observational drawing as a central aspect for assessment and reporting locates it as a technology for normalisation (Foucault, 1991), since pupil performance can be identified as below or above average. The further reference to national curriculum levels in his Year 8 and Year 9 reports identifies a national expectation that Matthew does not meet, yet there is nothing that connects his below average performance with dyspraxia. Matthew appears 'normal' in terms of his art assessment yet this normalisation eliminates him from being 'good' at art. His average ability in drawing from observation, recorded in Year 8 and Year 9, normalise him within a 'satisfactory' average, yet he excludes himself in a later confirmation that his work is not exceptional. In his discussion of his own perceptions of ability, it is this exceptional ability across a range of activities that assures 'meaningful' participation. Those who are defined as average are excluded in this circumstance and it is the abnormal as exceptional who become 'authentic' participants defined by a particular talent. Eisner (1972) acknowledges the singularly problematic relationship between visual arts education and concepts of talent. Matthew recognises drawing from observation as a central element in defining such concepts of exceptional ability.

Matthew's reflections on his ability can be viewed in terms of this comparison between him and his teacher but also between him and others in his class. However, their comparative ability appears to be based on levels of technical skill rather than ideas and imagination, for example.

Claire: So how would you rate yourself
you seem to quite enjoy your art and design work but you were saying that
it's not something that you'd want to pick in your options why don't you
think that you'd...

Matthew: Because erm
It's not like one of my best subjects
I enjoy it sometimes but it's not one of my best subjects
I'm not that good at it but I enjoy it

Claire: Why don't you think you're that good?

Matthew: I don't really get that good marks and stuff and then
I'm not very good at actual observation drawings and stuff
but I like
I don't mind drawing like in my own time

Claire: So who do you think is the best at drawing in your class?

Matthew: Kev.

Claire: Why?

Matthew: He's got a really good imagination and he's really skilled at drawing.

Claire: But obviously you've got a good imagination.

Matthew: I've got the imagination
but I'm not that good at drawing

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Claire: Why don't you think...

Matthew: I don't know

I'm good at doing stuff like that (referring to Fig. 5)

but I'm not very good at drawing things like that (referring to Fig. 4).

Claire: And do you think you have to be good at both those things?

Matthew: Yes

because like shading and stuff that's what she really marks you on not your imagination.

Matthew's concept of his ability in relation to art production relates specifically to the way his work is assessed and, although he enjoys the subject, his and the judgments of others, become the dominant feature. Within his perception of his lack of ability is the space that drawing from observation occupies. Drawings developed from the imagination appear to have less significance for Matthew in this comparison of his own ability with that of 'Kev', but this is set within the context of the assessment system. He suggests that observational exercises are aspects that he is not good at. While it is possible that he identifies this specifically because of the focus of my research, observational drawing does appear to have been at the centre of his secondary art education.

This narrative theme identifies drawing from observation as a dominant discourse within Matthew's experiences but could relate to the experiences of any pupil. There appears to be no connection here with a 'dyspraxic' experience and no discussion of any particular difficulties. Matthew appears to have participated fully with this activity and has been recognized as largely 'average' via the employment of observational drawing as a technology for determining pupil ability.

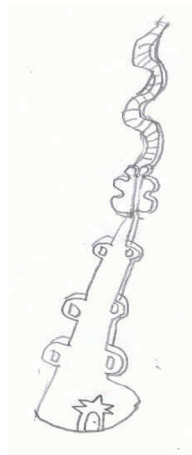


Figure 5. Building drawing developed as a 'doodle'.

Matthew's description of work produced from his imagination offers a useful point for contrast with his observational drawing experience:

We were asked to make just like a doodle thing and make interesting shapes and stuff
 I didn't know I could actually draw but it came out pretty well
 I thought it was going to look really bad
 but it actually came out alright.
 Well at the minute we've got three watches to do and ones drawing like a proper picture and ones like drawing a repeat design so you get tracing paper but
 trace like a pattern type of thing then like flip it over and do it again then go over it that makes a repeat pattern and then
 the other one we're doing is like a doodle with fine liners so that one looks pretty good

Matthew enjoys drawing these 'doodles' (e.g. [Fig. 5](#)) or drawings from his imagination. In his previous comments he describes drawing from observation as removed from his concept of art since it is representing something that is already there. The imaginative drawings are more appealing to him possibly because he enjoys producing them. The doodles appear to be successful but may be perceived to be of less worth. Presumably these drawings would be assessed as showing the development of 'creative skills' yet their role is less well defined than the drawings from observation which have a confirmed status within the curriculum.

The sense of easy enjoyment rather than disciplined application locates the 'doodles' within the domain of the facile and suggests that they may have less value for Matthew and within the educational structures in school (Bourdieu, 1984:486). The amount of concentrated time allocated to the observational drawing exam, compared with the rapid production of these images, contribute to this perception of a lack of value. The choice of the word 'doodle' locates this type of drawing in a more playful domain than the rigorous observed drawing, although it could be argued that both ways of working have a place within art traditions. Observational practice appears to be a dominant factor in determining the level of artistic ability and is suitably prioritised within the curriculum and the assessment process. In contrast, Matthew's views on drawing from observation ('I don't really think it's that artistic - it's drawing something else that's there, your not like using your imagination...it just doesn't feel like your work...') are lost, buried and therefore subjugated as, in Foucauldian terms, 'naïve knowledge' lacking any authority or basis (Foucault, 1980:82). It could be argued that Matthew's enjoyment of this type of drawing activity also represents a form of subjugated knowledge. He later acknowledged that, although he felt pleased with these drawings, he was aware that he also needs to be able to draw representational images from observation in order to be considered 'good' at art. Matthews (2003:101) discussion of the lack of value placed on spontaneous visual representation and expression seems particularly relevant to what Matthew was acknowledging here and to this narrative of observational drawing as a dominant and regulatory discourse.

‘COCK A LA DOODLE EE DOING:
OCULARCENTRIC REPRESENTATIONS OF DIRECT EXPERIENCE

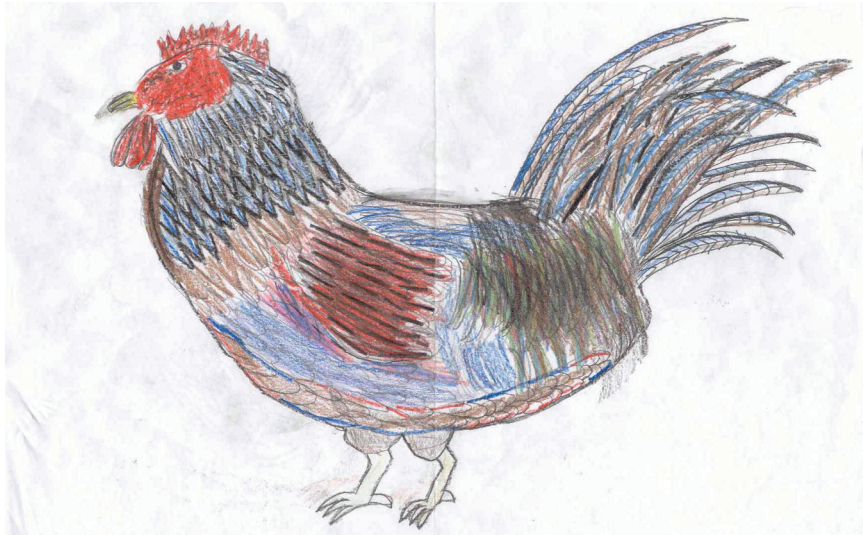


Figure 6. Matthew's observational drawing of a cockerel.

The cockerel drawing (Fig. 6) was volunteered at my first meeting with Matthew and there was a real sense of pride that was shared by his mother and father who all agreed that it reflected an improvement in Matthew's drawing. I recalled in my research notes:

Cockerel drawing – a pencil drawing with coloured pencil, drawn from a secondary source, no background, but highly detailed. Mum later said 'Did you show Claire the cockerel drawing' and all agreed that it was a really good piece of work. Mum suggested that it demonstrated a real improvement in his drawing skills.

This is the first point of discussion since the drawing was heralded by Matthew's mum as a sign of progress and the best piece of work he had done. It is therefore possible to identify the drawing as a breach in the narrative of parental expectation related to Matthew's poor performance in art, recounted in earlier discussions with his father. The drawing of the cockerel was identified as a point of departure and evidence of his developing ability and therefore a comparatively positive observational drawing experience.

My own reaction to this drawing is interesting however, since I had assumed that it had been made from a secondary source such as a photograph or another drawing rather than the direct observation of a bird. I was surprised that he had experienced drawing the cockerel from direct experience but was also conscious that I was making a judgement on the quality of the image. My notes related to my judgements

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regarding the validity of particular drawing responses and reflected my beliefs that a drawing from a secondary source was of less value than a drawing from direct observation. I brought this belief about the drawing to the second meeting and there was a further breach therefore in terms of my own expectations and the way in which the drawing had been produced. Matthew showed me the drawing again offering an explanation:

Matthew: It's supposed to be a cockerel.

Claire: Yes I know
I remember you doing that
It was really detailed.
so I wondered if we could just look at your drawings and if you could just talk through
I know that you already did this last time
but just talk through how you did the drawings and just how you went about making the drawings really...
Matthew: Of the cockerel?

Claire: Yeah and then we could look at the other drawings as well.
Cos I remember that you were doing these weren't you?
You were going to use small sections of those to do some design work.

Matthew: Yeah
for the cockerel what we did we had to make sure that we had the right body shape so its supposed to be like
kind of like a heart type thing on the side
and then we had to make sure we had all the feathers in the right place
What we had to get ideas about how
where the feathers were going to go
we had two cockerels in the back of the room so like we could go

Claire: What real ones?

Matthew: Yeah

Claire: Stuffed ones?
Matthew: No they weren't stuffed they were actually
because one of our supply teachers like
she's got a farm type of thing with birds and so she brought two cockerels in

Claire: Oh wow.
that's fantastic
so did you make this from other drawings of a cockerel?

Matthew: No.
we researched cockerels
we got some pictures of cockerels to try and help us and we just had to draw it from side on and then we kind of made our own feather designs and stuff

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we could only use certain colours cos like you can't have any random funky colour pink cockerels
so we could only use like a brown
dark blue
dark green
red and some others

Claire: So how did you use looking at the cockerels?

Matthew: Well we'd use it for certain feathers

like for the wing feathers

we'd see how they're shaped and then like how they're positioned like next to each other

Claire: So was it easier to get that sort of information from looking at them

Matthew: It's easier than getting it from a picture.

Claire: Right yeah why's that d'you think?

Matthew: Probably cos like it's easier to see it in real life

cos it's harder to see where their actual wing bone and stuff is on that (pointing to a small internet picture of a cockerel) but if you look at a real cockerel you can see where it is.

Claire: Right excellent

I didn't realise that they had brought the cockerels in

so what was it like?

can you just say what it was like in the classroom on that day then

Matthew: Noisy.

we've got

our art department has like

we've got stairs

there's one upstairs and one down stairs and then there was two upstairs and two downstairs and then like they were all cock a la doodle ee doing each other ...

Claire: Were they?

that's crazy

so did they keep them in...

Matthew: no they took them home

They took them home after

they were in like a small cage

Claire: That's incredible that

I thought that you'd done that just from using other drawings.

The story he told about making the cockerel drawing provided an interesting justification for the role of drawing from direct observation and the value that this might have for providing a rich multi-sensory experience. Matthew appears convinced of

the value of working directly from the cockerel, identifying that this allowed him to see and understand how parts of the cockerel fitted together, an aspect that might be difficult to understand in a flattened photograph. Matthew describes how he was able to observe and use information and commented on the way the drawing process was complimented by the use of secondary source materials.

The activity underlines the primacy of the visual experience. Matthew implies that one aim of producing the drawing was to reproduce a naturalistic image of the bird. The observation of the live cockerel offers an external referent for Matthew in order to compare his drawing in terms of anatomical ‘correctness’, when he talks about getting the ‘right’ shape. He observes the colours and the form and uses this information in his work, yet Matthew’s description of the noise, with the cockerels *‘all cock a la doodle ee doing each other’* evokes a memory of the whole experience and this was reflected in the way he spoke about this as a humorous anecdote. Employing a narrative reading, Matthew’s response and the drawing, offer the potential to consider the breach between an emphasis placed on the visual representation in comparison to the rich multi-sensory description of the scenario. I detected a sense of enjoyment of this novel experience and the finished product, the drawing, was only one aspect of this series of lessons, yet the mark that this would receive from the teacher would have been based entirely on the visual representation. The drawing from observation is removed from the lively, vibrant, comical description offered by Matthew and offers a reading of an ocularcentric learning experience.

Matthew experienced drawing from observation as a useful and stimulating activity, yet his recollection could belong to any member of the class. His description and the drawing produced do not mark him out for particular consideration in relation to issues related to concentration or coordination and speak more of a shared remarkable event than a specifically dyspraxic drawing experience. This narrative emphasises the space between direct experience and observational drawing, confirming the gap between the event and the representation. In terms of Matthew’s drawing performance and his parents shared concepts of his ‘ability’ in art, the drawing suggests a closing of the gap as evidence that he has begun to make progress.

Observation, representation and perceptions of teacher expectation Matthew frequently refers to his art teacher negatively, discussing the expectations that the teacher has about art production, specifically in relation to her own ‘expert’ drawing ability. When asked how the teacher marked his drawing, Matthew suggested that the decisions were based on concepts of technical skill but also on a highly subjective decision about ‘how it looks’:

they mark it on accuracy, erm
 then skill used
 and then just how it looks
 the thing is she
 the really annoying thing is that she expects everyone to draw as good
 as her
 say it was like a really good drawing but it’s not as good as hers then
 you’re not going to get a really good mark

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Matthew identifies his teacher as good at drawing, but this level of skill is described in negative terms since it provides an unfavourable source for comparison - an ideal that might never be attained. The art teacher needs to be able to work as a convincing practitioner, yet this can also cause tensions within the art room where issues of 'talent' create a breach between pupil and teacher performance. Matthew referred specifically to an example of an observational drawing to explain his point:

this girl called Hannah in year 7
when we were drawing the trainer
do you know how you get running trainers and you've got a bit of material
where it like laps over each other?
it's got like two materials on?
well she'd drawn one of them and it looked **really** (Matthew's emphasis)
good and then she (the art teacher) gave that it wasn't that good and she
needs to put more shading and stuff into it
it was actually like a really good picture but 'cos it wasn't as good as hers
that it's not a good picture

When Matthew talks about the way work is marked, he relates it to a piece of representational observational drawing. His own description of the quality of Hannah's drawing is based on the way she was able to represent the overlapping fabric on the shoe, and he tells this story to emphasise the impression he has of the 'quality' of this drawing. The twist in the tale comes as Matthew suggests a sense of unfairness in the way the teacher marks and comments on this work. Matthew describes Hannah's work as 'really' good because she is able to represent certain features, but the teacher's role is brought into question here when Matthew identifies her as the arbiter of a certain concept of quality. Matthew's perception is that the teacher's decision is based on her own levels of drawing skill.

Matthew's description of this episode places skill levels and representation at the heart of drawing. He describes in detail why he felt the drawing was good, by indicating the nature of the representation. There appears to be no sense of mystery to the marking process and Matthew is quite clear that accuracy and levels of skill used are but he also refers to the catchall phrase indicating that the work is marked on 'how it looks'. There is a sense here that such decisions based on hegemonic forms of representation and visuality are acknowledged as subjective (Atkinson, 2001).

The power relationship between Matthew, his peers and the teacher is significant in his view of how work is marked and the role of pedagogic language within the development of these relationships (Bourdieu, Passeron and Saint Martin, 1996). The role that these players have within this Foucauldian 'field of power' (McHoul and Grace, 1993:21) reinforces the ways in which teacher and pupil co-construct these relationships. Here drawing from observation provides a clear point for comparison between levels of ability which define pupil and teacher within the discipline.

Power is located with the teacher not only because of her role but also, interestingly, because of her level of technical ability which Matthew assumes creates a negative relationship between her and the way she views the work of others. This relationship is based on a hierarchical and competitive concept of ability.

Matthew's perception is that because she has a good level of technical ability others are deemed to be less capable. It appears to be acceptable that Matthew can recognise another pupil as 'elite artist', yet the art teacher's role as 'elite practitioner' results in a degree of resentment since her comments on the elite students work appears to be an attempt to undermine the pupil's status.

THE 'GAPING MAW'

Matthew is de-centered from the norms of participation in the English (subject) curriculum as a result of his technical difficulties with handwriting. Although Matthew's 'dyspraxic' experiences were not directly apparent in terms of his art and design education, they were significant in this 'dominant' curriculum area. The physical aspects of handwriting were of particular concern, and his performance in this subject dominated early discussion. Although this might appear insignificant in terms of the research relating to drawing from observation, it is highly significant in the way Matthew experienced his art education. Within the lexically dominant curriculum, English was a point of conflict and tension (between Matthew and his teacher, teacher and parents, and parent, Matthew and school) as a result of Matthew's difficulty with handwriting, and this dominated his school experience. In terms of Matthew's narrative in the context of inclusion, this was a very significant point and to ignore it would be akin to treating Little Red Riding Hood as a story about a child with a red coat, ignoring the presence of the wolf behind the tree. Matthew's experiences of English present a definite breach in concepts of performance and ability, the dyspraxic ideal and ideal learner behaviour. This was such a dramatic and significant part of the narrative, that any discussion of his experiences of art and drawing from observation can only remain a sub-plot.

In terms of the 'dyspraxic ideal', there is a significant breach between the ideal pupil, Matthew's cognitive abilities and his technical ability via his handwriting. Matthew has a reading age of 17+ but is placed in set 4 for English because he has difficulty writing quickly and for sustained periods of time, impacting on his examination performance. As a result of a sense of injustice, there are points of conflict with his teacher and his mother regularly intervenes. Although he can sometimes use a keyboard he has been told that he must improve his handwriting by practice. As a result of being in set 4, he will only be allowed to study English Language rather than Literature and Language. He is excluded from the full curriculum as a result of the technical emphasis on handwriting rather than his cognitive abilities. Handwriting operates as a technology employed within the examination processes as well as a technology for normalisation. Matthew's learning is identified as problematic because of his inability to master this particular technology. His observational drawing experiences slip into the gaping chasm of this dominant breach by which Matthew is excluded from aspects of schooling reserved for those capable of high levels of academic performance and the ability to write quickly and fluently by hand.

Matthew did not choose to study art beyond Year 9. He devours novels and performs well academically in mathematics and languages and has gained a place

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on an engineering course with the possible prospect of a future apprenticeship. It could be argued that his story resonates with a description of a process of self-elimination whereby individuals remove themselves from an engagement with assessment through fear of being unable to meet expectations (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). The UK system of opting for preferred subjects for examination presents a ready-made opportunity for avoidance or self-elimination. It is interesting to note that only a few subjects can be eliminated from pupil choice at the point of 'options'. Other areas for study remain core to the curriculum but art is one of those subjects that can be easily excluded. Matthew acknowledged his own lack of talent and referred specifically to drawing from observation but also his ability to produce tonal exercises to a good enough standard. Matthew appears to have a satisfactory level of ability in the subject yet this is evidence of a lack of a particular talent. In terms of his dyspraxic experience, it may be that insufficient detail and a lack of coordination, evident in the difficulty he acknowledged in assessing pressure, contributes to his sense that art is a subject at which he does not excel yet it is difficult to make a clear connection. What is evident is that Matthew does not consider himself to be included in an exclusive 'centre' of talent and he contributes to his own exclusion by his adherence to what counts as 'art'. Drawing from observation appears to play a significant part in the way he defines his ability and the relevance of art as a school subject for him. The contribution that this makes to his dyspraxic learner identity is occluded by the emphasis on literacy and more specifically handwriting as a dominant skill in his compulsory secondary education.