Chapter IV

Educational Connoisseurship

Reality is an infinite succession of steps [and] levels of perception. A lily is more real to a naturalist than it is to the ordinary person. But it is still more real to the botanist. And yet another stage of reality is reached with that botanist who is a specialist in lilies.

Vladimir Nabokov

The Meaning of Connoisseurship

The preceding chapters assigned to perception a central role in our knowledge of the world. Perception manifests itself in experience and is a function of the transactions between the qualities of the environment and what we bring to those qualities. The character of that experience is in large measure influenced by our ability to differentiate among the qualities we attend to.

The ability to make fine-grained discriminations among complex and subtle qualities is an instance of what I have called connoisseurship (Eisner, 1976, 1985b). Connoisseurship is the art of appreciation. It can be displayed in any realm in which the character, import, or value of objects, situations, and performances is distributed and variable, including educational practice.

The focus of this chapter is upon connoisseurship as it applies to teaching, curriculum, and schooling generally. But before addressing educational matters, I will examine connoisseurship as a process. For this purpose there is no better subject than the connoisseurship of wine.

Again, I must beg readers' patience in what might seem like a tangent into an unrelated area. This book is built upon methods that pay close attention to the subtleties of qualitative experience, and wine serves well to illustrate these methods. I hope that understanding how connoisseurship applies to wine will help build a foundation for understanding its role in the perception of educational practice.

What is it to be a wine connoisseur? Certain requirements appear obvious. First, one needs access to wine and the ability to taste it. But tasting wine—by which I mean experiencing its visual, olfactory, and gustatory qualities—is not simply a matter of putting some wine into one's
mound. It is a matter of noticing, and noticing requires perceptivity. Perceptivity is the ability to differentiate and to experience the relationships between, say, one gustatory quality in the wine and others. Like the interplay of sounds in a symphonic score, to experience wine is to experience an interplay of qualitative relationships.

Second, wine connoisseurship requires an awareness of not only qualities of taste but also qualities of appearance and smell. The color at the edge of a red wine when the glass is tipped is indicative of its age; the browner it is, the older. The way in which it is "legs" hang on the inside of the glass says something about its body. The perfume or nose of a wine is another quality that counts. These qualities and others constitute the features of wine that provide potential experience. I say "potential" because whether we can in fact experience the wine's perfume, for example, depends on both the presence of perfume in the wine and our ability to notice it. Experiencing this transaction is a manifestation of qualitative intelligence (Ecker, 1963). Connoisseurship depends on high levels of qualitative intelligence in the domain in which it operates.

Third, wine connoisseurship depends upon the ability to experience those qualities as a sample of a larger set of qualities: it is not "simply" a matter of sensory differentiation.

One kind of tasting focuses upon the quality of qualities per se. We taste a certain sweetness or fruitiness in a white wine. We experience its qualities. We know what experience it yields. We notice its effects on the inside of our mouth—we might describe one white wine as round, full, and buttery, another as sharp, light, and dry. What we know through the qualitative distinctions we are able to make pertains to qualities experienced. What we may or may not know is that one wine is a Sauvignon while the other is a Chardonnay. If we know that one is a Sauvignon and the other a Chardonnay, we know more than the qualities of each wine—we also know that each is a sample of a larger class.

Because wines (like children) are never identical, we are able to place each wine within the class it represents, and also to assign it a position among the wines within that class. To do so we need a concept of what Sauvignons and Chardonnays, in general, taste like; further, we need to remember the differences among particular Sauvignons and Chardonnays we have tasted. We need a gustatory memory. The ability to differentiate and remember enables us to form the gustatory concepts to which the words Sauvignon and Chardonnay refer.

The Utilities of Antecedent Knowledge

Our connoisseurship of wine is influenced by more than our ability to differentiate the subtle and complex qualities of wine we taste and to
compare them in our sensory memory with other wines tasted. It is also
influenced by our understanding of the conditions that give rise to these
qualities. Knowing how a Sauternes is made—the kind of grapes used, the
time at which the grapes are harvested, the manner in which the grapes are
pressed and processed—contributes to our ability to experience the
nuances of wine. Every wine manifests its history. Knowledge of that
history can have a bearing on our ability to experience its qualities. Tokay
grapes have a presence and character that Concord grapes do not possess.
French oak barrels impart a flavor that can be discerned from that of
stainless steel vats. The Sauternes vintages of France possess a style that
differs from those of California. The point is that true connoisseurship
includes the ability not only to experience qualities, but to experience
qualities as a case or a symptom of factors that have a bearing upon the
qualities of the wine experienced. Put another way, antecedent factors are
relevant for making sense of the wine. Any wine can be treated as a
symptom or exemplification of those antecedent factors—a wine can
illustrate the effects of using stainless steel in wine making. Knowledge of
antecedent factors can serve as a guide for searching for the qualities of the
wine to be experienced. Which of these we emphasize depends upon what
we wish to use the experience for.

The development of the palate is fostered in other ways as well. Knowing
that cooperers use different kinds of wood in the construction of barrels alerts one to taste for the qualities that different woods confer upon
the wine. Cooperers also "toast" the inside of the barrel with a small fire. The
extent to which the barrel has been toasted—light, medium, dark— influences the taste of the wine. Connoisseurs of wine can note these
differences, and wine makers bring such factors under control in the
wine-making process. Furthermore, connoisseurship enables wine makers
to adjust that process on the basis of anticipated taste. That is, wine makers
are interested in the wine's taste potential, and they judge this potential on the
basis of what the wine tastes like before it is ready to drink.

One final point regarding the art of wine making and its relationship
with connoisseurship in general. Wineologists now are highly trained in the
chemistry and science of making wine, yet in the end, the making of wine
is an art. It is an art because the quality of wine depends on someone's
being able to (1) experience the qualitative nuances of wine and (2) make
judgments about the virtue of the qualities experienced. Even a recipe or a
formula has its ultimate test in the qualities experienced when the wine is
tasted. In the end, a qualitative experience is the "measure" of wine
quality, and not the formula.

There is no foolproof recipe that can be used to reproduce what has been
produced before. Wine grapes, like children, do not come in standard
forms. The amount of sugar in grapes varies from season to season, from
location to location. Differences in the raw material due to difference in climate from year to year must be taken into account in deciding what to do.

So far, the main focus of this discussion of connoisseurship has been on the appreciation of qualities. In virtually every domain the qualities that participate in some class are varied. The more complex the subject, the wider the array of information we must use. Classrooms are probably one of the most complex subjects of connoisseurship. In classrooms, knowing the history of the situation, something about the teacher and the school, and the values that are regarded as important in the community can help us to notice and to interpret what we have noticed. What we might see and say about a first-year teacher would probably differ considerably from what we would see and say if we knew the teacher was a fifteen-year veteran. If we knew the students in the class had a measured mean IQ of 140, our knowledge would influence what we would look for and how we would regard what we had seen. The point here is not difficult to grasp: it is that our perception and interpretation of events are influenced by a wide range of knowledge we believe to be germane to that classroom or situation. Our ideas about something make a difference in how we regard it (Rosenthal, 1966).

What is germane to a particular classroom is not necessarily limited to knowledge secured solely through observation. Our understanding of theories of teaching and learning, our views of what is important in the educational process, and our image of acceptable teacher-pupil relationships all come to bear upon what we are likely to notice and how we interpret it. The kind of knowledge relevant to the observation of classrooms derives from general knowledge about educational theory and classroom-specific knowledge. In general, as these domains of knowledge expand our awareness of the situation, our experience is likely to be increasingly differentiated.

Readers will note that in the previous sentence I qualified my remarks by the phrase "in general." That is because just as knowledge relevant to a situation can provide a new window through which it can be perceived, knowledge can limit perception as well.

The Liability of Antecedent Knowledge

One of the built-in dilemmas of acculturation is the fact that the language we acquire, our expectations, and the norms that permeate our culture all provide cues that are useful for negotiating the world in which we live. We learn a language that is categorical, and categories frame our perception in particular ways. These categories, moreover, are value laden. We learn to look for those qualities that are labeled, but especially for ones that have particular value for us. If the qualities of snow affect skiing, we develop
diminution of connoisseurship. Not having time to attend carefully, we simply do not see what we have no immediate use for. When our labels and our aims jointly shape our modes of perception, their effects upon perception can become especially limiting. We begin to do the kinds of things we can do with the labels and the theories we know how to use. The more we use these labels and theories, the more we are likely to use them. Familiarity breeds comfort, and the theories we know and use provide a coherent and consistent structure for our relationship to the world.

Epistemic Seeing

The processes of connosseurship I have described can be regarded as examples of epistemic seeing (Dretske, 1969). Episteme refers to knowledge, and epistemic seeing is the kind of knowledge secured through sight. My emphasis on seeing should be regarded as a shorthand way of referring to all of the senses and the qualities to which they are sensitive. Classrooms, like wine, are known by their smell and tactile qualities as well as by their sight. As Jackson (1968) remarked, the smells of chalkdust and stale milk are almost certain signs of an elementary school classroom.

We have seen that awareness of qualities is a primary mode of epistemic seeing; indeed, it is foundational. We must become conscious of qualities before other considerations can be taken into account. Thus, awareness of the qualities of voice, manner, movement, and visual environment, at the very minimum, provides knowledge of those qualities as such. But as I have indicated, those qualities can also be regarded as samples of a larger class. We see something “as.” The lecture is not only a lecture, it is an example of lecturing. By seeing the lecture as belonging to a class, and by seeing the class as a varied array of examples, we can situate any particular lecture in that array. Primary epistemic seeing depends upon awareness of the particular. Secondary epistemic seeing refers to seeing the particular as a member of a larger set.

It is important to note that the term knowledge as I use it here is not limited to true propositions, but includes awareness of an array of qualities. We need not make a statement or claim to know what is before us. And during the course of most of our lives we do not. We not only know more than we can tell, as Polanyi (1967) has said, we tell far less than we know. Our knowing does not depend upon our telling. Our telling is a way of making public what we have come to know. Connosseurship is the means through which we come to know the complexities, nuances, and subtleties of aspects of the world in which we have a special interest.

One aspect of connosseurship is subject to misinterpretation. I said earlier that connosseurship is the art of appreciation. Appreciation is a term that unfortunately is conflated with “a liking for.” There is no necessary relationship between appreciating something and liking it. To appreciate
the qualities of a wine, a book, or a school means to experience the qualities that constitute each and to understand something about them. It also includes making judgments about their value. One can appreciate the weakness of an argument, a teacher, or a poem as well as their strengths. Nothing in connoisseurship as a form of appreciation requires that our judgments be positive. What is required (or desired) is that our experience be complex, subtle, and informed.

To some degree all people have some degree of connoisseurship in some areas of life. In virtually all cases, however, the level of their connoisseurship can be raised through tuition. Teachers of literature can help people learn how to read a novel, indeed to learn the several ways in which a novel can be read. Coaches help players learn how to read a field of play in motion so that their performance in the game can be more effective. Critics of film and painting help others learn to see what they might otherwise not notice and in the process increase their level of connoisseurship. Members of groups concerned with gender and minority discrimination have helped others appreciate the subtle but significant forms of sexism and racism found in books, newspapers, laws, and other seemingly neutral materials. In the process, people’s consciousness is raised, and they become more able to notice and respond to such material.

To appreciate a racist comment is not to say that one likes it, but rather to recognize it. Again, the seeing is epistemic.

In its customary mode connoisseurship is concerned with matters of quality, in the sense of value. Connoisseurs of wine, of art, of cabinetry are typically those who can discern the value of what they attend to. They can often provide reasons for their judgments.

Concern with the value of student and teacher performance in educational settings has been important and strong. We want to know about the quality (value) of education that children are receiving.

Judgments concerning quality depend upon memory or what Brody (1987) has called our “imagic store.” Refined sensibilities allow us to make fine-grained discriminations from which concepts may be formed. These concepts are images that are construed from our experience with qualities. For example, we have an auditory image of Baroque music that allows us to distinguish it from Romantic music. We have an image of Gothic architecture that allows us to distinguish it from Georgian architecture. We have an image of cooker spansials that allows us to distinguish them from Great Danes, and so forth. Within any of these images we have a further array of examples that we can order with respect to quality. Dog connoisseurs can distinguish not only between cooker spansials and Great Danes, but between cooker spansials whose features are regarded as excellent and those regarded as mediocre.

Similarly, we have images of forms of teaching, kinds of classroom life, and types of student activity that allow us to distinguish between
degrees of excellence in each. In fact, in a complex act like teaching, there are many, many varieties or genres. What constitutes excellence in one is likely to be different from what makes for excellence in another. The qualities that constitute excellence in a lecture are not identical to those that make for excellence in a discussion. In short, we possess a multitude of images from which we select in order to identify and appraise what we experience. Connoisseurship requires the appropriate application of criteria to the instance. In the field of education, the criteria are far more complex than those employed in judging either works of art or cocker spaniels.

Consider a fairly straightforward example—judging the quality of diving at the Olympics. Here five judges assign a score to the diving performances of a number of divers. The judges know which dive the divers are to perform—say, a half-gainer with a full twist. To perform their role, judges must be able to do three things. First, the judges must see the dive. This requires making a fine-grained visual discrimination. Second, they must place what they have seen within a range of diving performances remembered, one end of which represents the perfect example of a half-gainer with a full twist. Third, the judges must assign to each dive a score on a ten-point scale that signifies the quality of the diver's performance within that distribution. It is in principle possible for each of the ten scores to be referenced in a judge's visual memory of a particular level of performance; in short, each judge may know beforehand what constitutes a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 performance and so on. The judges' task is essentially one of seeing and matching.

Compared to the assessment of teaching, even the judgment of Olympic diving performances is simple. First, there is no single ideal to which a teaching performance can be assigned. The varieties of excellence are numerous, and they relate to differences in form, and to differences with respect to what is valued. Different conceptions of educational virtue lead to different conceptions of virtuous teaching. Further, who is being taught counts in judging how well someone is teaching.

Second, in the Olympics each diver dives into the same water, from the same height, and from the same board. This is not the case in teaching, where virtually everything differs from teacher to teacher. When one considers the antecedent factors that ought to be taken into account in judging teaching, the greater complexities of judging teaching compared to judging diving become especially clear. Furthermore, in evaluating teaching we are seldom concerned with single isolated performances. We are not typically interested in a single group discussion or a one-shot lecture, but in performance within a range of situations over a period of time. Unlike diving, it's not a matter of split-second action. Thus our judgments must take into account not only contingencies related to particular classrooms, but also a series of performances that unfolds during an
extended period. Educational connoisseurs have more, and more complex, factors to consider, than their counterparts on the Olympic diving competition.

**What Educational Connoisseurs Consider**

I have tended to describe educational connoisseurship as if its exclusive focus were upon the teacher. Although teaching is clearly a prime focus for educational connoisseurship, it is far from the only one. In fact, educational connoisseurs extend to everything—almost. That is, they must attend to everything that is relevant either for satisfying a specific educational aim or for illuminating the educational state of affairs in general. For example, textbooks and instructional materials are important candidates for the attention of educational connoisseurs. Since decisions about content inclusion and exclusion are related to what students have an opportunity to learn (Walker & Schafft-Sick, 1972), the examination of the content and form of instructional materials is important. Tests that pose interesting questions, convey a sense of excitement about the subject matter being taught, are appropriately easy to read, and stimulate imagination are likely to be better than materials that do not have these features. To determine that some materials possess these features while others do not is to call upon educational connoisseurship (Vallance, 1975).

Seeing what appears obvious is not always easy. For years textbooks were published that assigned women to roles as nurses, but never as doctors, gave to men the responsibility for important decisions, and to women responsibility for keeping their husbands happy. We now are able to see what in earlier periods we apparently could not see or had no interest in seeing. At present, states like California scrutinize school texts to make sure such muted messages are not among those that children get from state-adopted texts.

How school buildings are designed, we have come to realize, affects how people behave in them. To what extent does the design of a school—or a classroom—facilitate or impede the attainment of the school’s aims? How are classrooms laid out, and what about the design and placement of furniture? Are these conducive to the image of schooling and of the child that the faculty embraces? In a compelling article, Getzels (1974) points out that the shifts in classroom layout were due, in large measure, to shifts in the image of the learner. Consider the change from screwed-down desks to movable ones.

The vision of the learner as an empty organism was transformed into a vision of the learner as an active organism. Learning was conceived of not only as a connective process but as a dynamic cognitive and affective process as well. From this point of view, the learner—not the
teacher—became the center of the learning process. It was the learner rather than the teacher who determined both the stimulus—what was to be learned—and the response—what was learned. Experimentation in the learning laboratory became concerned with the relation between the learner’s personality and his learning, and the teacher in the classroom with the learner’s needs and his adjustment in the learning situation.

It was no accident that the image of the ideal classroom took on a new conformation. The teacher-centered classroom became the pupil-centered classroom. The teacher’s desk was moved from the front of the room to the side, and the pupils’ rigid chairs in straight rows, which had seemed so sensible and practical from the older point of view, became quaint if not primitive objects and were replaced by movable chairs that could be shifted at will according to the needs of the teacher but, even more important, to the needs of the pupil. (p. 532)

Getzel’s points are well taken. For our purposes they explain the importance of discerning how physical features (and organizational ones as well) can affect what we are trying to accomplish. The nineteenth-century classroom with its raised platform upon which the teacher sat behind a large wooden desk and looked down upon pupils, who in turn looked up at the teacher, conveys both symbolically and practically a set of values.

The image of the classroom as a series of desks lined up in rows, six across and eight deep, into which children are pinned like butterflies conveys a very different sense of life and of students’ role than a classroom in which desks are clustered, where students face each other, and in which desks are unevenly distributed throughout the room. Since matters such as these count, educational connoisseurs can acquire knowledge of classrooms by marking the ways in which space is used in them.

School buildings can be designed as egg crates or as large living rooms. The spaces can be regular or irregular. The surfaces can be mechanical or organic. The environment can include growing plants and living animals or can be furnished to meet janitorial needs. “What is it like to be here?” is a nontrivial question that educational connoisseurs might very well ask.

Some Major Dimensions of Schooling

One way to think about the subject matter of educational connoisseurship is to consider the following five dimensions that I believe contribute to what I have called the ecology of schooling (Elstein, 1988). These dimensions are: (1) the intentional, (2) the structural, (3) the curricular, (4) the pedagogical, and (5) the evaluative. Each of these dimensions can be
examined from the standpoint of educational connoisseurship. First, I will
describe each dimension and then provide an example of how it might be
addressed.

The Intentional Dimension

The intentional dimension deals with goals or aims that are formulated
for the school or a classroom. The term intentions designates aims or goals that
are explicitly advocated and publicly announced as well as those that are
actually employed in the classroom. These aims or goals may be general or
specific, and may focus on a wide range of outcomes or on a few. They may
deal with sophisticated modes of cognition or be based upon recall, they
may attend to or neglect affective or attitudinal aspects of student behavior,
they may be educationally trivial or significant. What school districts,
schools, or teachers attempt to accomplish and what they actually do are
important matters, ones that can be the subject of educational connoisseur-
ship. Indeed, the notion of the "hidden curriculum" is predicated on the
importance of the muted messages children receive. Further, appropriate
goals depend on a host of considerations, some of which I identified earlier
in discussing antecedent factors pertaining to judgments about classrooms.

First, there are the questions of who the students are and what is in
their long-term best interest. On such matters there will always be more
than one view (Adler, 1982; Apple, 1982). Then there are matters of
value—abstract values pertaining to general educational goals, and values
that pertain specifically to the various legitimate aims of any subject area.
(There are at least a dozen aims, not just one, for the social studies. Even
math, a subject that is often thought of as relatively standardized, has more
than one defensible version.) Further, there are matters of proportion.
How much attention ought to be devoted to, say, cognitive aims, and how
much to so-called noncognitive aims? Given an aim, how well is it being
achieved? If the aim is educationally questionable or problematic, does it
matter if it is being achieved? Why worry about doing what's not worth
doing?

The difference between intended aims and operationalized aims in a
classroom is of particular importance. A teacher or a school district may
endorse one kind of outcome, but in practice emphasize quite another
(Eisner, 1986). What occurs in practice may be far better than what the
curriculum guide prescribes, or even what the teachers say they aim to
achieve. It can also be worse. The point is that there is often a discrepancy
between what educators say they want to achieve and what they do when
working with students. Students themselves may not understand clearly
what their teachers want to achieve and may have very different goals in
mind. Indeed, a student might know quite well that the teacher's aim was
to get him to understand and enjoy physics, while the student's aim was to be accepted into a selective college. Success at the latter would not necessarily mean achieving the former.

There are numerous ways to think about goals or intentions. One of these pertains to the degree to which they are achieved. Another is whether they are of value. One need not endorse the goals that a teacher values in order to recognize that they are being realized. At the same time, because students attain the goals that a teacher has set does not mean that an educational process has taken place. A painter who sets out to produce a third-rate painting and who succeeds has been successful in doing third-rate work.

The Structural Dimension

A second major area that can be considered by the educational connoisseur is the structural dimension. Dreeben (1968), Apple (1982), and others have pointed out how the organizational forms of schools—how the school day is divided and how subjects are assigned to time blocks— influence what students learn. The educational connoisseur might ask, What are the effects of dividing a school day into nine equal periods of fifty minutes each? Although this form of organizational structure is common in secondary schools, there are other ways to organize time.

The structure of an organization typically has persistent features. Unlike the topics that students study, which can change within days or weeks, the school's organizational structure is encountered daily for years. Because the structures people operate within influence many aspects of their lives, their importance can be profound. Roger Barker's work in ecological psychology (1968) is especially articulate in making this point.

Consider the way in which we organize high schools. It seems rational to divide the high school day into equal units, and to assign teachers, subjects, and students to each unit. The day is uniformly divided so that at any given time one can know just who is where doing what. Yet this order has other consequences as well. Students in high school move every fifty minutes, seven times a day. They have about six minutes to get from one location to another. When a secondary school has fifteen hundred or more students, the movement between classes is reminiscent of a game of musical chairs or a moving conveyor belt. Punctuality is important. It becomes necessary for students to turn their attention on and off on the basis of clock time, rather than psychological time. Shifting cognitive gears from math to history, from history to science, from science to art, from art to French, from French to physical education is something that students must learn to do—or at least to appear to do.

Not all of these requirements, which are a function of the way in which we have decided to organize schools, are deleterious. An educa-
tional connoisseur can note which are and are not conducive to the attainment of a given set of educational values. What does such an organizational scheme mean for teachers' preparation? How does it affect their ability to get to know the students they teach? What does it imply for the planning of lessons? What does it mean for building relationships across subject areas? Must schools be organized into such finite blocks? What are the alternatives? Must students move? Why not have teachers move and students remain stable, rather than the other way around?

Understanding the influence of an organizational structure in schools provides a basis for considering its utilities and liabilities, its benefits and costs. It allows us to consider other ways of doing things.

Another organizational structure that has had an important influence on schools, as Goodlad and Anderson point out (1999), is the graded structure of elementary schools. If schools have grades and if each grade has a content to be taught and learned, then a student who already knows the content of the next grade should be "double promoted," a practice that has been widely employed in American schools. Conversely, a student who has not learned the content of the grade by the end of a school year should repeat the grade, another practice widely employed in American schools. Are these practices, which appear to flow logically from a graded school structure, consistent with what is known about the variability of children's development? What does a graded school structure do to both students' and teachers' conceptions of educational progress? Is education mainly concerned with teaching students a graded body of content? What happens to children who repeat grades? Do they prosper?

Educational connoisseurs focused upon the structural aspects of schooling would note how the organizational envelope we have designed affect how education occurs. Schools, like hospitals, factories, and prisons, have a unique virtue they seek to attain. In what ways does the organizational structure of our schools and our classrooms facilitate their attainment?

The Curricular Dimension

The curricular dimension is another important area for the educational connoisseur to consider. One of the most important aspects of connoisseurship focuses upon the quality of the curriculum's content and goals and the activities employed to engage students in it. To make judgments about the significance of content, one must know the content being taught and the alternatives to that content within the field. Is this content up-to-date? From a disciplinary perspective, is it important? How is it being interpreted by the teacher and understood by the students? And what about the means through which this content is encountered? Do the activities engage students? Do they elicit higher order thinking? Is the
content being taught and learned in ways that enable students to apply it or to perceive its relevance to matters outside the subject? What is the connection between this subject and other subjects? For another way, what is the degree of boundary strength (Bernstein, 1971) between subjects? Is this curriculum, as the British sociologist Basil Bernstein (1977) would say, an integrated or a collection-type curriculum? Who frames the activities: the teacher, the student, the curriculum guide? And is there continuity between activities? Is the curriculum a series of individual events and activities, or are relationships drawn among the content areas students study? Does this curriculum afford students opportunities to practice the skills they have learned, or are these skills left to atrophy after they have been introduced?

Decisions about curriculum teach students many important things besides the content. For instance, students learn quickly what adults believe is important for them to learn. This message is conveyed in several ways; among the most important is the amount of time allocated to subjects. We assign time to what is regarded as important (Bernstein, 1971). Another is grading practices. What is graded counts—for both teachers and students. “Minor” subjects receive less time and are less likely to be graded or tested. As these allocations are made, a sociology of knowledge emerges in the school. The curriculum becomes both a means for developing modes of thought and a symbolic structure that defines a hierarchy of values for the young. What does this hierarchy teach the young? What kinds of thinking does the curriculum evoke and practice? What does it neglect? And what, if anything, does such neglect mean for the kinds of minds children are likely to develop? What will they have knowledge of, and what is likely to be outside their ken? In what cultural resources will they be able to participate, and which shall be other people’s pleasures?

Consider also the manner in which learning is fostered. Is children’s encounter with the curriculum viewed as one in which children travel alone on their own tracks, pursuing an individualized but personally isolated journey, or as one in which they have opportunities to work with others? Put another way, are the activities used to foster learning mainly individual or cooperative? To what extent is this a one-person race?

The terms I have used—cooperative, race, isolated—are value laden. The values that they imply are not embraced by everyone. I am not suggesting that these particular values should be the ones through which the curriculum is viewed. I do suggest that the value implications of the curriculum should be considered. Which values are used together with educational courseware?

It is important to remember that the features of the curriculum I have described manifest themselves in qualities we can perceive. These qualities, once experienced, can be interpreted. Without consciousness of,
say, the boundary strength of a subject, we cannot consider boundary strength or examine its effects. Learning to see what we have learned not to notice remains one of the most critical and difficult tasks of educational connoisseurs. Everything else rests on it.

The Pedagogical Dimension

The pedagogical dimension is the fourth major area of schooling that can be the focus of educational connoisseurs. It is the one that has received the greatest degree of attention so far. Two points about teaching are particularly relevant to educational connoisseurship. First, virtually all curricula are mediated by a teacher. How that mediation occurs has a substantial bearing on what is being taught and learned. One of the most consistent outcomes of research on teaching is that the "same" curriculum is taught in different ways by different teachers, so that how students experience the curriculum is inextricably related to the way in which it is taught (McCutcheon, 1976; Rubinek, 1962; Hawthorne, 1987). In this sense, the distinction between curriculum and teaching is artificial. One cannot teach nothing to someone. One cannot teach someone nothing.

Second, what students learn in the classroom is never limited to what teachers intend to teach or to curriculum content. As Dewey put it, "it is one of the greatest of educational fallacies to assume that children learn only what they are being taught at the time" (Dewey, 1930). Teachers teach by example, by covert cues, by emphasizing some aspects of content more than others, by rewarding students directly and indirectly, by the animation and excitement they display in class, by the level of affection they provide to students, by the clarity of their explanations, and more. Teachers teach by relying on illustration, using metaphor, employing diagrams and maps, organizing discussions, lecturing, assigning projects, posing questions. Furthermore, these means or resources are used in idiosyncratic ways by individual teachers. The features of their teaching convey their own messages. Educational connoisseurship can address the very qualities of teaching that typically elude standardized observation schedules and standardized achievement tests.

I will make two final comments about educational connoisseurship as applied to teaching, one concerning the importance of the teacher's aims and the relevance of the context in making judgments about what has been seen, the other concerning seeing an instance of teaching as an example of a teaching genre.

First, it is easy to be hard on teachers if one tries to appraise an act of teaching by comparing it to its ideal case. Under these circumstances, almost any teacher will fall short. It is more reasonable not to relinquish ideals, but to moderate them by considering the context in which the teaching occurs and the aims the teacher embraces. Teaching, like life, is
filled with trade-offs. Assessing the quality of the teaching, on balance, considering trade-offs, is more realistic than attempting to match actuality to its ideal. An experienced teacher working with a "difficult" class might have to use approaches that from one perspective might be questionable in another type of class. A new teacher might make choices that would be troublesome if made by a veteran. A lesson that had low-level, short-term aims might be acceptable if seen as a small part of a more significant enterprise. What is the context, who is the teacher, who are the students, with what other demands must a teacher cope, what are the teacher's aims—these are all relevant considerations in attempting to see and appraise teaching. Educational connoisseurship is enhanced and perception made more acute as the context is known. Since the perception of qualities in school situations is almost always interpreted, knowing the features of the context is likely to make the interpretation more defensible and more equitable.

Second, much research on teaching has been predicated on the assumption that there is a "best" system or method which could, in principle, be discovered and which would lead to high levels of student achievement (Tyack, 1974). Experimental studies of teaching are often designed to identify and convey these best methods. In some ways the effort can be regarded as the search for laws, as an effort to find cause-effect relationships that work. By discovering "what works," teachers could best reproduce their successes, something like getting teaching down to a science. Although some also realize that teaching is an art (Gage, 1978), the search for its scientific basis has dominated research on teaching.

If we take a leaf from the arts and apply what we can learn from them to the study of teaching, we would expect excellence in teaching, as in art, to be of many kinds. That is, we would expect to find different kinds of excellence rooted in different genres of teaching. Music, painting, and poetry contain a multitude of genres. The qualities that command admiration in Flemish painting of the sixteenth century are not those that command admiration in twentieth century cubism. What constitutes excellence in one differs from excellence in Gregorian chant. One mark of a connoisseur is to understand the genre and to employ criteria from that genre to the work or performance encountered.

Teaching also has genres of performance. Even one genre, such as lecturing, can take many forms. A lecture that is systematic, specific, logical, clear has importand virtues. But a lecture that is speculative, sometimes halting, one that gives students a sense of a teacher trying to deal with ideas that are not fully resolved, but which continue to be interesting, has other educational virtues. It is not necessary to appraise the merits of one by using criteria that are appropriate to the other. We
need to recognize the general style in which an example of teaching participates and to assess its quality by "rules" that are appropriate to it. In Plato's Republic, Socrates teaches Glaucus through a dialectic procedure. The dialogues often wander and circle back to points made earlier. They seldom follow a straight line. Aristotle, however, teaches through an analytically developed hierarchical order whose logic is meticulous. Both Plato and Aristotle are excellent teachers, but their excellence is based on different genres of teaching. Recognizing these genres is a mark of a sophisticated connoisseur. In simpler terms, one predefined observation schedule will not fit all teaching situations.

It is easy to distinguish between lecturing and discussing or between individual consultation and small group instruction. It is patently clear that the criteria appropriate for assessing skill in leading a discussion differ from the criteria needed to assess or perceive the qualities of a lecture. What is more difficult to see and assess is the teacher's personal signature. Both Monet and Renoir are impressionists, but their work is different. Renoir would not be a better painter if he became more like Monet in his work, or vice versa. Educational connoisseurs recognize the signature that individual teachers give to their work. These are, so to speak, styles within genres. We need to recognize the pervasive qualities of teaching as they are displayed in some form and a judgment—one that is difficult to make—of how the teaching might be enhanced.

There is almost a teleological character to this kind of assessment—can teaching become more of what it is trying to be? Looked at from a different perspective, we can ask how the coherence of the teaching can be increased. The task in coaching teachers is not to try to transform the pedagogical signature of a teacher into another form, but to help the teacher develop the strengths that "come naturally." This is not an argument for "biological determinism" in teaching—rather, it is a plea to enhance what is personally distinctive about teaching. The cultivation of productive idiosyncrasy in the art of teaching is as important as in the art of painting.

This attitude toward teaching runs counter to what is sometimes put forward as a technology of teaching seeking to get teaching, as they say, "down to a science"; the latter implies finding or trying to find, as Frederic Taylor tried to find, the most effective and efficient standardization way to effectuate a complex human performance (Callahan, 1962). The vision put forward here, in contrast to Taylorism, celebrates productive diversity rather than standard uniformity.

The Evaluative Dimension

The fifth major dimension that can serve as a focus for educational
Connoisseurship is the evaluative dimension. In this discussion I will focus on the ways in which evaluation practices, especially those embodied in tests, influence the students’ outlook.

Testing has been and is being used extensively in American schools to help secure reliable and valid information about school productivity. Through state departments of education, an educationally anxious public worried about its schools relies upon a battery of tests to monitor their effects. From one perspective, testing students to determine their academic achievement appears to be a reasonable way to identify student accomplishment and school effectiveness. Why not “sample” and make inferences about school productivity from the scores students achieve? Further, why not reward teachers on the basis of their students’ academic achievement? Why not compare schools on the basis of their test scores? The higher the scores, a teacher or a school achieves, the better the teacher or the school.

Educational connoisseurs would examine the effects of such assumptions as they manifest themselves in practice. What, if any, are the consequences of testing for teachers and pupils? Does testing influence what is taught? Does it shape teaching methods? Does it convey messages to students that support the values the faculty and community embrace? Does it create a status hierarchy among subjects that children study? In short, educational connoisseurs whose attention was devoted to evaluation would be concerned not only with the technical adequacy of the tests employed—do the tests have content validity, are they relevant to the curriculum, are they statistically reliable, and so forth—but also with what, besides academic achievement, they might engender, and what the substance of the testing program might be.

Consider the fact that in many school districts children are tested in May or June in order to assess their levels of academic achievement for that academic year. By the time the tests have been scored and student performance scores reported, their teachers have been assigned a new class of students, so that it is impossible for them to use the test results to do anything differently with the students who have been tested. Clearly there is a trade-off regarding the timing of a testing program, but consideration of the costs and benefits of such a trade-off might very well be one of the considerations that educational connoisseurs would take into account in reflecting on what they had seen.

Connoisseurship in the evaluative arena is not limited to testing, since evaluation does not necessarily require the use of tests. Evaluation concerns the making of value judgments about the quality of some object, situation, or process. Evaluation practices permeate classrooms because of the ways in which teachers appraise students’ comments, their social behavior, and their academic work. These evaluative messages are constant in the life of schooling. Tone of voice, facial expression, and
messages of support and enthusiasm are part of classroom culture. These, too, are appropriate events for educational connoisseurs to appraise. Indeed, one could argue that the culture of evaluation is so pervasive in schools that manifestations of this culture are collectively more powerful in shaping the day-to-day priorities of schools than those special moments devoted to formal testing.

Evaluation occurs everywhere: when teachers listen to children read, when children hand in what they have written, when students respond to teachers’ questions, and so forth. Because schools are designed to be places in which the tasks children encounter are always somewhat out of reach, some schools almost continuously create settings in which children are at the edge of failure. Relatively little time is provided to students to practice or relish their newly acquired skills; more complex skills are seldom far ahead. When one considers further that district-wide expectations for students are typically standardized rather than individualized, the evaluative dimension is seen to have even greater impact. Because of a common evaluative format, children can compare their position in a pecking order defined by the performance of other children competing in the same race. Educational connoisseurs not only would notice the effects of teaching on the culture of schooling, but also they would interpret what they had come to appreciate.

One final comment: evaluation practices within schools, those used in testing, are among the most powerful forces in the priorities and climate of schools. Evaluation practices, particularly those employed to operationalize the school’s values. More than what educators say, more than what they write in curriculum guides, evaluation practices tell both students and teachers what counts. How these practices are employed, what they address and what they neglect, and the form in which they occur speak forcefully to students about what adults believe is important. Because of the importance of evaluation, it is a critical subject for educational connoisseurship. I believe no effort to change schools can succeed without designing an approach to evaluation that is consistent with the aims of the desired change.

**Data Sources for Connoisseurship**

The data sources for educational connoisseurship are many. The most important is undoubtedly the observation of teachers and classroom life. But insights about teaching and classrooms can be secured by talking with students about their work and asking their views about what is transpiring, as well as by observation. Similarly, interviews with teachers can be a very rich source of information. Educational connoisseurs not only watch and see, they talk to others and listen to what they have to say. The interview is a powerful resource for learning how people perceive the situations in
which they work. It is important to remember that connoisseurship is aimed at understanding what is going on. Any source of data that can contribute to that end is an appropriate resource.

Among these resources are instructional materials, student work, teacher-made tests, bulletin from school administrators, homework assignments, and the like. What is the text and the subtext of these message systems, and what do they convey because of their form and content? What kinds of questions are asked of students on their homework assignments? What is the nature of their teachers' responses, and to what extent are the responses elaborated or interpretative, as contrasted with the use of checked-off answers indicating a correct or incorrect response? How soon after they are turned in are homework assignments returned? Again, the problem is to make sense of the situation; anything that allows us to deepen our understanding by using multiple data sources is advantageous (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data sources also include the history of the school or community since it is likely to enhance our ability to interpret what we see. Such data can be secured by perusing local newspapers and by talking to "old-timers" who know the history of the situation. In saying that historical context is a potentially useful resource for deepening connoisseurship, I wish to emphasize the word "potentially." I do not suggest that it is always necessary to situate a school or classroom in its historical context, only that in some cases it may be helpful. Whether it is useful or not will depend upon the nature of the problem that is being addressed and the availability of various resources. My main aim, however, is not to construct a laundry list of potential data sources for educational connoisseurship, but rather to underscore the point that whatever is relevant for seeing more acutely and understanding more deeply is fair game.

Although seeing what transpires in educational contexts is a fundamentally important achievement, seeing is never adequate if knowledge is to become social. For that to occur seeing must be transformed into saying. That is the task of criticism, the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1. The term quality has two quite different meanings. The first and most common refers to the value of something, as in "a quality carpet" or "a diamond of good quality." The second meaning refers to the sensory features of something—the quality of reckless or the elegance of a move on a dance floor or a basketball court. Although we often use language to stand for the qualities we experience, the language we use is rarely adequate to reveal the character of these qualities. Artistically worded language, as employed in poetry and literature, and interestingly enough in the utterances of preschool children and in some uses of slang, comes close to the creation of an analogue to the experience of qualities.
that themselves have no name. When I speak of qualitative research and evaluation, I refer to a form of research and evaluation that not only pays attention to qualities—which, of course, all empirical research must address—but uses representational forms that attempt to render such qualities expressly through the way the text itself has been shaped.

2. It should be pointed out that Fred Dretske’s (1989) conception of epistemic seeing, from which I have borrowed the term, is radically different from the conception I offer in this book. Dretske holds that epistemic seeing requires a belief that such and such is the case. In other words, while non-epistemic seeing provides sensation, Dretske believes that only when belief enters the picture does seeing become epistemic.

I do not embrace this view. I believe seeing becomes epistemic when individuals become aware of a certain array of qualities, whether or not they have beliefs about them. My knowledge of the taste of Coca-Cola, for example, is an example of epistemic “seeing” or epistemic tasting. I do not want to restrict epistemology to matters of belief, but rather to relate it to matters of consciousness.

3. John Dewey points out in Experience and Education (1938) that while beefsteak might be good, it’s not good for infants. Goodness, without consideration for context, is virtually meaningless. I concur.

4. For an example of the effort to codify “what works” in educational research, see What Works (1997).