



Chasing shadows: The tacit requirements of visual culture studies in the school curriculum

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Abstract

This paper addresses the negative impact of a generic skills discourse on a curriculum that is drawn from disciplinary expertise. The findings are directed towards the Department of Basic Education's curriculum strengthening process that is underway for 2025 and, in particular, their expressed intention to infuse 21st-century or generic skills and emotional competencies into the curriculum. The visual art curriculum and assessment policy statement for Grades 10–12 is used as a case study, with a focus on the generic skills of visual literacy and critical thinking. I argue that although generic skills statements point to noble objectives, they obscure requirements for learners, teachers, and examination setters. The paper makes an argument for explicit specification drawn from a disciplinary base in visual art, and highlights particular areas of concern regarding specification and specialisation that can be taken up by subject specialists in other subject areas.

Keywords: curriculum studies, specialisation, generic skills, visual art

Introduction

Now is a crucial time to look closely at South Africa's curriculum and assessment policy statements (CAPS). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) has initiated a curriculum strengthening process for 2025 and, at present, it appears that their intention is to infuse 21st-century or generic skills (such as creativity, critical thinking, and emotional competencies) into the curriculum (DBE, 2022). The inclusion of generic skills into curricula that draw on disciplinary expertise is not a straightforward process. It will be necessary to carefully theorise the relationship between generic skills that are general and open-ended, with specialised knowledge and skills that are guided and constrained by disciplinary expertise. It would also be necessary to consider the role of local or everyday knowledge in this process, and make its use apparent.

Topic 3 for CAPS for Visual Art in the Further Education and Training phase offers a relevant case study. Topic 3 is titled “Visual Culture Studies: Emphasis on Visual Literacy” (DBE, 2011, p. 9). The topic outlines the study of artworks and art objects, and draws together ideas from the discipline (or field) of visual culture studies with art history and the notion of visual literacy, which is a generic, not disciplinary based, mode of analysis. Through a comparison between the skills and knowledge statements in the visual art curriculum and the National Senior Certificate (NSC) Grade 12 Paper 1 examination (DBE, 2014a) and its marking guidelines or memorandum (DBE, 2014b), I will show that specialised knowledge and skill specification were compromised by the way in which generic skills expressions and everyday knowledge were placed in CAPS.

While some of the ambiguity in the curriculum stems directly from the complex and diffuse nature of the discipline or field of visual culture studies, the combination of different types of knowledge and skill—generic, specialised, and everyday—made it difficult for curriculum writers to specify requirements, which were thus left tacit. However, learners are not afforded equal learning opportunities if only some teachers are able to read into the curriculum to make apparent what is tacit or not overtly explained.

Background: The development of visual culture studies and the South African context

It is very difficult to understand the CAPS for Visual Art in isolation. It needs to be seen in the context of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) of 2008 (DBE, 2008) given that so much of what is said and what is not said in CAPS appears to have its roots in the earlier curriculum. It is also important to see the curriculum decisions in the context of scholarly work in academia in the field of visual culture studies, and in the political context of South Africa.

The sociologist of education, Basil Bernstein (1990/2003), developed the notion of the *pedagogic device* to articulate the way in which political forces influence a series of interrelated rules that operate in hierarchical relation and regulate the transformation of disciplinary knowledge into school subject knowledge. These distributive rules decide who gets access to what knowledge, and thereby define the objectives or values to be upheld in the curriculum. These values are extrinsic to academic knowledge and inform the recontextualising rules that guide the ways in which academic knowledge is reshaped as school knowledge. The evaluation rules reveal the criteria to legitimate forms of privileged communication (Bernstein, 1990/2003).

In postapartheid South Africa, there was a political imperative to democratise education. The NCS (DBE, 2008) was the first major revision to the Further Education and Training phase curriculum after apartheid. In that revision, visual culture studies replaced art history as the discipline that informed the theoretical component of visual art. Curriculum writers of the NCS adopted feminist and Marxist critiques that highlighted the privileged status of White and male artists in the canon of art history (Elkins, 2003). Poststructuralist theorists also

raised concerns about silent voices in art history, albeit from a different angle. They questioned the validity of the chronological approach that underpinned art history, and contended that novel interpretations or unique artworks that did not cohere with the unified story were left out (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Smith, 2012).

Visual culture studies, by contrast, was developed as a politically engaged practice that attended to these questions of representation and power (Roan in Holly, 2015, p. 48). The promise of new insight was located in interdisciplinary practices that offered the freedom to look anywhere—and with any tools, which were not set as established disciplinary methods (Bal, 2003; von Falkenhausen, 2020; Holly, 2015). Many scholars prioritised highly personal and hyper-situated knowledge that was located in the immediate and experiential, following the relativist practices of literary theorist Roland Barthes who relinquished the authority of the author and suggested that the reader's experience should guide what is a valid interpretation of a text (Allen, 2013; Bal, 2003; Moore, 2009). The objects of study were extended beyond traditional fine art objects, such as painting and sculpture, to include cultural objects from across the globe—objects from any discipline as well as contemporary society and popular culture.

The openness to any object of study allowed curriculum writers to bring in local craft and everyday knowledge. Following Bernstein, it is important to highlight this process of “recontextualisation,” in which aspects of knowledge or skills drawn from disciplinary expertise are selectively brought into new relations to create a pedagogic discourse or school subject which, in some sense, is an “imaginary discourse” (2003, p. 160). The social and cultural imperatives to socialise the next generation inform the academic agenda of teaching, learning, and assessment. The discourse is imaginary because the recontextualising rules draw on the discipline to extract the instructional discourse of knowledge, skills, and concepts—but it is embedded into the regulative discourse of moral and social values (Bernstein, 1990/2003).

The curriculum writers wanted to include space for learners' voices and experiences, and they selectively emphasised everyday knowledge in the learning programme guidelines (LPG) that were read in conjunction with the NSC policy and the NCS subject statements. The LPG of the NCS stated the following:

Visual Arts knowledge, whether local, national, pan African or global, is part of visual culture and daily life. . . . People, such as visual arts and craft practitioners in specific fields or colleagues, parents, local community members and the learners themselves, can provide a resource, for example, by explaining the meaning, history and function of artworks and artefacts, past and present. (DBE, 2008, pp. 22–23)

Learners were thus positioned as a resource for the knowledge of the curriculum with that suggestion that they naturally have knowledge about artworks and an intrinsic understanding of how to interpret a work of art. The writers demonstrated an underlying distrust towards knowledge that was exterior to learners. People from learners' local environment were offered as a buffer against knowledge that came from outside of their community. In a later

section of the LPG, the writers expressed an “urgent” need to protect learners from “ideological messages” of gender, class, and race that are embedded in the images that surround us (DBE, 2008, p. 36). The specialised terminology and approaches of formal analysis of art history, such as analysis of colour or compositional choices, were seen to be insufficient to demystify images. It was considered reckless to merely engage with the intentions of the artist, which emerged through a contextual analysis of art history because their intentions required further critique. The curriculum writers polarised these issues by understating the specialised practice of artmaking; and they pulled away from specialised knowledge about the artists’ context of production towards learners’ voices and experiences.

In an effort to find a “method which leads to the critical analysis” of images, the curriculum writers adopted the notion of visual literacy to analyse images (DBE, 2008, p. 36). Visual literacy is a heterogeneous term that is based on the premise that visual objects or images can be decoded like a text (D’Alleva, 2005). There is a notion that one can become literate in the codes of this language, and perhaps this can allow learners to go beyond the intention of the artist to uncover assumptions or stereotypes in the work. However, rather than define a visual alphabet using methods from a particular discipline, the literature uses generic expressions of skills to define the term: interpretation, analysis, understanding, visual perception, evaluation, knowledge of grammar and syntax, and visual–verbal translations (Kędra, 2018).

The genericism of these definitions was given very little specialisation in the LPG with the following definition: “Visual literacy Terminology: How elements in art can help to communicate meaning and message” (DBE, 2008, p. 48). The definition is so vague in order to cover the wide-ranging regulative objectives that the curriculum writers placed on visual literacy. They hoped it would develop the learner holistically by providing skills for emotional, physical, spiritual, and interpersonal communication (DBE, 2008). With little guidance or insight into what the elements of art are, or how they operate, it is likely (and ironic) that they were assumed to be the formal art elements of art history such as colour or space. Given that this was not explicitly stated or defined, there was no shared understanding amongst teachers. The evaluation rules that provide criteria to legitimate forms of privileged communication were diffused in the LPG (Bernstein, 1990/2003).

The underspecification of skills, and weakly bounded everyday knowledge, in the LPG are curious in light of the Department of Education’s (DoE, 2000) ministerial report published eight years earlier to highlight the damaging effects of such curricula. Building on the findings of the report, research in the field showed that learners from lower socioeconomic status groups were not able to bridge the gap between everyday knowledge and specialised communication when the boundary between the two was unclear and, certainly in 2008, specialisation was still required by the examination (Lubienski, 2004).

The DBE ministerial report of 2009 (p. 24) furthered the conversation by making clear recommendations for specification of knowledge and skills whose specialisation was “derived from the subject discipline” as a matter of equity. The CAPS curriculum was to be “based on essential learning as represented by subject discipline” (DBE, 2009, p. 62). It is

therefore interesting to consider the generic skills discourse and everyday knowledge that is present in CAPS for Visual Art and is a residue of the NCS.

Analysis of the visual culture studies in CAPS for Visual Art

When CAPS was developed in 2011, the theoretical component was reframed as “Topic 3: Visual Culture Studies: Emphasis on Visual Literacy” (DBE, 2011, p. 17). Visual literacy was positioned in the subtitle to constrain the way in which visual culture studies was understood. A close analysis of the curriculum definition for visual literacy highlights two threads that inform the analysis of the curriculum that follows—specification of skills and knowledge, and the degree of specialisation privileged. The definition of visual literacy in CAPS stated:

The first level of visual literacy is simple knowledge: basic identification of the subject or elements in a work of art. But while accurate information is important, understanding what we see and comprehending visual relationships are at least as important. These higher-level visual literacy skills require critical thinking. (DBE, 2011, p. 51)

Like most definitions of visual literacy, this statement relies on generic expressions of skill such as understanding and critical thinking. In the context of an art curriculum, it is concerning that there is no reference to disciplinary methods that can inform the interpretation of a work of art. Following visual culture studies, the curriculum writers assumed that valid interpretations emerge through increasing possible combinations of elements rather than constraining and carefully theorising their use in each context. In this instance, the directive to think critically replaced any clear instruction on how to do so. In the absence of clear criteria, many learners are likely to flounder and latch onto subject matter that they can recognise, rather than analyse the formal elements of the artwork. The place of specialised knowledge or “accurate information” is minimised in the definition.

Following the LPG, the CAPS writers were reluctant to prioritise specialised knowledge, and this statement pulls away from art history. However, the CAPS writers were ostensibly silent on the role of personal experience or everyday knowledge as criteria for making a legitimate interpretation of art. The silence might be read as an attempt to negate the use of personal experience and everyday knowledge in interpretation—without overtly stating it. The writers appear reluctant to openly go against the emphasis on learners’ voices that appeared in the LPG. However, what emerged was a kind of view from nowhere because specialised knowledge was downplayed and personal experience was not offered in its place, yet both specialised knowledge and everyday knowledge were included in the curriculum.

My analysis that follows will highlight these two threads: the inclusion of generic skills statements in the curriculum, and the boundary between specialisation and everyday knowledge. The analysis incorporated all statements pertaining to Topic 3: Visual Culture Studies: Emphasis on Visual Literacy (DBE, 2011).

Specification of skills and knowledge statements: Specialised vs generic

Skills

An analysis of skills statements in the curriculum revealed selective use of art history, design, and visual literacy. A large majority of skills statements were drawn from art history with explicit reference to contextual and formal analysis (68%). Direct references to visual literacy were fewer (8%). This emphasis on art historical methods is problematic given that art history was ostensibly written out of the curriculum and not overtly mentioned in the curriculum document. In other words, the curriculum does not tell teachers and learners to refer to the elements of art history. This makes the referents unstable and in need of careful explication and definition. Further, only 22% of the specialised terms, such as technique, style, and historical context, were explicitly defined in the curriculum. This results in different interpretations of the formal and contextual elements, which are further complicated by the emphasis on generic skills, such as critical thinking, that open up given definitions to a wider range of possibilities. For example, style and technique are given vague specialised definitions in the curriculum, but are also conflated within a generic notion of visual communication (DBE, 2011).

Knowledge

It was important to measure the specification of knowledge statements to examine whether there was a similar open-ended and tacit approach as seen in the skills statements. Knowledge statements are expressed as lists of artists under themes that arrange content. In Grades 10 and 11, the themes rely on specialised knowledge through referencing movements from art history. For example, in Grade 10, there is the theme “Classical world,” which refers to ancient Greece and Rome (DBE, 2011, p. 54). However, in Grade 12, there are four themes (out of eight themes) that group South African artworks together using generic organisers rather than specialised themes—such as “the emerging voice” or “post-1994 democratic identity” (DBE, 2011, p. 58).

As is to be expected from generic organisers without explicit definitions, the list of artists who appear next to the themes are quite diverse, with very little to define the particulars of their context beyond nationality. For example, the emerging voice theme includes, amongst others, Jacobus Hendrik Pierneef and Gerard Sekoto who worked decades apart and in divergent contexts, each with very different intentions. Pierneef was a landscape painter who minimised the scale of humans in his work, whereas Sekoto painted intimate reflections of his family and the people he loved. The diverse list of artists does not constrain the theme to create shared understandings of the interpretive framework of each theme. Learners and examiners would need to have a shared understanding of the theme to guide interpretation of artworks that they have not studied that appear in the examination.

This brief analysis of the curriculum reveals the genericism of an approach like visual literacy that results in skills and knowledge statements that are underspecified with requirements that remain tacit. The move away from art historical methods has downplayed specialised

knowledge. This is further complicated by the inclusion of everyday knowledge in the curriculum, which is explored in the next section.

Specialisation of knowledge and skills in the curriculum: Specialised vs everyday

It is apparent that the curriculum drew on art history, visual literacy, and visual culture studies in an interdisciplinary relationship. Although we are yet to see very clear features of visual culture studies in the curriculum, its influence is felt in the notion of interdisciplinarity and the preference for selective and flexible associations between different approaches, each with unclear boundaries. For example, visual literacy and art historical analysis are included but the way in which they reconcile is not made overt. Of further concern is the limited theorisation given to the positionality of the learner given that visual culture studies and art history have very different positions on the relative subjectivity or objectivity of the viewer, which when simply placed alongside one another, risks ambiguity.

Skills

It is interesting, and expected from the curriculum definition of visual literacy, that there is no mention of learners' using their own personal experiences from their everyday knowledge in the skills statements in the curriculum (DBE, 2011).

Knowledge

Even though there are no overt references to personal experiences in the skills statements, 4% of knowledge statements refer to local knowledge, often in spaces that appear to be copied over from the NCS (DBE, 2008). For example, contemporary local cathedrals, temples, mosques, and synagogues were offered as comparison to Early Christian, Byzantine, Romanesque, and Gothic art (DBE, 2011, p. 54). There is little direction on the relationship between the local sites and the stylistic characteristics of the international architecture. In relation to specialisation, there is a preference for specialised knowledge statements (65%) but, as is to be expected from the curriculum definition of visual literacy, there is no extensive specification regarding the artist's intention and the artist's context, which would include knowledge about the religious, cultural, economic, and social contexts of the artist.

The omissions in this area of the curriculum become apparent when the curriculum is compared to the NSC Grade 12 examination paper and memorandum (DBE, 2014a, 2014b). The curriculum includes some local knowledge but does not direct learners on how to make use of the everyday knowledge indicated in the curriculum. This is an important consideration for learners in terms of what knowledge they draw on in an examination. It is also critical to direct examination setters on what type of knowledge is privileged and what particular knowledge about the artist's context might be necessary for learners to know—either specified in the curriculum or given as additional information in a question. The examination cannot be closely aligned to an intended content, concepts, and skills taught if these have not been made clear (DBE, 2009).

Comparative analysis of the curriculum, the NSC Grade 12 Paper 1 examination, and memorandum

In another larger study (Palte, 2022), I analysed Question 1.1 and Question 6.1 from the NSC Grade 12 Paper 1 examinations and memoranda for 2014, 2017, and 2020, undertaking an extensive analysis of the two questions over three years of examinations to stabilise my findings. For the purposes of this article, however, I have extracted my data on Question 1.1 from 2014 to elucidate some of the issues that emerged from the curriculum's underspecification of skills and knowledge.

The comparison was designed to show whether the curriculum offers sufficient guidelines for the examination. I also used the memorandum responses to attend to the type of communication privileged (whether specialised or everyday) and to see if this lined up with the curriculum.

Question 1.1 of the NSC Paper 1, 2014

Question 1.1 from the NSC Visual Art Paper 1 is reproduced below with the provided visual sources.¹

Figure 1

Question 1.1 from NSC Paper 1, 2014 (DBE, 2014a)

Question 1: The Voice of Emerging Artists

The artists of the reproduced works have captured similar moments where children interact with one another in a peaceful and friendly manner. Children all over the world seldom think of the future and this innocence leaves them free to enjoy themselves and make friends with anyone.

1.1 Study Figure 1a and Figure 1b and write a short essay in which you discuss how each artist confirmed the above statement.

Your essay should include the following:

- Similarities and differences
- Use of style
- Compositional aspects/arrangements of figures
- The choice of colour and the impact of the work (10)

1 The memorandum response is not included owing to space constraints, but it is available on the Western Cape Education Department (2023) website.



Figure 1a: Andrew Macara, “Playground” Sri Lanka, oil on canvas, 1998.



Figure 1b: Ephraim Ngatane, “Township Scene with Dog and Bicycle” oil on board, date unknown.

The analysis below compares the curriculum, the examination question papers, and the answers given in the memoranda. The elements for analysis are categorised according to the dimensions of skills (formal elements) and knowledge (contextual elements and interpretation). For purposes of this analysis, I drew elements from the formal and contextual analysis of art history, such as line, colour, and composition or knowledge about the time period, place, culture, or economic life of the artist. The last section considers whether the themes adequately constrain interpretation.

Analysis of specification of knowledge and skills

Formal elements (skills)

- a) Alignment between curriculum and question paper.

All the specialised terminology for formal elements in the question paper is mentioned in the curriculum. There is generic wording used for specialised terms such as “arrangement of figures” that are included in the question to provide a clue to decode the specialised term of composition.

- b) Alignment between the question paper and memorandum.

The statements in the memorandum do not correspond to the elements given in the question. This is to be expected because of the open-ended bullet point that asks for similarities and differences. There are also implicit meanings within some of the specialised terms provided in the question, and as a result, statements regarding subject matter are included in the memorandum under the subtitle of colour. The memorandum extends beyond a description of colour to point out the “figures walking, more than one building (housing), and a dog in the foreground, along with a man riding his bicycle” that appear in sombre or darker tones (DBE, 2014b, p. 5). The generic wording placed alongside specialised terminology, such as “the arrangement

of figures,” weakens the specificity of the term composition. The analysis under the subheading of composition in the memorandum points to compositional elements like focal point but also examines the creation of space in the painting.

c) Alignment between the memorandum and the curriculum.

While the alignment between the curriculum and the question paper looks promising with bulleted points in the question that are defined in the curriculum, these definitions are abbreviated. As a result, the memorandum statements do not subscribe to the definitions in the curriculum. For example, an expansive definition of style may include reference to choice of colour as it is used in the memorandum, but the curriculum documents only lists examples of styles without mention of the means to justify the choice of style through artist’s brush mark or choice of colour.

Contextual knowledge (knowledge): Specialised contextual knowledge

a) Alignment between curriculum and question paper.

Question 1.1 was designed to examine unseen artworks according to the directive regarding the setting of papers in the curriculum: “Questions should include unseen visual images to test learners’ visual analysis skills” (DBE, 2011, p. 52). Unseen examples are seen as necessary to test literacy and as a safeguard against rote learning. The artists and artworks in Question 1.1 are not necessarily known to learners. Andrew Macara is not mentioned in the curriculum.

Ephraim Ngatane is one artist who is optional for study in this section but there is no guarantee that learners studied his work given that the “suggested lists are not compulsory or exhaustive—teachers can select their own appropriate examples” (DBE, 2011, p. 57). The date for Ngatane’s work is not given in the caption information of the question, and cannot be derived from the theme for the question “The voice of emerging artists” because it is not based on a set time period.

b) Alignment between the question paper and memorandum.

There are specialised contextual knowledge statements that appear in the memorandum such as references to artists’ biographies. These statements are tucked into the answers to style and colour because the question does not make provision for these statements. There is a degree of alignment between the question paper and memorandum in that the specialised contextual knowledge provided in the caption information is used to enable interpretation in the case of the locations that are stated in the titles of the artworks in the captions. The memorandum points to “the differences [that] lie in the style and the location—the South African work is expressive work while the Macara has a more Impressionistic approach” (DBE, 2014b, p. 4). However, the memorandum contains knowledge that is not given in the question with reference to the location of Ngatane’s work as Soweto. This statement is one of three statements that rely on specialised knowledge in the memorandum, and

that are not given in the question. The memorandum makes reference to “an important record of life in the township in a particular time in our history” (DBE, 2014b, p. 4) yet there is no date given for Ngatane’s work in the question. There is also reference to the intention of the artist, which is not given in the question. It is stated that “Ngatane sought to capture township life without preconceived notions of what was expected of so-called ‘township artists’ at the time” (DBE, 2014b, p. 5).

c) Alignment between the memorandum and the curriculum.

The three content statements of specialised contextual knowledge of the memorandum are not stated in the curriculum. It is important to take note of content statements that pertain to specialised contextual knowledge that are provided in the memorandum given that there is choice of study in the curriculum and no guarantee that this artist has been studied. The memorandum suggests that there is specific specialised contextual knowledge that is necessary to interpret the artwork.

Themes (knowledge): Specialised interpretation “The emerging voice”

This section examines the interpretation of the theme as presented in the question paper and memorandum. In this analysis, I explore whether the theme of the curriculum provides a clear interpretive framework that could be applied to unseen works from new contexts.

a) Alignment between curriculum and question paper.

The theme is not defined in the curriculum. The text in the box at the top of the question weakens the boundary of the theme by moving towards another interpretation, that of childhood innocence. The reference to childhood is a strategy employed by the examination setters to bring together two disparate artworks in the question. Macara is an English artist who depicted his travels, Ngatane is a South African who painted his reality. Neither have an expressed interest in childhood innocence. There is a direct deviation from the instruction to stay within the specialisation of the theme. The unseen examples tested “should relate to the learners’ theme of study, e.g. thematically or stylistic, as well as works/movements/civilisations that they have studied” (DBE, 2011, p. 52). It is likely that the deviation seen in the examination is a result of the ambiguity of the theme that fails to constrain possible interpretations of the theme.

b) Alignment between the question paper and memorandum.

The question misdirects the reading of the work by introducing an entirely new interpretive framework of childhood innocence. The theme of childhood innocence is taken up as a single interpretation content statement in the memorandum.

c) Alignment between the memorandum and the curriculum.

The memorandum relies on an implicit reading of the theme of “township life” to decode Ngatane’s work. The theme is not defined in this way in the curriculum. This has implications for whether learners are able to read into the hardships of township life in South Africa—which is stated as an interpretation of the work in the memorandum.

Summary of analysis of formal, contextual, and interpretative elements of Question 1, 2014

The above analysis shows that learners are being asked to analyse works using terminology in ways that they have not been shown, to use specialised contextual knowledge that is not specified in the curriculum, and to engage with unseen artworks without an established interpretive framework.

Topic 3 of CAPS for Visual Art has not sufficiently delineated what is expected of learners, teachers, and examination setters in terms of knowledge and skills. The generic definition of visual literacy suggests that learners can make sense of any artwork in the absence of knowledge. It fails to constrain the complexity of analysis required. This, together with the abbreviated definitions of formal and contextual elements, does not offer sufficient insight on the way we read different approaches to making art that are embedded in different contexts, for example, the meaning of the material in a contemporary painting differs from inter-generational craftsmanship and technical skill in local craft.

Analysis of specialisation of knowledge and skills (specialised, everyday, and generic)

This section analyses the degree of specialisation required in the examination, considering the ambiguity between specialisation and everyday knowledge seen in the curriculum. Table 1 below examines the positionality of the learner who is privileged in the question paper and the memorandum. There are three dimensions coded: specialised, generic, and everyday.

The two statements in the textbox of Question 1.1 were marked as “specialised other” interpretation and “everyday knowledge” respectively. The first line of the text box in the question points to the subject matter of the works that “have captured similar moments where children interact with one another” (DBE, 2014a, p. 4). The second statement of the textbox refers to everyday knowledge that is drawn from the learners’ context outside the classroom in stating that “children all over the world seldom think of the future” (DBE, 2014a, p. 4). Generic questions point to open-ended questions that are non-specialised, such as “similarities and differences.”

It is important to see that the everyday knowledge of the text box and the generic question that is bulleted in the question paper do not yield everyday knowledge responses in the memorandum. The interpretation of the work is specialised other because it is outside of the

theme, and derived from formal and specialised contextual elements. This means that learners might be misdirected to use everyday knowledge or personal experiences of childhood by the question when the memorandum shows they should only get marks for specialised knowledge. Research referenced earlier in the text (Lubienski, 2004) showed it is often learners from low socioeconomic status backgrounds who may misread such cues.

Table 1

Analysis of the type of knowledge and interpretation privileged in Question 1.1 from NSC Paper 1, 2014 (DBE, 2014a)

Specialised/non-specialised statements in Question 1.1 in relation to specialised/non-specialised responses	Question paper	Memorandum
Specialised formal elements: specialised	4	22
Generic formal elements: generic	2	
Specialised contextual knowledge	5	4
Everyday contextual knowledge	1	
Specialised interpretation	2	
Specialised interpretation (other)	1	3
Generic interpretation:		
Generic but cannot be specified whether formal/interpretative	1	

The curriculum is silent on the desired positionality of the learner, which results in examination setters selectively drawing on everyday knowledge without parameters to guide its use.

Observations and recommendations for the visual art curriculum

It is apparent that the curriculum is underspecified in the area of knowledge and skills. If learners are to be given an equal chance of success in visual art, knowledge and skills need to be made explicit for shared understanding between teachers, learners, and examiners. The importance of particular specialised contextual knowledge about the artist needs to be asserted with careful theorisation of what knowledge about the artist or the time period is required to be able to interpret a particular work of art, as well as the specific meanings of the formal or material elements of the work in that particular context. Careful consideration of this relationship would help to constrain the themes, which at present, are not always attached to context or given clear definition.

If the curriculum writers clearly mark out the specialised knowledge of the artist's context, it would be possible to consider how much of the learners' everyday knowledge could inform interpretation. For example, it would be very difficult for learners to interpret the symbolism

of Dutch 17th century still lives using contemporary symbols because the meanings of the objects are firmly rooted in symbolism of the 1600s, but learners could potentially offer insight into the fashion statements of the subjects of Lolo Veleko's subjects in *Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder* (Virginia Museum of Fine Art, n.d.). There is space for everyday knowledge and personal experience in art analysis, but the curriculum needs to carefully outline appropriate use for learners and make provision to accept everyday knowledge in the marking criteria if that is desired. This in itself is fraught because there is no way of knowing what everyday knowledge learners would have.

Conclusion

There is a painful contradiction at the heart of CAPS for Visual Art. Despite the inclusive parameters of visual culture studies that made way for art and craft from Africa as well as contemporary artists who were concerned with issues of race, identity, and gender, CAPS for Visual Art is not an inclusive curriculum that all learners can access. Many areas of difficulty in the curriculum stem from the inclusion of local knowledge that is not carefully theorised. The decision to work with generic skills further muddies the waters because generic skills statements are not explicit or constrained. Generic skills statements point to an objective, but they do not guide learners with the tools needed to succeed. The recommendations of this study lean towards more explicit specification drawn from a disciplinary base—rather than a move away towards genericism.

That said, the findings of this study do not negate the potential value of 21st-century skills, particularly the objectives to enable novel insight, learners' voices, local knowledge, or emotional competencies. However, in the visual art curriculum, their inclusion has not solved the problem of learner learning and achievement. As a result, there are concerns about 21st-century dialogue permeating the curriculum strengthening process as a solution to the problems in education without careful theorising of how the different types of knowledge operate together.

Even though it is difficult to generalise to other subjects, the case of the visual arts curriculum offers some cautions for the curriculum strengthening process. Subject specialists should carefully consider the requirements of their subject to identify possible incongruences or conflicts between the different types of knowledge. These conflicts need to be fleshed out, rather than pushed underground.

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