

## Micro-Paper 53: *Connoisseurship as Literacy Practice*



Raúl Alberto Mora

Associate Professor, Education and Pedagogy Graduate Programs,  
Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Sede Central Medellín | LSLP Chair  
raul.mora@upb.edu.co

### Defining the Term

The notion of connoisseurship draws from different traditions in art, cultural studies, and education over the past 30 years. Its most notable influence stems from the work of Elliot Eisner, who first conceptualized the term within educational research. Connoisseurship refers to the careful discrimination and detailed knowledge of a field, a group, or a community.

A connoisseur, therefore, would be someone who deeply understands the nuances of such spaces, recognizing the historical, [aesthetic](#), and language relationships that belong to them. Connoisseurship also refers to the understandings of concepts, trends, issues, levels of detail and quality, as well as the socio-cultural contexts where expertise and knowledge takes place. It also includes discovering what connoisseurs themselves do in order to gain detailed knowledge and access to extended [networks](#). The notion of connoisseurship defies traditional understandings of expertise as a connoisseur focuses on the aesthetic relationship with knowledge, rather than the potential power dynamics attributed to it.

Germane to connoisseurship is also the sense of guiding others who are novice to the intricacies of said fields or communities to better understand the details that comprise them. Connoisseurship, in that sense, has to do with both the cognitive and aesthetic elements required to incorporate the most complex features of the craft or field one wishes to explore.

Most recent iterations of connoisseurship have transcended art and education to explore issues of the “geek culture” and the new forms of detailed knowledge and understanding emerging in cultures such as coffee or comics. In the case of these cultures, connoisseurship implies a return to the historical elements of the cultures, extensive reading and discussions, and access to specialized information, going beyond the connoisseur’s mother

tongue. Making sense of today’s forms of connoisseurship, therefore, remains a topic of interest for those in [literacy](#) and language studies, [media literacy](#), and cultural studies.

### Connecting it to LSLP

As our research in urban and [gaming literacies](#) keeps growing, so do our objects of inquiry. In both cases, connoisseurship has emerged as an area of study as we explore the influence of second languages in the establishment of different communities in the city, such as comics or music, or the engagement with videogames as aesthetic experiences. As these communities specialize, so does the level of detailed knowledge about genres, auteurs, and titles. This expanded knowledge, in many cases, also involves more learning in and interactions with [second languages](#).

### Expanding Second Language Research

The idea of connoisseurship is one that offers interesting avenues of study for second language researchers. As our field continues to explore more meaningful ways to engage our learners with the languages we are teaching them, using their organic expertise on popular culture may become a powerful entry point for them. Discovering what you are yet to learn from what you are an expert in is a good way to produce new knowledge. Tapping into those levels of connoisseurship may provide an extra incentive for students to increase their [communicative competence](#) for a more realistic second language use in their daily lives.

### References

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