

Abstracts/Résumés pp. xv-xxi

Art Education in New Zealand: Historical Antecedents and the Contemporary Context

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Introduction

Education is never a passive, autonomous, or static activity. It manipulates, as much as it is manipulated, and reflects specific contexts. Education histories document continuities and changes over time, and are able to throw light on and inform contemporary practice. Whether viewed narrowly in terms of subjects, or in a more expansive framework of a “reciprocal and relational process of *active* construction by teachers and students...” (O’Neill, 2004, p. 26), curriculum cannot be separated from the social, political and cultural contexts in which it evolved. As Grundy (1987) says, “To understand the meaning of any set of curriculum practices, they must be seen as both arising out of a set of historical circumstances and as being a reflection of a particular social milieu” (p. 6).

Perspectives on curriculum as a social and cultural construction, together with Efland’s (2004) identification of the principal visions of nineteenth and twentieth century art education in the United States, prompted me to trace the historical antecedents of art education in New Zealand (Smith, 2007).

From the time of British colonisation this history has been dominated by two peoples, Maori and Pakeha. The indigenous Maori, referred to as “tangata whenua” (people of the land), were the first voyagers to arrive by canoe over 1000 years ago from Hawaiiki, the Pacific Islands of origin. When European navigators, traders and missionaries began to arrive, Maori applied the descriptive term “Pakeha” (white man) to these strangers. Because their white skin was a strange or abnormal condition to the indigenous people, they adopted the term “Maori” (normal or natural) to distinguish themselves (Walker, 1989). In 1840, a Treaty enacted between Maori and the British Crown (*Te Tiriti o Waitangi-The Treaty of Waitangi*) gave Maori protection of their “taonga” (treasures). Today, Pakeha, or New Zealanders of European descent, comprise 79% of the population (Statistics New Zealand, 2001) and the majority of teachers are Pakeha. Under the Treaty, they and their students are required to honour its principles and become cognisant with Maori art and culture. The history of art education in New Zealand reflects this ‘bicultural’ partnership (Smith, 2004a).

My research showed that from the beginning of early provincial and (non-state) missionary activity in New Zealand in the 1840s, there were mutually constitutive relationships between culture and politics in the development of education, state and nation (Stephenson, 2000). It became evident from the literature, and the findings of a fieldwork investigation in a sample of secondary school art departments, that current policies and practices in art education in this country are located in, or have evolved from the past.

Historical antecedents: Art education from the 1840s to the 1990s

Education policies and practices, from the 1840s to the 1930s, reflect the building of the nation. Schooling for both Maori and European/Pakeha children exhibited the politics of colonisation that were expected and desired to replicate the systems and values of the mother country, Great Britain. Settlement was based on the official goal of “reproducing British society” in the antipodes (Willmott, 1989, p. 4). Children were taught that they were Britons, as well as New Zealanders, and that

the Maori inhabitants were “not genuine citizens” of this country because they were different (ibid). That the Europeans saw the Maori as being able to be ‘civilised’ in no way supposed that their culture would be respected. The intention of nineteenth century educationists was to detach Maori children from their roots and to educate them to be conforming, if somewhat inferior workers, respectful of the new order. In the formation of educational policies during this period, the emphasis in governmental legislation for education, as well as for daily practice, demonstrated the persistence of colonising power. This was reflected in the kind of art education offered to Maori and Pakeha pupils from the 1840s to the 1930s.

A utilitarian schooling for settlers: Art education in the public schools

For art education, the first significant moment was the 1877 *Education Act*. Underpinned by a concern to create an obedient, disciplined, and industrious labour force which would enhance the economic prosperity of the country (O’Neill, 2004), an outcome of the Act was a utilitarian schooling for settlers in the public schools. The subsequent 1878 *Standards Syllabus* [*New Zealand Gazette (NZG)*, 1878], the first national curriculum in New Zealand, closely resembled the British model. Drawing was included among the so-called academic subjects and its teaching derived from developments in British art education. These developments had been shaped by Britain’s desire to train the manufacturing population in design so that the nation would be equipped to compete with and outdistance her international rivals. The utilitarian stance adopted in New Zealand originated from the 1850s South Kensington System of state-aided and controlled art schools and examinations. This system was originally established for training art masters and examining generalist teachers in art (Chalmers, 1990). Thus, in the 1878 syllabus, drawing followed an order of instruction for Standard 1-6 pupils including outline drawing from blackboard exercises, drawing from models and three-dimensional objects, geometrical drawing, and perspective drawing (*NZG*, 1878, p. 1311). A notable form of instruction consisted of drawing from plaster casts of sculptures and fragments of architectural decoration, brought to New Zea-

land in the 1860s by South Kensington-trained art masters. These objects served as a reminder of the classical forms revered within the Western 'high art' aesthetic. A century later, plaster casts of a foot, ear, hand and eye from Michelangelo's (1501-04) marble sculpture, *David*, were still to be found in art departments in many secondary schools, including my own. Those same plaster cast sections were among resources observed during my 2005 investigation of art teaching practices in secondary schools. Moreover, skill in rendering three-dimensional form remains an enduring dimension of art education.

Although replicas from the 'fine arts' traditions of classical antiquity and the Renaissance were used in drawing instruction, there was a clear division reflected in art education between the fine arts and the utilitarian arts. The fine arts, fostered in the Societies of Art that were founded between the 1860's and 1890s, were the preserve of wealthier British settlers. These affluent settlers had brought from Britain the nineteenth century concept of selective, academic, secondary schools run by private enterprise (Beeby, 1984). The utilitarian and practical arts, on the other hand, remained the province of the working classes. The main objectives of art education in the public schools had little to do with expression or imagination. Collinge (1978) described it as "technical education rather than art education" (p. 15). With the expansion of secondary provision in the early 1900s, manual and technical instruction became the 'common sense' preserve of the working classes. The focus in public schools upon students developing skills in drawing, and the emphasis on the vocational applications of art, continued into the 1930s and 40s.

Schooling as an agent for civilizing Maori: Art education in the Native Schools

Another key development, which affected the evolution of policies and practices for art education during the colonial period, was schooling conceived as an agent for 'civilising' Maori (Simon & Smith, 2001). The *Native Trust Ordinance*, 1844, signalled the colonial policy of assimilation which was to prevail. This was to be written initially into the 1847 Education Ordinance, and the practices of joint missionary/state

boarding institutions, developed under this legislation (see Simon, 1998). Under the *Native Schools Act*, 1867, the government established a national, state-controlled system of village schools referred to as Native Schools. These schools came under the supervision of the Native Department. In the Native Schools, art education was shaped by the effects of assimilation upon the art of Maori. Initially, these effects were inscribed in the attitudes and actions of British missionaries. Chalmers (1999) posited that “the missionaries were particularly loath to encourage or include the indigenous arts in education, because they were so inevitably connected to the beliefs and values that they opposed” (p. 180). Various labels as primitive, savage, tribal, or objects of ethnological interest, Maori “taonga” (treasures) were considered graven images by the missionaries. Missionaries defaced Maori carvings, construed as obscene, through such actions as the removal of genitalia. This represented an attack, not only upon the art of Maori, but on the spiritual basis of their belief systems. The colonial form of art education in the Native Schools thus had the specific purpose of aiding assimilation. This was manifested through breaking down traditional structures and belief systems in order to make Maori conforming and useful citizens, albeit as labourers and domestics of a new social, moral, and political order. Instruction was taken out of the hands of the “kaumatua” (Maori tribal elders) whose influence was seen by colonial educators, and many missionaries, as demoralising and regressive (Barrington, 1987).

The clearest insights into colonial policies and practices in art education for Maori children are provided in the education regulations for Native Schools (see AJHR, 1880, H.-1F; AJHR, 1905, E.-2; NZG, 1909; NZG, 1915). Specifications for the elementary drawing examinations, and the introduction of a programme of handwork, imposed upon Maori children a Eurocentric notion of the arts as utility. Activities in handwork included clay and plasticine modelling, cane weaving, and woodwork. This was indicative of the persistence of assimilationist policies and attitudes that weaving with cane, part of the British craft tradition, was introduced despite the fact that Maori already had their own extensive tradition of weaving (Simon, 1998). Furthermore, there was no evidence

of Maori themes or motifs being acknowledged and incorporated into this work. This omission could well convey to pupils that Maori traditions and styles of weaving and carving were less significant, and less valid, than those of Europeans. The same conflation of art with technical skills, that was evident in the public schools, was replicated in the Native Schools' curriculum for drawing. Although the 1915 regulations for Native Schools (NZG, 1915) stated that the purpose of drawing was to "awaken and develop the facility of observation, to train children to use hands and eyes in harmony, freely and correctly at will, and express graphically in suitable media the appearance (form and colour) of easily understood objects" (p.1159), drawing remained firmly linked to other lessons. As further indication that the European saw the Maori as being able to be 'civilised', the drawing curriculum listed "suitably civilized and British objects for study" (Chalmers, 1999, p. 177). For younger Maori pupils these included "coloured beads or buttons (in groups), skipping-rope, hoop, wooden spoon, gridiron, wire netting, envelope, slate, kite, axe, football, toy flags, toy animals, ninepin, bow and arrow, horse-shoe, carrot, plum, apple, pansy, daffodil" (NZG, 1915, p.1170). The same bias towards European examples was evident in the listing for older pupils: "Picture and photo frames, toasting fork, croquet-mallet, broom, cricket-bat, tennis racket, school-bag, tambourine, school bell, wood-shaving, clock-spring, bag of sugar, lantern, twigs and small boughs, fruits, feathers, butterflies, celery and rhubarb sticks" (ibid). Inherent in the practices of the time, art in schools was conceived as illustration. It had little to do with self-expression, cultural representations, or art-for-arts-sake.

From assimilation to adaptation

In successive syllabus revisions, in 1904 and 1913, few changes were made that would affect the development and status of art in schools. By contrast, the 1929 *Syllabus of Instruction for Public Schools* (Department of Education, 1929) contained detailed prescriptions for each subject. When the Native Schools began to use this syllabus, a move from assimilation to adaptation was signalled. Until this time official approval or encouragement for the schools to include Maori

crafts, or to incorporate Maori themes or motifs in their drawing programmes, had not been granted (Simon, 1998). The new regulations appeared to validate aspects of Maori cultural knowledge as worthy of inclusion in the “New Zealand culture”. From the 1930s, some Native Schools offered traditional or customary skills in “whakairo” (carving), “raranga” (weaving), “whai” (string figures) and “kowhaiwhai” (painting scroll work on rafters). However, what constituted appropriate Maori art, culture, and knowledge was decided by Pakeha officers of the Department of Education. More importantly, by designating it as Maori arts and crafts, Maori cultural knowledge was reduced to the same inferior subject status that was, at that time, afforded arts and crafts in the mainstream public schools. Taught mainly on Friday afternoon, when the ‘real’ work of the school had been completed, it simply became a cultural addition to the mono-cultural system (Simon, 1998).

Changing perspectives on art education from the 1930s

New Zealand’s emergence from the Great Depression of the 1930s coincided with a number of historical moments which prompted a revival in art education, particularly in primary schools. One such turning point was the visit to New Zealand of a delegation of eminent educationalists, following the New Education Fellowship (NEF) conference in Australia in 1937 (see Campbell, 1938). A theme that ran throughout the presentations was the need for teachers to cater to the individual student. Speakers specifically concerned with art promulgated the notion that it should have a central place in the education of all children. The subsequent initiatives adopted in New Zealand promoted art as a child-centred experience, replacing the utilitarian emphasis on formal drawing. The most influential proponent of child-centred art was Gordon Tovey, who was appointed the first National Supervisor of Art and Craft in 1946. Tovey embraced, through inter-curricula activities, the freedom of children’s expressive capabilities and the elimination of adult rules, ideas or standards (Smith, 1996). This approach marked a radical break from previous practices, particularly in primary schools.

The move to expressive child-centred art was paralleled by a further change that was to shape art education from the 1940s. Following World War II, a shift in the perception of art's function in New Zealand society towards the uses of craft in daily life and work reaffirmed the utilitarian stance of the early settlers. The establishment, by the Department of Education, of an Art and Craft Specialist Service resulted in the introduction of Western arts and crafts into schools. Support provided by the art and craft advisors focused on three major crafts - textile crafts, clay modelling and book craft. Paralleling this development, Tovey played an influential role in endorsing art and craft for Maori children in the Native Schools by promoting an education which drew upon Maori tradition (Smith, 1996). Thirteen Maori art advisors were recruited by Tovey between 1948 and 1961 to implement programmes that centred upon Maori arts and crafts. Traditional/customary Maori patterns were used in art and craft work. Maori songs, haka (dance, accompanied by chant or song) and legends formed, to some extent, a basis for drama and movement. By the 1960s, the Department of Education had given its Art and Craft branches responsibility for developing a programme for the teaching of Maori arts and crafts to all pupils, including Pakeha children.

It was not until the mid-1940s that a significant revision of the secondary curricula, until this time driven by academic imperatives, appeared to provide a breakthrough for art education in this sector. In 1943, the Consultative Committee on the Post-Primary Curriculum presented a report (The Thomas Report) which called for all students to receive a balanced education through a compulsory common core of general subjects. This accorded to art a status not previously enjoyed. However, in the subsequent *Education (Post-primary Instruction) Regulations 1945* (Department of Education, 1945), drawing and painting were recommended as activities essentially for those pupils with special ability. These pupils would be granted access to facilities at special art centres during after-school hours. Far greater emphasis was given to crafts and to design, with a sense of its value to the consumer society. The 1945 regulations thus encapsulated the belief, generated during the colonial period and perpetuated in the 1940s, of crafts as more useful than the pursuit of fine

arts. This emphasis on the elements and principles of design and of craft (i.e. art in daily living) aligned with Efland's (2004) identification of this particular vision of nineteenth and twentieth century art education throughout the Western world. It could, in retrospect, be regarded as a retrograde step for art education. Essentially, it fulfilled the spirit of the times. Thus, while craft 'clubs' thrived in many secondary schools during this time, art remained a mere addition to the mainstream curriculum (Murdoch, 1943).

New directions for art education in the 1990s

Well into the 1960s the creativity rationale for art education, and the commensurate interest in children's personality development, dominated the field world-wide. During the late 1960s and early 70s, a new generation of scholars and educators began to question that direction and to suggest, for the first time, that the study of art-for-arts-sake was worthwhile (Eisner, 1972). In addition to activities that resulted primarily in art production, the new approach to art as a 'discipline' advocated art learning activities that fostered understanding of the world of art. Awareness of the concepts, language, and approaches useful in responding to art was a further dimension. This was the climate in which the first national art curriculum in New Zealand, *Art Education Junior Classes to Form 7 Syllabus for Schools*, was developed (Department of Education, 1989).

Four features of the 1989 syllabus provided significant historical markers in the development of art education during the 1990s. The first was its emphasis upon two major traditions, Maori and European. While the many cultural groups within New Zealand society were acknowledged, the document reflected the bicultural stance of the 1970s and 80s (Department of Education, 1976). It exemplified the view that the Maori-Pakeha interaction was considered an intermediary step between a monocultural education system and the desired goal of multiethnic awareness and understanding (Smith, 2004a). The second feature of the syllabus was the balance given to the previous focus upon making art, and the need for students to understand its social contexts and significance. This inclu-

sion of studies about art, ways of responding to art, and the motivations for making art, were indicative of how far the vision for art education had moved from the 1940s. Aligned with this objective, the term 'craft' was abandoned in a deliberate attempt to reject the hierarchical ranking of art above craft. A third feature was the inclusion of definitions of art and art works which extended well beyond those previously articulated. Nevertheless, the examples cited in the syllabus were primarily from the Western modernist art making tradition. They illustrated, what Chalmers (1999, p. 173) refers to as, the "Eurocentric and racist roots of art education". In this situation, differentiation is made between Western art and the cultural production of others which does not conform to the Western aesthetic. A fourth feature of the syllabus was its modernist preoccupation with art works as the tangible outcomes of cultures. This position is at variance with the postmodern/post-structuralist conception of art as cultural text, more recently promulgated (Grierson, 2003). Nevertheless, underpinned by these four dimensions, the syllabus served to accelerate the development and status of art education in New Zealand. Not only was a clear direction for teaching and learning provided and presented in a discrete document, it required art teachers to become knowledgeable in the theoretical and art historical, as well as the practical aspects of the discipline (Smith, 2007).

The first 150 years

In sum, the development of art education in New Zealand from the 1840s to the 1990s was essentially a selection from the culture – the way of life, the kinds of knowledge, and the attitudes and values of society – of a particular time. During those 150 years art education was influenced, in particular, by colonial policies of assimilation and adaptation, the utilitarian imperatives of a settler nation, and a growing consciousness of the bicultural environment. Classroom practices were shaped by an ethnocentrism in which the values derived from the colonisers were applied, and by an increasingly distinctive New Zealand style of curriculum, albeit with a bicultural rather than multicultural focus.

The contemporary context: Art education from the 1990s

Current policies and practices in art education reflect the economic, social, cultural and educational changes, including curriculum reforms, promulgated in New Zealand by successive governments during the 1980s and 90s. These changes were initiated at a time when the country was becoming an increasingly multicultural society, with a progressively diverse student population (Statistics New Zealand, 2001). My perspectives on contemporary practice, located through fieldwork investigation (Smith, 2007; see also Smith, 2005), are posited within the context of the demographic shift of recent decades. They are positioned, also, within the expectations of the Education Review Office (ERO) (2000) that education should reflect this diversity.

Several features of the government's curriculum reform agenda have impacted on both policy and practice. For example, *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993), the overarching policy statement for teaching and learning, places emphasis upon increasing the ties between education and paid work, and education and the market. This shift, in which education seen as cultural practice becomes subordinate to an enterprise model (Peters & Marshall, 2004), informed the design of *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000). In this key policy document, which underpins art education across all schooling sectors, four arts disciplines (visual arts, music, dance and drama) are identified as significant contributors to employment and the competitive world economy. The rationale for art as economic potential, with its antecedents in the utilitarian and materialistic values evident in New Zealand as a developing nation from the 1840s, is validated in the curriculum in terms of useful skills acquisition and individualised, competitive learning. As a consequence, much programming, assessment, and art department structuring in secondary schools is focused upon the academic and economic achievement imperatives inherent in the curriculum reforms (Smith, 2007). Art department schemes emphasise the framework's groupings of 'essential skills', which include communication, information, problem solving, work and study, and self-management and competi-

tive skills. Designed to contribute to a highly skilled, technologically competent, and adaptable workforce these essential skills are included in art education reporting systems to students and their guardians.

The concept of art as a discipline, advocated in the first national art syllabus (Department of Education, 1989), is relocated in *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2000). The emphasis in the former, upon knowing about art and making art, is expanded in the curriculum to four 'strands'. Through these strands students are to study the visual arts in context, communicate and interpret ideas, develop their own ideas, and apply practical knowledge of art making processes and procedures. My investigation showed that art teachers consciously use all four strands to define learning objectives and assessment criteria, although the greatest emphasis remains on students making art (Smith, 2005, 2007). Reflecting the current achievement-driven approach to art education, time allocation for spontaneous and informal art activities that are not driven by curriculum objectives is minimal. Programmes reflect, also, a conscious decision by art teachers to prepare their year 9-10 students (mostly 13-14 year olds) for the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) visual arts examinations at years 11-13 (Smith, 2007).

The 1989 syllabus had provided definitions of art and art works which went well beyond those articulated previously. In the current curriculum, as then, the emphasis rests with the Western art traditions of painting, sculpture, design, and photography, with the addition of film and video, computer-generated art, performance art, and combinations of these forms. An ambition of the curriculum is for students to "understand visual art works as social and historical texts" (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 71). However, the modernist preoccupation with art works as tangible outcomes of cultures continues to take precedence over investigation of context (Smith, 2004b, 2005, 2007). With the exception of examples of customary and contemporary Maori art, it was evident during my fieldwork investigation that most of the art works selected by teachers for student study were drawn primarily from a mod-

ernist Western aesthetic. This was regardless of the ethnic diversity of the student population observed in classrooms (Smith, 2007).

The emphasis upon the traditions of Maori and Pakeha, another feature of the 1989 art syllabus, is also relocated in the present. While the arts curriculum, as with other Government education policy and curriculum documents, draws attention to the need for teachers to respond to the cultural diversity that marks schools and society in the twenty-first century (Ministry of Education, 1993; ERO, 2000), the greatest emphasis is upon the bicultural partners. The diverse traditions of Pacific peoples, and other cultures that make up our nation, are downplayed by comparison. A reference to “culturally inclusive programmes in the arts (that) will encourage positive attitudes towards cultural diversity ...” (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 104) is presented in the penultimate section of the document. This supports Mane-Wheoki’s (2003) claim that an “insistent ‘bicultural’ vision” continues to pervade the art curriculum in New Zealand (p. 8).

Art education in New Zealand currently adopts a particular focus upon skill acquisition and predictable outcomes (Smith, 2007). The framework of modernism and monoculturalism, which characterises both policy and much current practice, does not align with the expectations of the Education Review Office (2000). In ERO’s view, schooling should reflect the ethnic diversity and cultural difference of students living in New Zealand’s increasingly multiculturalised society. It was anticipated that the recently published, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), which presents future-focused policy to be implemented by 2010, would articulate a new vision for art education. Apart from an emphasis on ‘thinking’ as one of five key competencies or capabilities for living and lifelong learning, little more is offered. Past emphases on the four ‘strands’, the bicultural and multicultural character of New Zealand, and specific reference to the arts of Maori, remain unchanged. While the nomenclature ‘visual culture’ has been added, and positive direction is given to the ways in which students can engage in the visual arts, the new curriculum continues to cite art practices as “drawing, sculpture, design,

printmaking, photography, and the moving image” (p. 21). Although an ambition to move to the future is promulgated in the curriculum, the weight of the past still persists.

Conclusion

Educational policies and practices in art education in New Zealand have evolved from the societal conditions of the post-colonial era. While these may continue to influence the shape of art education in New Zealand, the cultural and visual arts environments of today’s world indicate that persistence with this evolutionary model requires critical scrutiny. A key debate for art educators in New Zealand is how art education can embrace the large shifts that characterise the contemporary conditions of art, culture and society. This suggests that a more revolutionary stance is needed to promote the implementation of policies and practices that take greater account of the ethnic diversity and cultural differences of students living in a multicultural nation and globalised world.

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