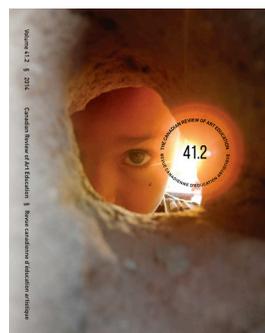


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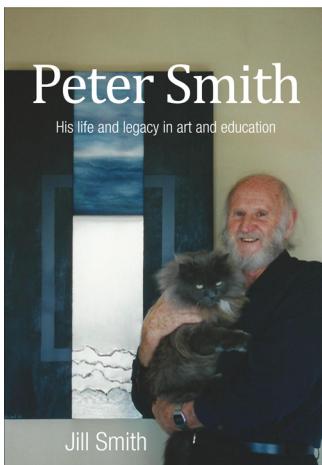
Book Review

Smith, J. (2014). *Peter Smith: His Life and Legacy in Art and Education*. Wellington NZ: NZCER Press. 146pp. ISBN 978-1-927231-06-7 \$19.95 (Amazon e.book) Soft cover \$44.95 NZ from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

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With papers on bicultural, historical antecedents and indigenous students' achievement published in CRAE (Vols. 31, 36, and 41) Jill Smith should be no stranger to readers of this journal. Given Canada's and New Zealand's somewhat comparative histories, as former British colonies with both indigenous and growing multicultural populations, Canadians will do well to take notice of the work of this New Zealand art educator. As well as her own, we should also get to know the work of Jill's husband: Peter Smith (1925-2012). As stated on the back cover of Jill's book about "the love of her life," "to know Peter's life and legacy is to understand the evolution of art education in New Zealand from World War 2 to today."

Although Jill writes that Peter was one of New Zealand's most influential art educators, I suggest that, to date, he was/is *the* most influential. When I read the publisher's "blurb" that Peter was "a well-loved teacher, role model, and mentor" I most certainly agree, because, as an art teacher educator,

Peter Smith was *my* first teacher, role model and mentor. Some readers may question whether an adoring and loving wife (who herself has become one of New Zealand's most influential art educators) is the right person to write such a book. My answer in this case is an unequivocal "yes."

This is a beautifully produced little book with the carefully designed "look" of other biographical memoirs produced by both Peter and Jill (Smith, 2009; Smith, Yunis, & Nguyen 2009). A rich archive of photographs enhance the text. In addition to images reflecting Peter's teaching and professional life I delighted in seeing photographs of him with Tiberius, a special cat, his art work, family social celebrations, his love of sailing and the sea, those human life-affirming moments that academics and professionals often push into the background or share only with an intimate few. Peter worked hard, but it is clear that he loved life and lived it with joy. I am writing this as I sit by the water at our Muskoka cottage. The canoe is ready for an evening paddle. The waka presented to me (see pp.119-120) is in the cottage. Peter would like it here. I'll end the day with a glass of wine by the lake and probably look a little like the contemplative image of Peter on p.128.

In many ways this book was "co-authored." In the last months of his life Peter set about sorting, labelling and writing notes, contextualizing a wealth of material relating to his life in art and education. This was supplemented by material from Jill's own diaries and the voices of former students, colleagues, and friends providing source material that historians and biographers dream about. Jill organized this material into eight chapters, plus an epilogue – a beautifully constructed poem contributed by Auckland art teacher Shelley Ryde and shared at Peter's funeral in May 2012. Referring to the book as a waka (a Māori canoe) Shelley contributed similarly meaningful words when *Peter Smith: His Life and Legacy in Art and Education* was launched at the 2014 Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Art Educators' Conference:

This Waka has been on an epic journey
A journey of minds
Of hearts
Of equals
Jill and Peter
Who found each other.

And here in this book is their story
The story of a great artist and educator
A thinker and a maker.
Written by his partner
A wordsmith and his mentor
As he was hers
Seated side by side
They navigated the seas
Together
Yes, this is a book about Peter
But it has been crafted and shaped
By their journeys and shared experiences
This is a book about the Waka of Jill and Peter
Who better to write it? . . .

Positing that anyone's legacy is shaped by the circumstances that shape them as a person Jill delves into Peter's family background claiming, among other factors, the influence of a Chartist great grandfather, family immigration to a non-conformist settlement in New Zealand in 1862; an older father who loved working with wood, painting in watercolours, and designing, building, and sailing boats; a younger politically active mother who was raised on a farm, and taught in Northland schools.

Peter began at Auckland Teachers' College in 1944, where the impact of new horizons and friendships are discussed. Among Peter's companions at that time are some of those who emerged as New Zealand's foremost historians, poets, musicians and artists. Peter began teaching in an elementary school in 1947. Jill terms this section of his life "optimism in a conservative climate" with optimism due to the appointment of Clarence Beeby, then ambassador to France, as Director of Education. Peter shared Beeby's vision, particularly his admiration for the ingenuity and inventiveness of working class New Zealanders. Beeby believed that art and craft should play a central role in the education of all children. In 1946 he established a national system of art advisers and in 1951 Peter became part of this team.

As someone who started school in 1949 I am a product of this new era in New Zealand art education policy. Gordon Tovey, the director of the Arts and Crafts Specialist Service “saw in Māori art the same vitality he aligned with children’s art” (Henderson, p.114). Peter valued his close association with the fourteen Māori art advisors that were appointed between 1946 and 1961. (Where were/ are the similar positions in Canada?) Western Canadians learned about some of this work when Elwyn Richardson taught at the University of Washington, and Sylvia Ashton-Warner at Simon Fraser University.

We next follow Peter’s emerging philosophy of art education as it was explored in university fieldwork, and at a district high school, when he began to work with older students. At the same period four sons from his first marriage were born between 1948 and 1956 and in 1953 he was seconded to Auckland Teachers’ College to begin the first specifically secondary art teacher program in New Zealand, and thus began his extensive career in this field. Chapter 4 titled “An Inspirational Mentor” traces Peter’s career as a secondary art teacher educator. In this chapter a number of former students and colleagues, myself included, share their memories. John Coley, who was a student in 1958, records:

The first thing that Pete communicated was you had entered into an important field that required serious attention and commitment, one that had vital implications for the personal growth of young people’s visual literacy, the encouragement and development of their creativity across many art-related occupations, and the aesthetic enrichment of their future lives. (p. 47)

Another important section in this chapter deals with Peter’s general influence in the College and his significant impact on those students who were not in the visual arts cohort. In the early 1960s Peter broadened his horizons and, with his family, and the aid of an Arts Council of New Zealand grant, made an extended visit to Europe, returning to Secondary Teachers’ College.

In 1971 Jill becomes part of the story in an amazing partnership that despite medical scares, lasted 41 years. There are many excellent teacher educators, but not everyone has the “smarts,” the status, and the social competence to contribute to national policy, to demand, lead, and foster change in curriculum, assessment, and the professional status of art teachers. In 1974 Peter became an inspector of secondary schools with

national responsibility for art. This was the beginning of another awakening for art education in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Although I was able to return to three national conferences in New Zealand, upon reading chapters 5 and 6, I became quite regretful, realizing that by staying in North America I had missed something rather exciting: residential courses for teachers and art advisers; increased respect for Māori art education (as Jill states Peter believed that “When a nation’s first people are marginalized, it is the coloniser’s obligation to elevate and restore those people’s rightful position to ensure a more than equal partnership”); and the first national syllabus moving from an art to an arts curriculum. In support of Peter being made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) art educator Ted Bracey identifies those qualities that are at the heart of Peter’s influence. Bracey writes:

Part of Peter’s extraordinary influence rests, in large measure, on his ability to inspire those who work with him. The complex sources of inspiration lie in his own example, his concern for and belief in the ability of others, his unique ability to reveal to others what is possible and worthwhile and, ultimately, in his absolute sincerity . . . His modest self-effacement and a complete absence of arrogance and ill-will excite affection. (pp.89-90)

North American art educators who met Peter, such as Laura Chapman and Edmund Feldman echoed similar sentiments.

Just as he was contemplating retirement Peter was asked to manage and negotiate the merger of several programs into the Auckland College of Education. The text is enriched with quotes from his talks and position papers from this time. The tributes, which marked Peter’s eventual retirement from the College of Education, give further evidence of his remarkable leadership.

The final chapter titled “A Man of Many Parts” discusses Peter’s art-making, his involvement with radio and television, and his love of the sea, boat building and restoration and especially sailing.

If there are aspects of Peter’s personal life that are missing or treated lightly, it is because the book was never meant to be a comprehensive biographical study – rather it is tribute to a life well-lived in education and art. This tribute to an inspiring teacher and friend serves as a reminder of the rich legacy that I inherited. It reminds me of the qualities that best define leadership. It reinforces my resolve to live equitably with First Peoples. It alerts me to the importance of living life fully, with multiple interests, commitments and passion; and to never really be “retired.”

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