



Jill Smith

Excellence Award: Sustained Excellence
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Jill Smith is a successful teacher educator. She defines excellence as the best possible professional preparation of candidates for the secondary teaching profession. Excellence includes "...the ability to recognise and value the varying talents and character of students and assist them to develop their own effective learning and teaching strategies and styles". Jill has been involved at a national level since the 1980s in the design of art/art history curriculum and assessment and the preparation of materials for teacher professional development. Jill's students state that her "...pattern of self-evaluation is seen as essential and non-threatening and is adoptive as a methodology by her past and present trainees".

The Role of the Teacher Educator

At the prize-giving in my final year of secondary school, I received along with the Senior Art prize, two special awards: 'All-round Excellence' and 'Service to the School'. These signify qualities that I have endeavoured to sustain during 32 years in teaching and teacher education – the pursuit of excellence, enthusiasm for teaching, and full participation in education both in and beyond the classroom.

My definition of excellence is: the best possible professional preparation of candidates for the secondary teaching profession. The role of a teacher educator is highly specialised. Its distinguishing feature is the ability to recognise and value the varying talents and character of students. This includes assisting students to develop their own effective learning and teaching strategies and styles. Being a teacher educator requires an excellent knowledge of the subject and a background of proven teaching practice. It requires an understanding of the needs and aspirations of adult learners, recognition of their differing strengths and areas needing development. Strategies should provide motivation and leadership without undue imposition of philosophy, pedagogy and style.

The teacher educator must move with the times, assessing new knowledge and shifts in ideas in the subject, keeping well abreast of developments in pedagogical theory, teaching practice, and remaining conversant with changes in national curricula and assessment policies.

Each subject of the school curriculum has its particular methodologies. These cannot be subsumed under a generalised professional practice programme. The accusation is sometimes made that secondary teachers focus upon subjects rather than students. I reject this and am adamant that each specialist teacher has a professional responsibility to contribute to the whole education and welfare of each student and to the life and ethos of a school.

For me, excellence is setting a pathway for beginning teachers to explore, providing them with sound and up-to-date knowledge of educational theory and teaching pedagogy. This needs to include many and varied exemplars of good practice, with access to a wide range of teaching resources, considered feedback and careful assessment of college and school-based experience. The provision of continuing support for students when they become art teachers provides me in turn with collegial companionship and professional co-operation. I am very proud of so many of them.

Curriculum Development

Since entering teacher education in 1980, I have taken every opportunity to increase my professional growth and development in order to enhance and give credibility to my teaching. I have been fortunate that my teaching career has been in a climate of substantial curriculum development. This has involved the membership of professional associations, national and regional committees, and

advisory groups. My professional development has also involved participation in conferences, consultancies, reviews, and national examination and moderation positions. These have all enabled me to stay in touch with secondary school art/art history teaching whilst working in the tertiary sector. One of my former students, Jeanine McCaig (HOD Art, Northcote College, 2002) states that:

Jill's curriculum knowledge and implementation is impeccable, yet she continually strives for improvement through constant review. This pattern of self-evaluation is seen as essential and non-threatening and is adopted as a methodology by her past and current trainees.

I consider, however, that the critical factor in my professional development has been the evaluation of experience and the ability to apply and test it in the context of teaching programmes. This has meant consistent revision of programmes to meet changing needs, to improve approaches, and to respond to changes in the nature of student intake.

Contribution to Teaching

Critical to my role and practice as a teacher educator has been the expansion of knowledge and understanding of the subject. There is a paucity of research in art education in New Zealand particularly in the territory of pre-adolescent and adolescent art education which has received little attention from theorists, philosophers, researchers and art educators world-wide. I have researched topics that include the ill-explored territory of adolescent art education and how the visual arts curriculum in *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* can be implemented in postmodern terms. General investigations into constructions of education, and issues and methods in educational research, have culminated in papers on art education. Research has provided me with a reflective opportunity. It has substantially assisted me in the clarification, development and appraisal of ideas and practice. These broader fields of art education research are tied to well-structured and accessible professional practice, and to curriculum and assessment programmes for beginning and experienced art teachers. Shelley Ryde (HOD Art, Diocesan School) states that:

Jill's strength as a mentor and role model for secondary art teachers is extremely powerful. Her teaching style is inclusive and encouraging, whilst challenging us to think laterally about programme planning and delivery strategies. She continues to be at the forefront of art education,

both in the contemporary and progressive course that she delivers, and in her leadership in the wider community.

I have been particularly conscious of my responsibility to provide students, both Maori and non-Maori, with a curriculum that demonstrates a bicultural responsibility and inclusiveness. A long-standing interest in taonga and contemporary Maori art led to my MEd thesis on the topic, *Biculturalism: the relationship between education policy and art education practice in secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand*. My colleague, Robert Hoerberigs (Ngapuhi), Senior Lecturer Visual Arts Education, states that:

Jill's life is one of cultural inclusiveness. Personally and professionally, she celebrates the biculturalism of New Zealand and its arts. She sees no mystery in the teacher's role in honouring the Treaty, revelling in all things Māori, and encouraging her students to feel comfortable doing the same. Jill has the ability to identify and nurture special strengths and qualities in her students and was instrumental in encouraging my own interest and focus (as a Māori student) on Māori art and bicultural art education while I was training. The topic is contentious with perspectives constantly shifting but it is Jill's first hand experience of the issues, her close connections with most of the major players, and her personal commitment to the topic that has earned my respect.

Influence on Colleagues

A teacher educator inevitably influences students. This occurs with students' understanding of policies, curricula and pedagogy, competence to develop and use resources, management, planning and organisational skills, leadership style, lesson and programme delivery and their quality of pastoral care. Within the one-year graduate programme, the student's process of learning and development can, at best, hope to lay a foundation of practice and professionalism. The measure of the teacher educator's worth will properly be evident in the performance of students when they take up their roles as teachers.

The sudden shift which students, who have been preoccupied with their own art practice, have to make into the 'pedagogical' climate of teacher education, can be challenging. A large part of student success is attributed to the teachers' ability to meld an understanding of art practice with art teaching methodology. A climate of sharing and co-operation promotes formative and summative feedback within groups that are very disparate in experience, specialisation and age. This creates

honest oral and written comments from students on course work, assignments, progress and performance on practicum. A willingness to act on suggestions made by students in course evaluations creates a safe environment for the exchange of ideas and expression of views. The feeling of preparedness and confidence is then retained when students enter the teaching environment

The role in sustaining secondary art/art history colleagues in the field is very important to me. Over 21 years many students have attended my programmes and are now widely dispersed throughout New Zealand and overseas. One of the rewards has been to see them develop their careers, to become Heads of Art Departments, to occupy roles in the Ministry of Education and advisory services, or to be significant leaders in tertiary art education. I have developed and maintain a strong network of art educators. Many still seek support and advice, many work with me on national and local projects and contracts, and a great number enrich my professional life. This is what sustains me in my work. One of my former students, Louise Plummer (HOD Art, Baradene College, 2002) states that:

Visual arts education in the region has gone from strength to strength as Jill's passion for the arts, her vision and forward-looking stance, and her thoroughness of methodology and exemplary modelling of professionalism have filtered through to the teaching population by way of her students. Over the 16 years I have known her Jill has sustained her inspirational teaching style and consummate professionalism and more importantly, she continues to advance her role as a leader in the field.

From an early age I was fortunate to have the benign influence of a number of teachers who encouraged me to pursue studies in art and, later, to become an art and art history teacher. I remember them with affection and gratitude. Now, I have the opportunity to encourage and influence others who can open up a world of art to many students. I do consider it a serious responsibility though remain aware of the temptation of pride - to know all and be all to one's students. I repeat the conviction that excellence in large part consists in being able to recognise, value and enhance the talents and qualities of all those I have worked with.
