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The Art Consultant as Writer: A Retrospective of Ontario Publications, 1945-1995

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Consultant, supervisor, co-ordinator – though the official titles may have changed with locale and decade, the position of art consultant has remained an enduring fixture of the Ontario education system since World War II. In this paper, I will trace the evolution of Ontario art consultancies from 1945 to 1995. My focus will be a novel one: the art consultant as writer. Teachers who have entered the profession within the last twenty years may find this role for art consultants to be surprising since it has remained largely dormant during the lifespan of their teaching careers. A review of the literature paints a different picture, however, and reveals that Ontario art consultants after World War II did indeed see writing as an integral part of their professional activity. Particular attention will be paid to publications written by Elizabeth Harrison, Florence Hart, and Arnel Pattemore. The development and decline in the role of art consultant as writer will be linked to cyclical changes in the delivery of education in Ontario. With this subtext in mind, the paper is divided into two parts. The first half is devoted to publications written by art consultants during the career of Charles Dudley Gaitskell, roughly

1945-70, an era when education was centralized and tightly controlled by the provincial government. The second half is focused on publications written by art consultants during the period 1970-1995 when education experienced a significant degree of local autonomy.

The Gaitskell Era: 1945-70

In 1945 Charles Dudley Gaitskell was appointed the first director of art education by the Ontario Department of Education (DoE). His instrumentalist philosophy of art education complemented the progressive public school curriculum introduced earlier in 1937 by Colonel Stanley Watson, DoE Superintendent of Curriculum and Textbooks. This progressive curriculum was outlined in two elementary documents, which remained in force for almost 40 years: (a) *Programme of Studies for Grades 1 to VI of the Public and Separate Schools* (a.k.a. 'the little grey book'), and (b) *Programme of Studies for Grades VII and VIII of the Public and Separate Schools* (a.k.a. 'the little blue book'). The colloquial names for these two small books, measuring 5.21" x 7.5", were derived from the colours of their respective soft cover jackets.

The little grey book, 153 pages long, outlined curricular expectations for all subjects from grade 1 to grade 6. The mandated subjects were health, English, social studies, natural science, arithmetic, music, and art. In the document's introduction the "threefold task" of elementary education was clearly communicated: (i) "the school must help the child to understand the nature of the environment in which he lives; (ii) the school must seek to lead the child to choose and accept as his own those ideals of conduct and endeavour which a Christian and democratic society approves; (iii) the school must assist the pupil to master those abilities that are essential to living in a modern society" (Ontario Department of Education, 1941, p. 7).

Six pages were devoted to art education, a subject predicated upon the twin pillars of aesthetics and self-expression:

As in language and music, the school curriculum in art should recognize the importance of both appreciation and creation. Appreciation of the beautiful is partly emo-

tional and partly intellectual, and the school should provide experience in and training for both these phases of appreciation. Creation in the realm of art is emotional, intellectual, and physical, since the forms of beauty which the child attempts to create with pencil, brush, or knife have been forefashioned in the mind in response to an emotional experience. (p. 127)

An entire page was devoted to aesthetic education under the heading "Cultivating a Love of Beauty":

The creation of beauty by the child is a corollary of his experience of beauty in nature and in art. No opportunity, therefore, should be missed to direct the attention of children to forms of beauty all around them. The landscape, the sunset sky, the clouds, the trees shrubs and vines, the flowers, the birds and butterflies, each may be to the child a thing of beauty. Not alone in the works of the great Master Artist but in those of His disciples is beauty to be discerned. (p. 128)

Similarly, the little blue book, 151 pages long, spelled out curricular expectations for all subjects in grades 7 and 8. The mandatory subjects were social studies, English, mathematics, science, health, music, and art; optional subjects included crafts, manual training, home economics, and agriculture. The rationale for art education remained as a vehicle for the development of healthy interpersonal skills: "The development of many important skills involved in communicating ideas and emotions to others may be furthered by the suggested activities in English, Mathematics, Art and Music" (Ontario Department of Education, 1942, p. 9).

The little blue book devoted five pages to art and an additional five pages to crafts. The crafts section offered teachers more than 70 possible projects although many possessed dubious artistic or academic merit such as: sharpening a bread or meat knife, patching hot-water bags and inner tubes, making a window stick of variant lengths, filling small holes or cracks in plaster, making labels for plants and school garden plots, and making minor repairs and adjustments to bicycles. In contrast, the art section urged teachers to implement much

more rigorous, integrated activities:

Making a frieze or mural to decorate the walls of the classroom, planning and executing the back-drop for a stage production, doing an illustration for the class magazine, making models to indicate stages in the story of transportation, drawing the 'set-up' used in a science experiment, representing accurately the markings on the wing of a rare moth – these and a hundred others are art activities of indubitable value. (p. 99)

Given such a progressive, child-centred curricular mandate from the DoE, it is not surprising to learn that Gaitskell's approach to art education involved: (i) "provision for creative-ness in all activities for all participants; (ii) acquisition of skill through activities which engage the emotions and intellect of the learner; (iii) provision for the learner to enjoy freedom of thought; (iv) fusion of art production with the real experiences of the learner; (v) stress in developing taste; (vi) use of art experiences to relate the individual to the social group" (Blackwell, 1989, pp. 21-22).

Gaitskell had been greatly influenced by the progressive philosophies of such art scholars as Sir Herbert Read, Arthur Lismer, and Marion Richardson. Lismer had already circulated across Ontario Read's pacifist-oriented credo "education through art" which clearly placed art education within an instrumentalist, pedagogic milieu, as opposed to an essentialist, disciplinary one. Gaitskell spent his entire career extolling the virtues of education through art and was a key figure in its dissemination throughout the province and across the nation. Gaitskell played a prominent role in the formation of the Ontario Society for Education through Art, although he never served as its president. Instead, he devoted his political endeavours to its national counterpart, becoming, in 1955, the first president of the Canadian Society for Education through Art.

Gaitskell used his position at the Department of Education to entrench his philosophy of education through art across the province. In 1945, his first year as director of art education, he began summer courses for art specialists that were offered

by the Department and taught by teaching masters from the field. In 1948, Gaitskell inaugurated the first of a series of field studies officially undertaken by the Department to research best practices in art education. The resultant data were analyzed and reported in five monographs published between 1949 and 1954:

Art and Crafts in the Schools of Ontario (Ontario, 1949).

This 62-page monograph was based on eight bulletins on art education issued by the DoE 1944-45 to 1,500 schools. The bulletins were revised four times, and each subsequent set of revised bulletins were field tested with a different set of 1,500 schools - quite an ambitious undertaking, indeed.

Children and their Pictures (Ontario, 1951). This 16-page monograph did not involve field research; instead, it offered elementary teachers practical guidance on picture-making. Naturally, it espoused a child-centred, Lowenfeldian methodology.

Art Education in the Kindergarten (Ontario, 1952). This 40-page monograph was based on initial research conducted over a two-year period involving 9,000 children, aged 4-6 enrolled in 425 kindergartens across the province. The monograph also used data from subsequent research that involved 500 children enrolled in Toronto kindergartens.

Art for Slow Learners (Ontario, 1953). This 46-page monograph presented data from a three-year study of 575 children of sub-normal intelligence. The monograph offered pedagogic strategies as well as visual exemplars.

Art Education During Adolescence (Ontario, 1954). This 116-page monograph detailed data from a six-year study involving teenaged students from 240 schools across the province. The purpose of the study was to suggest a model art curriculum for grades 7-12. While emphasizing the central importance of picture-making, the monograph stressed the need for design-based projects and opportunities for students to develop an appreciation for their artistic heritage.

Thus, right from the start of his tenure at the Department, Gaitskell exemplified the concept of art consultant as writer, a professional approach which culminated in his seminal 1958

text *Children and their Art*. This 446-page publication provided art teachers with a truly all-encompassing overview of art education by covering such diverse topics as: instructional methodologies, classroom organization, stages of child art, studio media and skill development, group projects, activities for gifted and challenged children, displaying art, art appreciation, and appraising children's progress in art.

In addition to instituting summer courses for art specialists, conducting field research across the province, writing monographs, and authoring an art methodology book, Gaitskell sought to entrench the education through art philosophy by working very closely with art consultants. One such consultant was Elizabeth Harrison whom Gaitskell installed as art supervisor for the City of Kingston Board of Education in 1946, before she got her teaching license (Debenham, 1993). Complete with a glowing forward by Gaitskell, Harrison's 1947 book *Self-Expression through Art: An introduction to Teaching and Appreciation* demonstrated how quickly Gaitskell was able to get art consultants to emulate his Departmental activities at the local level. Over 16,000 copies of *Self-Expression through Art* were sold; a reprint in 1960 was not quite as well received. Essentially a compendium of elementary school art projects, the book was filled with male-only pronouns and offered recipes for modeling with asbestos powder:

More than environmental and gender issues would need to be addressed in a new edition, according to Harrison, who has seen no academic mention of the book lately. Its philosophy which emphasized non-directive teaching methods would, she feels, be considered dated today. Her reading of contemporary art education publications has convinced her that art instruction has largely become "a matter of metho-do-logy...The whole jargon has changed. In our day, we didn't use special language or gird ourselves up with footnotes all the time." (Debenham, 1993, p. 29)

Harrison also emulated Gaitskell by being minimally involved with the Ontario Society for Education through Art and focusing her activities at the national level; she was a founding member of the Canadian Society for Education through Art

and became an Honorary Life Member in 1970.

The career of Florence Hart, supervisor of art and crafts for the City of Oshawa Board of Education, offers another example of Gaitskell's ability to inspire and nurture local art consultants throughout the province of Ontario. In many ways, Hart's contributions to the field mirrored those of Elizabeth Harrison. Hart also wrote a book, entitled *What Shall We do in Art?: Practical Ideas for Elementary Schools*, another compendium of elementary art projects complete with another glowing forward by Gaitskell. Although *What Shall We do in Art?* was published in 1957 - a decade later than Harrison's text - the progressive education through art philosophy remained intact.:

The purpose of the school art programme is, primarily, to enrich the child's life. When, in the course of an art lesson, a child is encouraged to use his imagination to *create* something, the lesson has been a success. By adult standards his work may be crude and inadequate; the real test is the satisfaction and joy he has derived from it...Art lessons help some children by furnishing opportunities for the release of emotional tensions...Co-operative art projects encourage the development of good social attitudes in most children. (p. 9)

Correspondingly, Hart suggested that "on the report card, only the effort column should be filled in for art" (p. 16) and opined that calls from elementary teachers for a provincial course of study for art were incompatible with the education through art philosophy. The principal difference between the careers of these two curricular crusaders was in the realm of political action. Whereas Harrison, like Gaitskell, devoted her political advocacy to the national arena, Hart chose to champion the cause provincially. Florence Hart served the Ontario Society for Education through Art as journal editor during the 1950s and as president 1955-56 (Blackwell, 1988).

Another Ontario art consultant who considered writing to be part of his professional life was Arnel Pattemore, the coordinator of art for the City of St. Catharines Board of Education (later the Lincoln County Board of Education). Although his

career began just as the Gaitskell era was winding down, Pattemore's professional activities possessed striking similarities to those of the post-World War II icon. Needless to say, Pattemore shared Gaitskell's belief in child-centred, progressive education in general and the tenets of education through art in particular. Like Gaitskell, he worked tirelessly on behalf of the Canadian Society for Education through Art serving as president 1971-72. Later, in 1979, Pattemore was named an Honorary Life Member of the Society. It is interesting to note, however, that unlike Gaitskell, Harrison, or Hart, Pattemore managed to balance his political advocacy both nationally and provincially, serving as president of the Ontario Society for Education through Art, 1982-84. Following in the footsteps of Elizabeth Harrison and Florence Hart, Arnel Pattemore wrote three books, *Printmaking Activities for the Classroom* (1966), *Art & Crafts for Slow Learners* (1969), and *Art and Environment: An Art Resource for Teachers* (1974). As with the earlier texts, Pattemore's books were compendiums that offered art teachers practical studio tips and suggested projects. The printmaking text even continued the tradition of beginning with a glowing forward by Gaitskell who had by 1966 become an assistant superintendent in the DoE's curriculum division. None of Pattemore's texts provides readers with any scholarly material or references, although the printmaking text does have a bibliography of related books. *Printmaking Activities for the Classroom* contains an opening paragraph, however, in which its education through art foundation is alluded to:

Art education is a vital and important area of learning in which the school is able, perhaps more than in any other subject discipline, to provide that contact between the child and his world. The visual excitement which is a part of our surroundings is reflected in the work of children, particularly those at the elementary level. The young student also uses his art as a means of communication in which he conveys to others – to his audience of teachers, parents and peers – his personal ideas and ideals. In a world which is so dependent on rapid means of communication, it becomes ever more necessary for the child to have many opportunities to express himself in a wide variety of media and techniques. (p. 7)

The Post-Gaitskell Era: 1970-1995

The 1970s witnessed the implementation of many changes in how education was delivered in Ontario, not the least of which was the creation in 1972 of the Ministry of Education (MoE). Throughout the decade the Ministry accommodated requests for greater local autonomy from newly enlarged school boards, which had been created by a spate of county, municipal, and regional amalgamations. During this period of decentralization, which lasted into the 1990s, many urban school boards greatly increased the number of subject consultants and curriculum specialists working centrally from board offices. Correspondingly, the Ministry significantly reduced the number of education officers working out of regional offices across the province.

In 1975, the Ministry issued *The Formative Years* - finally replacing 'the little grey book' which had been first published back in 1937. In keeping with the new mantra of local autonomy *The Formative Years* offered elementary teachers a grand total of twenty-two, 6" x 8" pages with only the most skeletal of curriculum guidelines for grades 1-6. On the lower third of page 18, four broad expectations for art (which had been unilaterally given the awkward title of 'visual arts' in 1974) were outlined: (i) "experience and respond to forms, events, and materials in the environment; (ii) perceive qualities of form such as similarities and contrasts, surfaces, patterns, rhythms, cohesiveness, line, mass, space, and colour in natural and manufactured objects and materials; (iii) clarify and express personal experiences and feelings in visual form through a variety of materials and activities such as modelling, construction, painting, and drawing; (iv) share visual expressions and relate them generally to the work of other people".

Clearly, art at the elementary school level retained its instrumentalist, education through art philosophy. Proponents of an essentialist, education in art philosophy were still left wandering in the wilderness; although unforeseen at the time, their day of triumph would come in the 1990s. *The Formative Years* signalled an abrupt end to the old days of Departmental regulation and inspection. The introduction entitled "Ontario's Approach to Curriculum" clearly spelled out the new era of lo-

cal autonomy: "While the Ministry articulates the broad goals, it is the responsibility of the local school boards – through their supervisory officials – to formulate local programs that are within the rationale of the provincial policy and at the same time reflect local needs and priorities" (p. 2).

The Ministry's decision to allow greater local autonomy was echoed in *Towards Visual Awareness*, the 1976 curriculum guideline for art in the senior division. The second paragraph of the introduction makes this decentralized approach very clear:

As the title of this document implies, visual awareness is intended to provide a general direction in all visual arts programs in the Senior division and at the Honour Graduation [grade 13] level. There are many ways to achieve this goal, and the structure outlined in this document leaves considerable scope for local initiative. In fact, it is hoped that local planning will help each student achieve the intent of the program in a way suited to individual development, either through a wide choice of visual arts courses or through a diversity of activity and experience within any one course...The program that is built on the structure set forth here will vary from school to school. (p. 3)

The "structure set forth here" was a tripartite model consisting of 'design', 'studio activities', and 'study of the artist, past and present'. Although the three components could easily have been employed to develop an essentialist, disciplinary curriculum, *Towards Visual Awareness* steered secondary art teachers away from such an approach by suggesting interdisciplinary themes throughout the document. For example, the program planning section opined that "a logical way to achieve... coherence is to develop a course, or a unit within a course, around a central theme" (p. 9) and proceeded to offer some possibilities: art and industry; twentieth-century art as a social statement; cityscapes and landscapes; building for crowds; study of light and colour; mass, texture, and space; wood; and film.

It is interesting to read in *The Formative Years* how the Min-

istry envisaged local autonomy actually being implemented across the province: "Working within the boundaries of provincially and locally established purposes and priorities, those most aware of the children's needs and the community's expectations – parent, teacher, principals, supervisory officials, as well as the children themselves – must all be involved in the planning process in appropriate ways" (p. 2). This is interesting because nobody in the long list of potential implementers named by the Ministry actually did the work; instead, the task of implementing the Ministry's broad objectives was given over to subject consultants – educational shareholders not mentioned anywhere in *The Formative Years*.

Ontario art consultants had long been accustomed to preparing curriculum documents, especially those focused on elementary grades where art was taught by generalist teachers, but these documents were very scant. During the years of Ministry decentralization, however, locally-prepared curriculum documents became increasingly more detailed in terms of content and more professional in terms of appearance. To illustrate this phenomenon, we can look at three art documents produced locally by the Board of Education for the Borough of East York (1973-78). I selected East York because of its unique status as a very small board, suburban in composition and sensibility, which operated under the auspices of the very large and very cosmopolitan Metropolitan Toronto Board of Education. *Your Art Program in Balance* (East York Board of Education, 1973) and *Art: Elementary Division* (East York Board of Education, 1974) typify locally-produced art documents prior to the advent of *The Formative Years* and its attendant era of Ministry decentralization. Both documents were printed with black-line masters, had construction paper covers, and were manually bound with staples. *Your Art Program in Balance* contained six, 8.5" x 11" single-sided pages and offered simple charts outlining elements and principles of design, rather homespun rationales for art instruction, and an elementary grade planner borrowed from the Peel County Board of Education. *Art: Elementary Division* contained twenty pages and was clearly focused on grades 7 and 8. It offered 13 'aims of art education' and the following definition of art:

We define a work of art as a subjective personal reaction or act resulting in a unique construction. The process is an individual response to an environmental challenge or inspiration. The creative act channels the individual's natural resources and employs experimentation, discovery, organization and judgement. (p. 17)

Even humour could be found in the evaluation section. Student progress was to be rated on a 1-5 scale: 'extremely successful', 'very successful', 'effective', 'needs a little work', and 'back to the drawing board (but never say die)'. Within four years these two documents were superseded by *Visual Arts, JK-9* (East York Board of Education, 1978). This post-*The Formative Years* publication contained 251 pages and left no stone unturned. The document offered detailed advice on stages of development, stimulus for art expression, planning an art programme, evaluation, classroom environments, gallery visits, visual arts resources, recipes, and a glossary of art terms. The three-ring binder contained a fold-out chart entitled "Self and Environmental Awareness", frequent pictures of on-task learners, and art exemplars completed by East York students, some of which were reproduced in colour.

By the 1980s, virtually every school board across Ontario had teams of subject consultants busily writing curriculum documents. It was not uncommon for the larger boards to have four or more consultants for art alone, such as the Waterloo County and City of Toronto boards of education. Some of the most impressive art curricula were written by the Halton and North York art consultants. For example, Halton art consultants Jack Redmile and Don Marshall supervised the writing of *Visual Arts OAC* (Halton Board of Education, n.d.) the most comprehensive and academic document on record; the writers were probably too tired to include a publication date. In North York, legendary art consultant Al Downs supervised the writing and printing of the *Curriculum Guidebook in Visual Art for Elementary Schools* (North York Board of Education, n.d.). This curricular gem had seven sections devoted to: stages of child development, motivation and environment, program planning, sequential programming, selective programming, planning models, and evaluation. The landscape format and

user-friendly section tabs made the *Curriculum Guidebook* easy to use, and the page layouts themselves were visually stunning. Such exemplars completely outshone other art curricula produced during the same time period such as *Visual Arts: Intermediate* (Toronto Board of Education, n.d.) and *Visual Arts: Primary Division* (Middlesex County Board of Education, 1986) which, despite their size, retained the amateurish production values of East York's 1973 *Your Art Program in Balance*. In 1984 the Metropolitan Toronto School Board reached an agreement among its six constituent boards to jointly produce curriculum documents in order to reduce publication costs and avoid duplication of resources and personnel. One such joint publication was the 257-page *OAC Visual Arts Course of Study* (Stadnyk, W. et al, 1987); a unique feature of this document was its massive slide appendix, which offered comparisons and contrasts for each of the 120 artworks in the *Ontario Academic Credit Key Works of Art*. While the post-Gaitskell era saw the role of art consultant as writer relegated almost exclusively to the publication of local curriculum documents, there were a few consultants who continued to write books. For example, North York art consultant Mary Gay Brooks wrote *Images: Printmaking* (1985) which followed closely the content of Arnel Pattemore's *Printmaking Activities for the Classroom* (1966).

Twilight for the Art Consultant as Writer

The old adage that history repeats itself certainly proved to be true during the last century of education in Ontario, where the mode of delivery alternated cyclically between periods of centralization in government ministries and periods of decentralization among local boards of education. The decentralization ushered in by the 1975 publication *The Formative Years* reached its frenzied zenith in the late 1980s. The physical signs of excess could be seen in the construction of increasingly palatial administrative buildings and the ever burgeoning bureaucracies that laboured within them. Taxpayers decried the rise in school board budgets during a time of decline in school enrolments. University registrars voiced alarm at the inconsistency of student preparation for post-secondary education.

When the end came it was both sudden and dramatic. The election of the Progressive Conservatives in 1994 left no aspect of education untouched. Mike Harris's 'commonsense revolution' resulted in legislation that reduced the number of school boards across the province, transferred funding for education from local school boards to government ministries, and mandated province-wide curriculum documents. All of these measures sought to re-establish provincial control over education and each, in its own way, contributed to the twilight of the art consultant as writer. Almost overnight, school boards in Ontario disbanded the army of subject consultants they had commissioned during the 1980s. Deprived of the funding to pay them and divested of the need to hire them in the first place, school boards no longer provided consultants with the resources needed to fulfil their role as writers of books or curricula. Thus, teachers who have entered the profession in the past two decades are likely quite unfamiliar with the concept of art consultant as writer. The majority have probably had only the most fleeting of contacts with their art consultant, assuming that their board still employs such an individual. Few will have any memory of a time when art consultants wrote books, conducted field research, and prepared local curricula.

The demise of the art consultant as writer might not have been so significant had art education professors in Ontario faculties of education been capable of assuming the twin challenges of research and writing. A literature survey of their scholarly publications since 1990 (Clark, 2006) uncovered no significant research studies, a handful of journal articles, and only four books: *Getting Into Art History* (Smith, 1993), *Art Education: A Canadian Perspective* (Clark, 1994), *Art Education: Issues in Postmodernist Pedagogy* (Clark, 1996), and *An Introduction to Art Education* (Clark, 1998). What could account for such a dismal archival record?

The decline in Ontario's leadership in art education can be traced to the University of Toronto's imposition of province wide graduate programs focused on the study of generic curriculum theory rather than subject specializations, such as art education... Educators seeking career

advancement, whether administrative or supervisory, completed advanced degrees that seldom provided any insight into subject content or skills. Educators determined to acquire subject specializations had no alternative but to study in other provinces or the United States, perhaps never returning to their posts in Ontario. (Clark, 2006, p. 219)

Although all of Ontario's faculties of education had acquired their own graduate programmes by the 1980s, none had established graduate studies in art education. As a result, Ontario art education professors were poorly prepared to fill the void created by the demise of the art consultant as writer.

What does the future hold for art teachers in Ontario? Given that the history of Ontario education has proven to be remarkably cyclical, they may well experience a return to the era of art consultant as writer in the future. In 2008, the Faculty of Education at The University of Western Ontario instituted the province's first graduate studies in art education. Thus, one can predict with some confidence that within boards of education and faculties of education the legacy of research and publication left by Charles Dudley Gaitskell and art consultants such as Elizabeth Harrison, Florence Hart, and Arnel Pattemore will continue to inspire and guide.

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