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ART COLLECTIONS AND TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

My interest in teaching collections began at Geelong Teachers' College where I did my undergraduate training. Fellow students seemed to be oblivious to the marvelous artworks hanging on the walls throughout the buildings. The opportunity to study the F M Curtis Collection, initiated at Bendigo Teachers' College, now part of La Trobe University Bendigo, raised obvious questions about the role of these collections in the early teaching colleges and what events or factors led to their beginnings. This case study will be situated within a broader picture of art collections in institutions across three states.

Early teachers' colleges in Australia were established in major capital cities and from here graduate teachers set out to meet the needs of students in urban and rural areas. The isolated rural teaching situations with which many were confronted were often ones of hardship, loneliness and deprivation (Trotman & Hunt 2002). Eventually colleges were established in regional areas to provide training for country students, to make their practical experiences more relevant and to encourage teachers to stay in the country. This paper explores the history of art collections in three early teacher training institutions. Within this context, a case study of one country institution is then further developed to shed light on the influences and factors contributing to art education philosophy underlying the development of the art collection. The implications of this knowledge for development of future policies and research are then considered.

Art Collections in Early Colleges

The Armidale Teachers' College in northern New South Wales was opened in the 1920s. As early as 1873 a need was identified for rural teachers' colleges 'to alleviate problems of staffing country schools and to stem the drift of students to urban areas' (Elphick 1972: 23). Furthermore, Elphick (1972: 36) argued that a country college was necessary 'to give a sense of reality to practice teaching for teachers destined for small country schools'. Sydney Teachers' College was criticised as being too academic and subjects such as Music, Art, Physical Education and Manual Arts were least likely to be chosen by students. Armidale's philosophy, derived from Education Department policy, was to emphasise the practical subjects.

From the 1890s Melbourne Teachers' College was the only institution in Victoria to provide teacher training until after World War One. The first regional teacher training institutions were established in 1926 in Bendigo and Ballarat but were closed down during the Depression years. These were not branches of Melbourne Teachers' College but independent institutions. Towards the end of the Second World War, the Victorian government predicted the future need for teachers and as Melbourne Teachers' College was overcrowded the decision was taken to reopen the country colleges. Burnett (1973) cites the Victorian Parliamentary Debates of 19th September, 1944:

In order to decentralize the training of teachers and to provide for the increased number of students whom it will be necessary to train in the immediate post-

war period, the Government proposes to re-establish Teachers' Colleges at Ballarat and Bendigo ... Apart from any consideration of the benefits of decentralization from a national standpoint, it is felt that the provision of additional training centres will have a very encouraging effect upon the teaching service.

In Western Australia, Claremont College was established in Perth in 1902. Now virtually closed, it is part of Edith Cowan University which has three major metropolitan campuses in Perth and one at Bunbury as well as study centres in regional areas of Western Australia such as Broome and Geraldton. For a large part of the twentieth century graduates from Claremont traveled to all corners of Western Australia to fulfil their teaching obligations to the Western Australian Government (Bolton & Byrne 2001).

Central to the philosophies of some early teachers' colleges was the notion of 'enculturation' and the need to provide an appropriate 'cultured atmosphere' for the training of young people. This was important because it led to the development of the art collections in these institutions that today are substantial educational and financial assets as well as the means by which institutional identities are portrayed.

The art collection at Armidale Teachers' College began with the donations of benefactor, Howard Hinton. He saw the art works 'as a Decoration of that fine building' (in Elphick 1972: 75). From 1929 to 1948 Hinton gave more than one thousand works to the college, his intention being:

... to provide a complete collection illustrating the development of Australian art from 1880 onwards, and my action in making the gift to Armidale Teachers' College was prompted by my great interest in Australian education and my desire that

the collection should be available in perpetuity for the benefit of succeeding generations of the students of the Armidale Teachers' College (in Elphick 1972: 75).

Works donated by students included a portrait of Hinton by Norman Carter. At one assembly staff stood at doorways to collect donations for artworks as staff and students left. Hinton insisted that the art works be hung all over the College, in corridors, lecture rooms and the auditorium. 'He maintained that knowing their value the students would cherish them and preserve them with care' and as Elphick (1972: 76) records: 'His insight proved correct for no painting was ever interfered with and no painting was ever stolen by a student of the College'. When it was proposed that students should commission a portrait of one of the founders of the College, which was eventually painted by William Dobell, while a student in London, the principal appealed to the students' collegial spirit:

The names of contributors will be placed on the back of the picture and preserved for all time. Try to visualize the time, say, a hundred years hence, when the walls of the Armidale University will be adorned with pictures of its benefactors, and think that your gift was the earliest. By so doing you will endow the College, commemorate the work of a great man, and honour yourself (Newling in Elphick 1972: 77).

In the 1920s in Melbourne, Arthur Law, the new principal of Melbourne Teachers' College, initiated the purchase of works for an art collection. The influence of Melbourne Teachers' College and the AJ Law Collection will be shown to be central to the development of collections in the Victorian country colleges. Lecturers at the new colleges had been trained in many cases at Melbourne and were inspired by this art collection. Phillip Law (1999: 3) outlined his father's philosophy about providing a suitable environment for the training of teachers:

Arthur Law believed not only that the College should extend the cultural backgrounds of its students, but that the teachers graduating from the College, moving out into country regions, should help spread culture in rural communities through the pupils in their care. So he decided to acquire good paintings, by reputable Australian artists, to adorn the walls of the College rooms and hallways.

To finance the Collection, Arthur Law placed a five shilling levy on each student entering the College. At the seventy-fifth anniversary of the College, F C Mellow (Lecturer-in-Charge of Art and Crafts) made the following remarks about the A J Law Collection:

The growth of this collection is symbolic. It began at the instigation of a man who would be the first to say that he had very little knowledge of art work and the value of art work. But he had no doubt whatsoever of the value such a collection would have in a place like a teachers college, where thousands of teachers would live with these pictures over a period of time, and then would disperse over the length and width of Victoria (in "A Tribute to A J Law" 1969).

Postwar developments

At Claremont College the art collection was started in 1947 when this college was still the only institution to provide teacher training in Western Australia. The principal, Thomas Sten, allocated funds to purchase art works and over the next decade three major gifts of art works were made by Claude Hotchin, a gallery owner (Archer 2001). As Bryant McDiven, who lectured in art at Claremont in the fifties explained, 'Tom Sten was disturbed by the lack of "cultural tone" in the college environment so he introduced a most active campaign to enrich the walls with paintings, drawings and original prints' (in Bolton & Byrne 2001: 54).

In Victoria during the 1950s, colleges developed on many regional and suburban sites to meet the need for teachers in Victoria. Tom Wells (2001: 1), Curator of the State College of Victoria Geelong and then Deakin University Art Collection, referred to the importance of his training at Melbourne Teachers College and the exposure he had to the A J Law Collection there:

My experiences in this area go back to my formative years of training as an art teacher at Melbourne Teachers' College in the 1950s, and continued with my employment at Frankston State College and then Geelong State College.

In each of these organisations the primary aim of the art collection was to expose students (and staff) to artefacts [sic] for their awareness raising potential to foster an interest in the arts. As collections grew they were seen to be a valuable asset to the organisation and served to show that our culture as perceived through the visual arts was an important dimension of tertiary education.

At Bendigo Teachers' College in 1955, F M Courtis, lecturer in Art Education, acquired the first art works which were to be the start of a valuable and significant teaching resource. While the new College at Pleasant Vale (Flora Hill) was being planned Courtis began collecting.

With Len Pryor who was principal at the time, I was able to take part in meetings with the architects in planning the new college which was to be at Pleasant Vale. I was well aware of course of the large areas of bare walls that we would be confronted with and a long range thought was to put on these walls art works that would reflect a cultured atmosphere ... Now the idea was probably influenced by a small amount by my earlier contact with A J Law Collection at the Melbourne Teachers' College. So I

put the idea to Len Pryor who was most enthusiastic and that was really the beginning of the exercise (Transcript of interview December 2000).

The accounts here convey the belief that teachers, trained in the city, required exposure to the arts so they could spread culture in rural communities. Also present was the assumption that country students required enculturation perhaps because access to original art works had been denied to them in their schooling and family experiences because of distance from major centres or because country education and life were deficient in the civilising aspects of city life. In country teachers' colleges then contact with original art works was seen to be particularly important to enrich student teachers' experiences.

Within this broad brush picture of art collections initiated in institutions across three states that I have painted, I would now like to make a more detailed study to depict the influences, people and events that have contributed to the growth of one collection in particular, the F M Courtis Collection.

The F M Courtis Collection

From 1951, the Bendigo Teachers' College provided teacher training for a large part of country Victoria. The first postwar location of the College at Camp Hill, in the city centre, was of particular benefit to the Art staff and to the students. The Lecturer in Art Education, Mr Fred Courtis, recalled how in the early years the Bendigo Art Gallery lent the College art works to brighten up their temporary location and to provide an atmosphere of cultural enrichment for all:

When the college was at Camp Hill I was able to borrow paintings from the Art Gallery to hang in our lecture rooms. Those paintings had to go back when we moved out to Pleasant Vale which was about 3 miles away. From Camp Hill it was easy to take students to the Art Gallery to have

discussions about various aspects of art. It was just a matter of about three minutes walk from the college (Transcript of interview December 2000).

With the move to Pleasant Vale distance made it difficult to visit the Art Gallery so the art collection commenced by Courtis allowed students and staff daily contact with art works:

In the beginning, with only a few paintings, the only choice was to put them in a place where the students often went and generally individually, and they had time to look at these few paintings that we had in the early stages, and that was the administration area. But of course the long term aim was to use the Collection as a teaching resource and gradually the works spread throughout the College (Transcript of interview December 2000).

The intentions of earlier philanthropists and administrators, such as Hinton, Law and Sten, were for collections in colleges to "decorate" or "adorn" the walls and to provide "a cultured atmosphere". Through the 1950s a greater emphasis appears to be placed on the works as a teaching resource. F M Courtis recalls the importance of original artworks for discussion and instruction. Art staff begin to speak of the importance of the works as teaching collections. What were the changes in art education that influenced this shift?

In Melbourne the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization (hereafter UNESCO) Art Seminar of 1954 had an important impact on art education in the state and eventually across the country. This seminar on "The Role of the Visual Arts in Education" was held at the Women's College, Melbourne University and directed its attention specifically to art education needs in Australia (Smith 1958: vii). The impetus for this came from the 1951 UNESCO art education seminar held in Bristol, UK. According to John Steers

(1999: 1), the 1951 seminar was the result of UNESCO'S earlier educational conferences during which 'resolutions were adopted to inquire into art education'. Steer concludes that from all accounts Sir Herbert Read was the 'key figure'.

In 1954 in Paris, the First General Assembly of The International Society of Education Through Art (hereafter InSEA) had been opened by Sir Herbert Read who spoke on the "Future of Art Education". The idealism of the Assembly at the time is reflected in the Preamble to its Constitution:

Education through art is a natural means of learning at all periods of the development of the individual, fostering values and disciplines essential for full intellectual emotional and social development of human beings in a community... (in Steers 1999: 2).

Following on from the 1954 Melbourne Seminar, Bernard Smith (1958) published Education Through Art in Australia. With an introduction by Sir Herbert Read, this became an important text in disseminating Read's philosophy about education through art and the principles and aims of UNESCO and InSEA throughout the art education community of the late fifties. As Doug Boughton (1989: 200) reports:

The proceedings from this conference reflected strong support for creative expression as the major aim of art education in Australian schools ... This support was expressed by artists, teachers, inspectors, and administrators, who met at the conference to discuss for the first time the intended outcomes for art education in this country.

The Melbourne Seminar (in Smith 1958: 86-91) came to a number of resolutions aimed at reforming and reconceptualising art education in schools, in teacher training colleges, and in the public domain:

Believing that the neglect of the arts is a betrayal of an educational trust can produce, if sufficiently general, an unimaginative, uncreative and emotionally sick community and Believing that standards of taste are lower in Australia than most other countries Considers that standards must be raised and the environment made aesthetically stimulating through advice of experts in the various field of art, architecture, cartography, domestic design etc.

The Seminar recommended that all Australian universities should establish chairs of Fine Arts. Importantly the Seminar noted:

Every individual and organization connected with art education should continually draw the attention of the public to the fact that a reproduction can never take the place of an original work of art (in Smith 1958: 91).

Prior to the Melbourne Art Education Seminar in 1954, art collections were seen to serve important roles decorating and thus creating a certain type of "cultured" atmosphere in places of learning. Also that at Armidale, Melbourne and Claremont Teachers' Colleges there was a recognition that students (and staff) would benefit from the enrichment in and the knowledge about Australian cultural heritage gained through exposure on a daily basis to original art works. Other values associated with the collections included what Principal George Muir of Armidale described as 'the historical significance of the collection, a great act of patronage of art, College sentiment and public pride in the collection' (Elphick 1989: 80). Following the 1954 Melbourne seminar greater emphasis would be placed on a third role, that is using the artworks as teaching collections for the instruction of students about media, style, technique and art history.

The delegates to the Melbourne Conference conveyed its resolutions to teacher training and art colleges across Victoria. As Bryan Clemson (2001), past curator of the Courtis Collection, recalls there was regular communication between the colleges through seminars, professional organisations and friendships, so it can be assumed that these ideas travelled quickly and were adopted across Victoria.

So it was these changes in art education that influenced the shift from artworks as 'decoration' to artworks as teaching collections. The importance of original art works for education in art, the need for enculturation of young people training to be teachers in a country where the arts had been neglected, the need for greater access to art collections, and the perceived need for the prioritising of the Arts in curricula at all levels developed as the premises that guided art education in the fifties. The acquisition of original art works by the regional post-war teachers' colleges then can be seen as a response to, and a natural consequence of, this rationale for art education.

In 1986 the F M Courtis Collection went on show at the Bendigo Art Gallery to mark the tenth anniversary of the Bendigo College of Advanced Education. The exhibition comprised mainly Australian works from colonial through Australian impressionist, early modernist and contemporary works. A focus was the recently purchased Leonard French suite of prints, *The Journey*. Bryan Clemson (1986) wrote in the catalogue, entitled *Foundations*, that 'cultural literacy is an essential factor for better understanding of ourselves'. In a country institution:

[c]lose contact with the arts can provide insight into the foundations of the culture and enable us to interpret our subsequent patterns of social change. We gain a better understanding of what it means to be Australia ... We contend that it is from the

daily contact with all works of good quality that the student is better able to develop individual taste, knowledge and pride in our cultural heritage and environment.

Clemson's belief that daily contact was beneficial to staff and the wider community, and also for the enrichment of academic programs was supported by the third curator of the Collection, Lyndon Langan. He believed that by surrounding beginning teachers with lovely things 'some of that aesthetic must rub off. And we were all very keen to have our beginning teachers teaching art to children because we had a firm belief in what art can do for growing kids' (2000 transcription of videoed talk).

Although there was never a formal acquisitions policy the curators agree that some works in the Collection were particularly selected because of their contribution in teaching students about the processes of art making including techniques, design and composition, and others to represent different periods in Australian art history. As Bryan Clemson (2001) recollected: 'The lecturing staff wrote into courses specific study germane to the art collection. So that everyone had to make a study of the works on the wall or on display, and use the library'.

While the first acquisitions belonged to the landscape genre followed by early examples of Modernism in Australia, by the sixties acquisitions included expressionism and abstraction. Increasingly, the Collection was viewed as a teaching resource, not only for art education staff, but also social studies, outdoor education and literature. The important collection of artefacts, on loan from John Bradley and the Yanyuwa aboriginal community, and the small collection of traditional bark paintings have been an invaluable resource in the Indigenous Studies program, which in the past has assisted in the preparation of students for teaching in indigenous

communities. Today it is used to address issues in Australian art history and theory from a post-colonial standpoint, as well as to better inform students about traditional indigenous culture.

The Future

Currently the Collection is used in both the primary and secondary teacher education programs. Specific assignments are given including critical studies of the work of represented artists and craftspeople, talks given on the works to peers, and units of work based on the use of a collection as a teaching aid.

Importantly, the Collection has the potential to generate debate about the use of adult art in the education of children. I would like to use an example from Reggio Emilia in Italy to illustrate this last point. In Paulo Freire School (for 3 to 6 year olds) there was a large work taking up all one wall by Italian contemporary conceptual artist, Walter Valentini. Based on the concept of 'time', it was seen as a stimulus for children's conversations about the work and about time, and a stimulus for their own works. Time is evident in the use of the pendulum and plumb lines. The children had renamed it the 'dance of the strings'. It was seen as a means of bringing contemporary artistic culture into the school. Children were not expected to copy any aspect of the work but to develop understandings about the range of expressive languages and the courage and freedom needed to be an artist. The atelierista, the artist employed in the school, emphasised again that the work was a basis for conversations only, not for copying adult artists, but for recognising another's individual expression. So the re-examination of the place of art works and collections in the education of children is another important future direction for my research as it is necessary that future uses of the F M Curtis Collection with student teachers are responsive to changes in art education theory. These decisions about the Collection will impact upon any acquisition

policy that is developed and upon planning for student and community access either through the actual gallery space or through a virtual electronic gallery.

The questions raised in this research about the role and place of collections in the early teaching colleges have led to a sound understanding of the educational bases for their development. This understanding now provides a departure point for future research in art education and a foundation on which policy can be developed for the best use of the Collection in the future.

The notion or belief that enculturation occurs through contact with art works, by 'rubbing off' or by some sort of osmosis is an assumption that needs investigating. My research, concerned primarily with the history of the F M Curtis Collection has not done this. It is an important direction that needs researching.

Importantly the spirit of the intentions of the early art educators needs to be recognized in decision making so that collections continue to educate students about the role of visual art in their lives and the lives of their future students.

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