

3. SYLVIA'S PLACE: ASHTON-WARNER AS NEW ZEALAND EDUCATIONAL THEORIST

Sylvia Ashton-Warner's New Zealand educational context has been – and continues to be – misrepresented as antithetical to her creative methods. Sue Middleton, a professor of education, locates Sylvia's educational ideas within the national and international Progressive Education movement, indicating that key education officials in post-war New Zealand encouraged creativity and self-expression.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner frequently claimed her educational ideas to be “in confrontation ... with the time and place in which she lived” (Clemens, 1996, p. 23). But, as one North American educational philosopher has put it, “an educational theory grows where it is planted, soaking up the nutrients in the local soil, turning to the local light” (Grumet, 1988, p. 14).

This chapter makes the case that, as a teacher, an educational writer and theorist, Sylvia Ashton-Warner grew *in*, and not in spite of, New Zealand. My argument unfolds in two parts. The first reviews theoretical ideas in the local and international educational environment in which Sylvia lived and worked. Sylvia and Keith Henderson taught in what was referred to until 1947 as the Native School system (and from 1948 until its abolition in 1968 as the Maori School system).¹ They trained and began work as teachers during the Great Depression; and Sylvia began serious writing during World War Two. The war and the Native School system intersected in complex ways with the wider international Progressive Education movement and its promotion ‘from the top’ in New Zealand’s public schools. An overview of Progressive (or New) Education, the changing theories of culture and race in the Native School system, and relations between these during World War Two, opens a wide-angled aperture through which to read Sylvia’s early writing.

The second part of the chapter zooms in on the schoolrooms, hills and sheds in which Sylvia Ashton-Warner read, thought and wrote, particularly during the World War Two years when the family lived in Pipiriki. At this time, Sylvia learned the disciplined life of a writer, keeping a diary in which she developed her educational theory. This would later be published as *Myself*. I trace footprints of others who engaged with Sylvia in these spaces, finding pathways that connect the reading-writing-thinking Sylvia on her bush-clad hilltops and inside her haunted shacks with wider metropolitan networks of educational thought.

Sylvia's List: Educational Theory in New Zealand

Educational theories are expressed in a range of printed texts: academic, political, professional and popular. As a formal body of knowledge, Education is a subject, or discipline, taught and examined in universities. In Sylvia's New Zealand, scope for academic expression in Education was minimal: in 1950, there were only 17 university staff in Education spread across four university colleges and there were no academic Education journals.² Educational theories flow between academic and wider public domains, infusing research reports, curriculum documents, teachers' magazines, conference presentations, parliamentary debates and popular media. Politically-mandated educational theories colour the gaze of authorities (such as inspectors of schools). As performative scripts (syllabi, programmes and textbooks), educational theories are enacted in everyday classroom settings, giving shape to teachers' work and underpinning the rules, maxims, guidelines, habits and hunches in teaching practice. The spatial arrangements of classrooms, the equipment and the activities in them, are 'stagings' of theories of teaching and learning. What children are asked to do and how they are disciplined are performances, or enactments, of theory. Educational theories produce particular kinds of learner and teacher identities.

From the time of Empire, the educational theories of the English-speaking world were global phenomena reaching New Zealand, with metropolitan England as their originating and legitimating authority. Historian Peter Gibbons suggests that we New Zealanders conceptualise "the seas about these islands" not as barriers but as "highways" (2003, p. 6). What overseas and local conceptual resources were available to Sylvia Ashton-Warner to 'think with' and how might these have reached the rooms in which she read and wrote at Pipiriki? Sylvia left us with lists of her reading, including:

Rousseau, Herbert Read, comparative religions, the Bible, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Blake and Coleridge; the English poets, French literature, history and poetry; Russell, Freud, Jung, Adler, and Fromm: Maori mythology, history, culture and the language; the lives of the musicians, music textbooks, and even ploughed through Havelock Ellis, believe it or not. Everything but education (*I Passed this Way*, 1980, p. 354).

This list links Sylvia Ashton-Warner's reading and writing with the global production and circulation of texts and ideas of her time. By what routes did books by European intellectuals reach the isolated hills of Pipiriki? Some of the systems through which Sylvia encountered her books were initiatives of New Zealand's first Labour Government (1937-49): teachers' correspondence courses, book clubs and the Country Library Service³ (the latter supported by America's Carnegie Corporation).

The books she identifies here are significant. Although Sylvia claimed not to read Education, her list included foundational theories of the international Progressive/New Education movement: developmental psychology (Ellis), sociology/social philosophy (Fromm, Rousseau) and psychoanalysis (Freud, Jung and Adler). In

Teacher, she acknowledged three progressive educational theorists. Two were of the psychoanalytic tradition: Herbert Read⁴ and (in a brief aside) A. S. Neill (1968). In *Teacher*, she quoted Caldwell Cook: “Not the professor, but the artist, is your true school master”⁵ (1963, p. 90). Caldwell Cook’s *The Play Way* (alongside works by Dewey and other progressives) was recommended reading in the 1929 official curriculum that was in place when Sylvia started teaching (‘Reports of the Minister of Education’, 1928–1956).⁶

Officialdom’s engagements with progressive ideas in the years leading up to, during, and after the Second World War can be traced in the reports of Ministers of Education, Chief Inspectors of Primary Schools (‘Reports of the Chief Inspectors of Primary Schools’, 1928–1956) and Chief Inspectors of Native Schools (‘Reports of the Chief Inspectors of Native Schools’, 1928–1956). These show that along the ocean highways, ships carried teachers on exchange visits, delegates to international conferences, books on educational theory, professional journals, and curriculum resources. Despite, and to some extent because of, the Great Depression and the war, the 1930s and 1940s were a time of great excitement, experimentation and unprecedented freedom in many educational circles in New Zealand. New ‘child-centred’ methods would foster healthy and happy individual child development, nurture and protect fragile democratic values, and (following Dewey) help build a more democratic society.⁷

Founded during World War One, the international New Education Fellowship (NEF) and its journal *New Era* had members and readers in New Zealand from the 1920s (Abbiss, 1998). In 1937 (when Keith was starting teaching and Sylvia was a wife and young mother in rural Taranaki) the NEF held a conference in four New Zealand centres with support from the new Labour Government. Schools were closed to enable teachers to attend and nearly 6000 of them took the opportunity. Parents, officials and members of the general public showed keen interest. Many were turned away when halls were filled to capacity. A number of the lectures by the 14 international speakers were broadcast nationally on radio, and 2500 of the 3000 advance copies of the proceedings pre-sold (Campbell, 1938). As Helen May (2003) outlines, British child psychoanalyst and infant educator Susan Isaacs was particularly popular. The following statement from one of Isaacs’ talks encapsulates New Education:

The principle of activity expresses the empirically discovered truth that the child grows by his own efforts and his own real experiences. Whether it be in skill or knowledge, in social feeling or spiritual awareness, it is not what we do to the child or for the child that educates him, but what we enable him to do for himself (1938, p. 83).

From the 1930s, the language of Progressive/New Education dominated the writing of education officials, ministers, politicians and inspectors, and surfaced in in-service courses and curriculum resources. In his final report as Chief Inspector of Primary Schools in 1952, Mr F.C. Lopdell reflected:

Until after the First World War, the search was for more suitable subject-matter and better techniques for teaching it, but in the “twenties”, largely as a result of the War, education began to set itself the wider objective of developing the whole person for life in a democracy, and the search began for achieving that objective (p. 2).

He saw the “shift from teaching to learning” as having social objectives: “the fuller development of each person is the school’s contribution to one of the problems of democracy – the problem of producing a population of independent and socially responsible citizens” (p. 2).

The ‘activity’ approach to learning in New Education became particularly influential in Native School policy, especially after 1930s, when Douglas Ball was appointed as their Chief Inspector:

[An] essential of social and individual well-being is re-creation, the strengthening of personality, which involves the whole man and is rooted in the unity of life. Beyond physical health, development of mind and character, appreciation of Nature and of art, re-creation is that from which flows the inspirational force that gives life its meaning. The Maori, once strong in racial idealism, is in need of this integration of character. The means adopted to assist in this strengthening of personality is the method of child activity, the encouragement of growth through exercise of emotional and intellectual powers, other than the mere acquisition of knowledge by absorption (Ball, 1936, p. 2).

Native Schools would provide “a kind of education which shall be closely related to Maori life and culture, and yet shall at the same time form a basis for the social and economic fusion of the two races” (Mason, 1940, p. 4). This replaced the earlier policy of assimilation, described as follows:

When I first visited Maori schools in 1931 I was impressed by the fact that there was practically nothing Maori in the schools except the Maori children. No Maori song was ever sung, there was no sign of Maori crafts, nor any interest in Maori history as part of the school curriculum. The values in their own culture were ignored, and the instruction was on Pakeha lines (Fletcher, 1948, p. 2).

In 1931, a book of conference proceedings, *Maori and Education*, was “the first work in the Principles of Education, Pakeha or Maori, that has yet appeared in New Zealand” (Jackson, 1931, xiii). At the turn of the twentieth century, Maori had been presumed a dying race, and Education Professor A.B. Fitt of Auckland University College saw schooling as sharing responsibility for this: “We do not educate the Maori but rather we unwittingly assist in killing him in the spiritual sense of the word. And, with this spiritual killing, the physical death is not far off” (1931, p. 223). He debated the question of fusion:

To return to the Maori, we must consider for a moment the problem as to whether his ultimate end (if indeed he survive long enough) will be fusion with the white race or the maintenance of a separate existence alongside his countrymen. If the former case holds, and many high authorities on the Maori consider it will, then the education of the Maori must frankly face the problem of fusion. If the latter holds, it must be subject to certain limits, for much of the Maori's earlier life is quite inconsistent with our white civilisation. In fact, in this case too, it will not be the original culture which will survive, but a culture considerably modified in the direction of our white culture (p. 225).

While this and other chapters of *Maori and Education* bear imprints of previous assimilationist language, the book was a scholarly application of the anthropological, psychological and pedagogical concepts of its time to educational questions, including bilingualism, Maori 'mentality', and Maori 'educability'. It was "essential for administrators and teachers concerned with Native education to study and understand the culture of the people in whose interests they are employed" (Ball, 1936, p. 7). Sylvia's list of her readings included "Maori mythology, history, culture and the language".

As in the chapters by Penfold and Tawhiwhirangi in this book, the objective of 'fusion' did not extend to the use of Maori language as a medium of instruction, bilingualism being seen as an obstacle to 'progress'. However, teachers were encouraged to create supplementary reading materials, consistent with the children's vocabularies, as stated in the report of the Chief Inspector of Maori Schools in 1948:

Even in the infant room, in such a subject as reading, there is too much reliance on textbooks, to the neglect of the most effective material – the teacher's own blackboard and self-prepared reading matter. It must be admitted that the primer readers as supplied to the schools, have serious deficiencies, but so far there is nothing better available to supplant them as textbooks. They are not written for Maori children, and contain words that are unnecessary for a Maori child's vocabulary. The need is all the greater, therefore, to supplement these books by suitable reading material. A study of the words needed by the Maori child should be one of the first points to be considered (Fletcher, 1948, p. 2).

These comments echo the 1929 curriculum, which had urged teachers to feel free to adapt their programmes to "the interests of the pupils and to the environment in which they live" (Atmore, 1929, p. 2).

Both the Department's and Sylvia's methods were designed to tap into the Maori child's everyday vocabulary. The Department's rationale was sociological: children's words were referential, emanating from their 'outside' environments of family, farm and countryside. In contrast, Ashton-Warner looked 'inside', 'drawing key words out' of each little reader's psychic underworld. It had been her psychotherapist who had taught Sylvia about the two great instincts, fear and sex,

during her ‘nervous breakdown’, and her therapeutic insights infused Sylvia’s teaching. Sylvia’s reading of psychoanalytic literature (Freud, Adler, Jung and others) brought therapy and teaching together in theoretical, as well as experiential, terms. In Sylvia’s infant room, children’s key words erupted to the surface as captions for the two great drives, fear and sex. The most powerful words were ‘ghost’ and ‘kiss’: “Any child, brown or white, on the first day remembers those two words from One-Look” (Sylvia, 1956b, p. 11). In the 1950s, Sylvia published the first version of her teaching scheme (which would later become *Teacher*) in serialised form, in *National Education*, the magazine of the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) (as reprinted in this volume, chapter 2). Published under the name ‘Sylvia’, these were her first textual footprints across local landscapes of educational theory.

The official education policies of fusion (or cultural adaptation) were designed to restore ‘pride of race.’ In particular, Native Schools were to cultivate “an interest in the old Maori arts and crafts, in their songs and dances, in their games, and in their history and mythology” (Fletcher, 1948, p. 2). In his 1936 report, Senior Inspector Ball reported on a series of in-service courses for Native School teachers on modern methods of teaching at which Sir Apirana Ngata, Dr Wi Repa and “a large staff of assistants” gave “practical instruction in Maori carving, flax plaiting, tukutuku and taniko work, and poi dancing” (p. 3). Ball’s ideas on the educational value of creative and performing arts drew on, and intertwined with, his interests in Maori culture and in New Education. Consistent with this combination, Sylvia’s list included poetry, music, Maori history, language and culture. Ball argued that in Native Schools “art and craft may prove to be one of the most productive channels for the growth of individuality and for the development of self-reliance and independence” (1939, p. 3). In *Teacher*, Sylvia wrote, “The Maori mind is essentially artistic in character” (1963, p. 138). Ball said, “The Maori child has a real facility for drawing action pictures of men, horses, aeroplanes and motor vehicles” (1939, p. 3). The boys in Sylvia’s infant classes included these words in their key vocabularies. In Ball’s scheme, as in New Education more generally, poetry was accorded an important place. He noted in 1939:

Both children and audience reflect the intense pleasure derived from a vivacious and sympathetic interpretation of poetry. When this spirit of brightness has been attained it permeates the whole curriculum, for the children, conscious of their ability to express themselves forcefully, and inspired with self-confidence, are able to convert all their work into pleasure, and the school becomes a hive of industry, with the pupils taking a very active part in their own instruction (p. 3).

But while concepts of progressivism and cultural adaptation threaded through educational documents, we know that mandated theories are not always put into practice: they can be resisted, subverted, distorted or ignored. The shifts in thinking were occurring during wartime, when families, teachers, schools and bureaucracies experienced rationing, shortages, and the requisition of facilities for military purposes. The high proportion of male teachers in the forces (in 1944 it was 70

percent) (Overton, 1945, p. 1), necessitated the return to the classroom of elderly teachers accustomed to older, authoritarian, methods. Family life was disrupted, and children traumatised, by wartime terrors, losses and death. Clarence Beeby, Director-General of Education, advised teachers to apply the principles of developmental psychology to “act as a buffer between the world of the child and the warring world of the adult, to pass on to the child only such of the jarrings and jostlings of the adult world as he feels the childish mind can cope with at this stage. It is for the skilled teacher to say what burden of knowledge the child at each age can bear” (Beeby, 1992, p. 129).

Wartime conditions also encouraged classroom improvisation and experiment. The Department of Education organised conferences of advisors for infant methods promoting activity methods in schools, reporting: “The latest methods of infant room teaching were stimulated by the visits of the infant-teaching specialists to our schools” (Stubbs, 1943, p. 1). The absence of men threw the customary gender order into disarray. Although the wives of the headmaster had usually been expected to teach primer classes in small Maori schools, during the war years, and also during the teacher shortages of the post-war baby boom, any prejudice against married women continuing to teach in public schools subsided, and teaching was seen as women’s patriotic duty. Wartime conditions saw even young women rapidly promoted (albeit temporarily) into senior positions as principals, advisors, inspectors and officials. The Department reported that some of “these ladies have conducted refresher courses for native school infant teachers” (Stubbs, 1943, p. 3). Sylvia attended at least one of these courses (see Hood, 1988, p. 105). Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, examples of progressive and experimental teaching were recorded in official reports, and later in Barrington’s (1987) study of Native School teachers’ logbooks, in interview-based studies of teaching practice in public schools in general (Middleton & May, 1997) and in Native Schools in particular (Simon, 1998; Simon & Tuhiwai Smith, 2001).

Sylvia’s books make occasional reference to progressive tendencies in her wider New Zealand educational landscape. Local educators supportive of her approach are seldom referred to by name; more often their identities were disguised. Hood’s research has since unmasked some of these hidden identities. Notable New Zealand educators who ‘passed her way’ included: Sir Apirana Ngata (Maori MP, intellectual and educator);⁸ Gordon Tovey (National Advisor for Art and Craft, who introduced her to Herbert Read’s work);⁹ Gwen Somerset (pioneer Progressive infant teacher);¹⁰ Walter Harris (Advisor on Visual Aids);¹¹ Rowland Lewis (an inspector sympathetic to New Education); and Douglas Ball (Senior Inspector of Native Schools, and later of Primary Schools).¹² Beeby is cited by name as an advocate of holistic or integrated curriculum in *Teacher* (and also in the serialised version published in New Zealand five years previously, as discussed in chapter 5 of this volume).

While others have focussed on the ‘truth’ (or ‘fiction’) of Ashton-Warner’s tales of conflicts with convention and authority, my intention has been to locate her educational theory within the conceptual landscapes, or linguistic spaces, of her place and time. But such analyses work at the level of abstraction and, unlike most

educational theorists, Sylvia did not write in abstractions, but rather expressed her educational philosophy through diary entries, novels, and poetic imagery. Intensely personal, her educational writing is incandescent with images of place. In Sylvia's textual images of hills and pathways, houses and classrooms it is possible to discern faint trails connecting her secluded schoolrooms, shacks and houses with wider metropolitan networks of educational thought.

Sylvia's Place: Sheds, Schools, Rivers and Bridges

Just after the start of World War Two, Sylvia and Keith Henderson moved from an isolated East Coast Native School (Horoera) to Pipiriki, high up the Whanganui River. Her autobiographical book *Myself* is replete with spatial images. Their new classroom had a "tall ceiling, high rafters and a lot of air and echoes" (*Myself*, 1967b, p. 60). Bachelard (2002, p. 6), the philosopher, writes that "an entire past comes to dwell in a new house," and Sylvia sensed a "frightening Inspector shade in the rafters, limiting and aborting all I do" (*Spinster*, 1958, p. 190). Her mother had been a teacher, struggling through the First World War and the Depression to support an invalid husband and 10 children. With continual 'Inspector troubles', the family was always on the move. As a child, Sylvia attended 10 small schools, usually taught by her mother.

In some of Sylvia's texts, inspectors are cast as the allies of New Education that 1940s policies intended them to become. But in others, inspectors are phantoms, shades of their punitive force in her childhood: "There's a ghoul from the past that haunts, I think, all teachers of my generation, from those five-year-old days when we felt the tension of the teacher and the foreboding of the Inspector himself" (*Teacher*, 1963, p. 198). While the isolation of her previous school, Horoera, had precipitated her 'nervous breakdown', she'd had freedom there, "far from the haunts of inspectors." In Pipiriki, "with roads and bridges and no tidal rivers, an inspector could walk in any day" (*Myself*, 1967b, p. 67). Like the houses in Bachelard's account, for Sylvia the schoolroom was a primal space for "thoughts, memories and dreams ... The binding principle in this integration is the daydream. Past, present and future give the house different dynamisms, which often interfere, at times opposing, at time stimulating one another" (Bachelard, 2002, p. 26).

But war was a greater outside threat: "We laughed a great deal ... until Pearl Harbour" (*Myself*, 1967b, p. 60). Domestic routines accommodated War Institute meetings, Keith's Home Guard duties, a sister who "arrived from the capital where her home is between three targets just asking for Japanese bombs" (p. 61). Sylvia read Freud's *Introductory Lectures*, and formulated her theory of violence: "The word beginning with a capital V widespread across the world. The violence I believe to be in all of us is subdued in the undermind, waiting, but which blasts out on occasion depending on how near the surface it is, or on the rigidity of the surface" (*Teacher*, 1963, p. 32). The 'design' of her work, the key vocabulary scheme, was "that creativity in this time of life when character can be influenced for ever is the solution to the problem of war" (Sylvia, 1956a, p. 295). While

policy suggested teachers act as a 'buffer' between children and war, Sylvia took the lid off repressed fears. In *Myself*, she outlined her theory to a visiting inspector:

I suppose that schools in the big city slums ... If I were teaching there I ... And if I were allowed to I ... I mean children from criminal homes, starved and that. Throats cut in the night and that sort of thing, hungry, stealing ... I'd give them words like "knife" and "cutthroat" and ... "jail" and "police" and "blood". I'd give them words they lived with.

"Words they lived with," repeated Mr Harrison.

But he only repeated the last phrase, not stepping forward. It seemed as though he were stalled. "See, what I mean is," I go on, "I'd relate through words the outside of a child to the inside of a child and then you'd get integration" (*Myself*, 1967b, p. 110).

While Sylvia tried to explain that repressed violence inside young children needs release, the inspector was distracted by matters outside:

"The thing to do," flash of hands, "is to give them bad books like themselves, then you'd integrate them, then you'd get them peaceful."

"Then you'd get them peaceful," indulgently, "I say," Mr Henderson, eyes out the door, "where's that spot where you plan to dig a trench for the children? There's no telling when we're going to get this visit from the Pacific. Under the pines over there?"

"Impracticable. You can't dig through the roots. No, Mr Harrison, I plan it nearer the school, just at the edge of the playground there." (*Myself*, 1967b, p. 110).

While Sylvia, inside her classroom, theorises about violence in the child's inner world, the men focus on the outer world, planning a trench through the school grounds for protection against violence in the form of an air attack.

Sylvia requires a separate house for her dreaming: "no voices and no doors banging. No pace, no demand for answers ... and no war news" (*Myself*, 1967b, p. 74). From an early age, she dreamed of being elsewhere. Bachelard writes, "It is on the plane of the daydream and not on that of facts that childhood remains alive and poetically useful within us" (2002, p. 16). In *Myself*, Sylvia describes

bleakly counting my bead-dreams that I dreamed when I was single about how I would live my life: a glamorous mysterious vivid life in the capitals of the world with those of my own kind – artists, musicians and writers. And lovers demanding a look from me, and friends thinking me wonderful. Paris, Rome, New York ... roaming, roaming, fascinated. Getting on and off ships and trains and planes, the last word in fashion. Without remembering those dreams and seeing them against what I am now: a forgotten girl on the top of a hill drearily teaching Maoris. A forgotten girl (*Myself*, 1967b, p. 20).

Glamour, excitement, art and romance are ‘over there’, in cities she has never seen, where the authors of the books she reads live and work. What and where she is “now” (on a hill “teaching Maoris”) means oblivion, being “forgotten” (invisible) to people she has never met, but desires to become.

To highlight the ‘New Zealandness’ of Ashton-Warner’s theoretical writing, it is useful to place the above extract alongside one by a very differently located woman writer. A generation older than Ashton-Warner, Virginia Woolf was born in London into an intellectual middle-class family. As an adult, Woolf lived the bohemian intellectual, artistic and sexual freedom of Ashton-Warner’s daydreams. In the following account, Woolf evokes the Hyde Park house where she had lived as a child:

The tea table rather than the dinner table was the centre of Victorian family life – in our family at least. Savages I suppose have some tree, or fire place around which they congregate; the round table marked that focal, that sacred spot in the house. It was the centre, the heart of the family. It was the centre to which the sons returned from their work in the evening; the hearth whose fire was tended by the mother, pouring out tea. In the same way, the bedroom – the double bedded bedroom on the first floor was the sexual centre, the birth centre, the death centre of the house (Woolf, 2002, p. 125).

Woolf wrote: “The division in our life was curious. Downstairs there was pure convention, upstairs pure intellect. But the there was no connection between them” (p. 158). With the help of servants, the mother’s (downstairs) work involved care of the body, presiding over the fire, pouring tea for returning sons, performing social rituals demanded by Victorian convention. Upstairs, cut off from such menial concerns, was her “father’s great study ... entirely booklined ... the brain of the house” (p. 125). Only the bedroom connected the two: babies, and death. The floor-plan was vertical, segmented by gender.

The spatiality of Sylvia’s life “on top of a hill” was more untamed. Initially she accommodated her personae as teacher, wife, mother, lover, artist and writer in domestic space by demarcations of time:

I have so much to do between school and home that I have to give every minute its value. I must keep my reading and learning of poetry going and mental exercises; Huxley, Russell and such, from the public library, the new book clubs; one book at least has been suitable: *This Hill Is Mine*. Also there is the Maori language to continue learning, schoolwork, scheme, workbook and chart preparation. I practice Maori sentences that Mrs Hira has taught me; over and over again, whenever I am alone, doing dishes and sweeping. Whenever I rest I pick up my novel and last thing at night I read one poem. I do my school work in the afternoon and after tea. I paint charts in the conglomerate sun porch, but still there’s a book to be written; every night, dead or dying, after school work and letters, I get in those few lines (*Myself*, 1967b, p. 28).

The policy of 'cultural adaptation' (learning Maori language) was performed while sweeping; state-supported access to good literature in rural areas (through book clubs and libraries) enhanced her evening study; family space (in the sun porch) was shared with the making of visual classroom resources advocated by the New Education. "In place of an imagination of a world of bounded places," writes Doreen Massey, "we are now presented with a world of flows. Instead of isolated identities, an understanding of the spatial as relational through connections" (2005, p. 81).

Sylvia dreams of a separate place for creativity, removed from school and family. She rents a shack, calling it Selah. Sylvia writes: "Selah is the house I've built before in the brilliance of wistful fantasy, emerging into reality. This is the geography of it. Here could be the fresh air of independence, the miracle of solitude, ... of music, study and painting" (*Myself*, 1967b, p. 116). Bohemian Europe might pass that way: "Elegant people will come with their hair quietly parted. Terrific conversations plunging through till morning ...". Like other rooms in Sylvia's psyche, this shack was haunted: shadows of a murder-suicide of two young (Maori) lovers there. She imagines "pretty curtains blowing the dead away" (*Myself*, 1967b, p. 116). Can she claim this space for art? Sylvia's own ghosts and ghouls follow: "I've always seen the artist as a monster coming in from the outside that inhabited my brain, my mind, quite distinct from me. I couldn't have the monster in the family."¹³ Accordingly, "I locked the artist away in the study. I locked him out. I had to go to him." Selah must contain the demons of her under-mind – her dreams, illicit passions, and the writing that disciplined dreaming. The mad woman looms in the garret: "Asylums are full of artists who failed to say the things they must, and famous tombs with those who did" (*Incense to Idols*, 1960, p. 169).

In the quotations cited earlier, Sylvia called out to her readers from high "on a hill teaching Maoris". On the other side of the world, Virginia Woolf looked back into her childhood's domestic interiors. Writing from 'inside' the metropolitan centre, Woolf speculated that 'savages' (colonial 'others') might orient their lives spatially around "some tree or fire place." But savages were distant figures of Woolf's imagination, remote from the orderly Victorian rooms in which ladies poured tea and men speculated upstairs in book-lined studies. Positioned geographically in Woolf's antipodes, Sylvia could only dream of "a glamorous mysterious vivid life in the capitals of the world." Woolf's metropolis is Sylvia's imaginary; Sylvia's open spaces, and her hill among 'Maoris', Woolf's. Located on opposite sides of the imperial divide, both writers echoed the tropes of race: Empire, metropolis/periphery, civilisation and savagery (Maloney, 2001).

As Cathryn McConaghy has argued, "Sylvia constructed her notion of race usually within the tropes of the day" (2006, p. 74). Consistent with policies of her time, Sylvia's teaching scheme was not intended to promote what today is referred to as biculturalism (or bilingualism). It was designed as "a bridge from the known to the unknown; from a native culture to a new; and universally speaking, from the inner man out" (*Teacher*, 1963, p. 28). The key words scheme, which tapped inner (psychic) dimensions of the child's mind, was a transition: "They can't bridge the gap between the pa and the European school without it" (*Spinster*, 1958, p. 115). Failure to cross over (into civilisation) meant going 'back' to nature (savagery):

The transition made by Maori children is often unsuccessful. At a tender age a wrench occurs from one culture to another, from which either manifestly or unconsciously, not all recover. And I think that this circumstance has some little bearing on the number of Maoris who, although well educated, seem neurotic, and on the number who retreat to the mat (*Teacher*, 1963, p. 31).

Sylvia's image of 'back to the mat' was a recurring one in racial discourse. Professor Fitt (cited previously) used it: "the main outcome of our attempts to educate the Maori has been failure. That this is so is substantiated by the reports from so many competent observers that the one longing of so many Maori boys and girls, once their schooling is over, is to 'return to the mat', that is, to the old paternal ways of living" (1931, p. 223). In *Bell Call*, Ashton-Warner refers to "Some secluded spot, some overlooked Maori pa where ... children can merge with nature" (1971, p. 27). And in her novel *Greenstone*, Huia, a child of mixed race, crosses back and forth across the river between "This" (its/her Pakeha) side and "That" (its/her Maori) side:

As the canoe makes its nervous way across the ponderously moving water her inner world changes colour and character. That Side is everything that is Maori, This Side in the clearing all that is English, each side demanding its inherited loyalty, while right here on the treacherous surface of the river is the recurring transition ... this sundering feeling accompanying movement from one race to another. Where can her spirit fly like a bird to its nest where conflict is forgotten? (1967a, p. 129).

As Tess Moeke-Maxwell (2006) suggests, *Greenstone's* evocations of rivers, canoes, bridges, transitions and hybridity evoke theoretical engagement with policies of cultural fusion. Sylvia makes few references to Maori culture in her teaching (apart from the children's key words), and her arts are European: The Pied Piper mural, the European classical music she played on "the new piano ... Here was this Friedman in a Maori schoolroom" (*Myself*, 1967b, p. 31) (chapter 8 and 9, this volume, on lack of Maori language in Sylvia's classrooms).

CONCLUSION

To locate Sylvia Ashton-Warner as a New Zealand educational theorist, the "localisation in the spaces of our intimacy is more urgent than determination of dates" (Bachelard, 2002, p. 50). We create our 'selves', or identities, in particular social, geographical and cultural settings. Sylvia Henderson, a teacher in a Native School, dreamed and wrote her persona as Sylvia Ashton-Warner, novelist and educational theorist, in (and not in spite of) Pipiriki during the Second World War. The places in which she lived, dreamed, read, thought, loved, and wrote should not be seen as isolated cells or containers. Studying Sylvia Ashton-Warner as a *New Zealand* educational theorist – knowing her place – reveals connections between her haunted hills, classrooms and houses and wider metropolitan movements of educational thought.

NOTES

- ¹ For a history of New Zealand's Native School system, see Barrington & Beaglehole, (1974); Simon (1998); Simon & Tuhiwai Smith (Eds.) (2001); Barrington, (2008).
- ² My analysis of 'Sylvia's place' in Education as an academic subject in New Zealand is developed in another paper (Middleton, 2006).
- ³ These are referred to in *Myself* (Ashton Warner, 1967b).
- ⁴ Herbert Read's *Education Through Art* (1958) is mentioned in several of Sylvia's texts. He wrote the foreword to *Teacher* and visited Sylvia in New Zealand; for details, see Hood (1988).
- ⁵ See also Ashton-Warner's (1956c) article 'Tone', reprinted in chapter 2, this volume.
- ⁶ The progressive strands of the 1929 curriculum and Sylvia's reference to Caldwell Cook in *Teacher* are outlined in Middleton (2006).
- ⁷ As described elsewhere (May, 2003; Middleton & May, 1997), American philosopher John Dewey had a major impact on many New Zealand early childhood and infant teachers between the 1920s and 1950s. Middleton (2006) indicated that the lengthy reading list in the 1928 'Red Book' curriculum (Dept of Education, 1929) included several books by Dewey, including his *Democracy and Education* (1916).
- ⁸ Ashton-Warner mentions Apirana Ngata in *Teacher* (1963, p. 85). She also mentions Ngata in *Greenstone*: Koro (her character Huia's great-grandfather) was a teacher at Te Aute College "where he had a hand in schooling young Maoris designed for Pacific renown later in the century: Ngata, Pomare and Rangi Hiroa, with ripples of letters after their name and European titles" (1967a, p. 51).
- ⁹ For further information about Tovey's work, see Simpson (1974).
- ¹⁰ Gwen Somerset (née Alley) is well-known as a pioneer of progressive methods in infant classrooms. In *Myself* (1967b, p. 101), Sylvia refers to a visit and letter from "Saul's brother, a big name in the education world". Saul was the alias Sylvia used for her close friend, the district nurse, Joy Alley. Hood (1988, p. 102) refers to Joy having a visit from her sister Gwen in Pipiriki. Gwen's methods, as described in her autobiography (1988), were similar to Sylvia's. See also chapter 5, this volume.
- ¹¹ The idea that the character of Pan in *I Passed this Way* is based on Walter Harris is discussed in Hood (1988).
- ¹² For a discussion of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's depiction of Douglas Ball, see Middleton (2006).
- ¹³ Transcribed from interview Endeavour Television (Interview, 1980).

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