

# **MINDING THE AESTHETIC: THE PLACE OF THE LITERARY IN EDUCATION AND RESEARCH<sup>1</sup>**

**TERRY LOCKE**

*Faculty of Education*

*The University of Waikato*

## **THE AESTHETIC AS A MODE OF COGNITION AND MEANS OF SOCIAL COHESION**

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,”—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

(From Keats: “Ode on a Grecian Urn”)

(Ricks, 1999)

It is easy enough to think of these lines from “Ode on a Grecian Urn” as a mere slogan. But I do not think it is. The nature of knowledge and its relationship to the imagination was one of the great Romantic themes, and we know that Keats thought long and hard about it, probably during lectures he attended during the three years he spent training in medicine.

On 1 October 1815, Keats entered Guy’s Hospital for more formal training. Henry Stephens, a classmate and later the inventor of blue-black ink, described the would-be poet: Whilst attending lectures, he [Keats] would sit & instead of Copying out the lecture, would often scribble some doggerel rhymes, among the Notes of Lecture, particularly if he got hold of another Student’s Syllabus—In my Syllabus of Chemical Lectures he scribbled many lines on the paper cover. (*The life of John Keats*, 2004, pp. 9–11)

I think I need to say to my audience who do enjoy singing the binomial theorem or chanting the periodic table in the shower that I *do not* see the arts and sciences employing diametrically opposed modes of cognition ... but more of that later.

So what might be meant by an equation of truth with beauty? My thinking can be encapsulated in three statements:

- The awareness of pattern is central to human meaning-making.
- Form is the aesthetic face of knowledge.
- There is a pleasure in form.

These three statements suggest three phrases in aesthetic knowledge production. The first relates to perception or intuition, an awareness of relationship between events or qualities. The second relates to the emergence or embodiment of this awareness into something durable (a painting, poem or equation) or something

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enacted (a chant or dance) that exhibits qualities such as balance, shapeliness, harmony and elegance that go beyond (but include) the utilitarian. The third is about response to this formal embodiment. The maker herself or himself can take pleasure from creative acts. But going beyond the individual or group maker, these forms, calling forth from the audience a particular kind of attention, have the potential to produce states that we attempt to describe in words such as “rapture”, “transport”, “enjoyment”, “delight”, “validation” and even “Eureka!” These acts of attention, engaged in collectively (and the example which sprang to mind as I wrote this was the Chicago crowd listening to Barack Obama’s victory speech with its rhetorical glories) are powerfully cohesive.

Lest I be accused of originality here, let me insert a quotation from James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*—part of a long conversation between Stephen Daedalus and his fat friend, Lynch.

To finish what I was saying about beauty, said Stephen, the most satisfying relations of the sensible must therefore correspond to the necessary phases of artistic apprehension. Find these and you find the qualities of universal beauty. Aquinas says: *Ad pulcritudinem tria requiruntur integritas, consonantia, claritas*. I translate it so: *Three things are needed for beauty, wholeness, harmony, and radiance*. (Joyce, 1960, p. 211)

As I read this passage, the three words wholeness, harmony and radiance more or less equate with those three statements I made earlier.

I would like to share with you a poem of mine. It is called “The achievement of a hand ax”:

Picture this man:  
his uncalloused hand hefting  
lovingly the yellow worked flint  
of a remote age  
pausing in the clasp &  
unclasping of the stone  
the tendering of fingers on edges  
pausing in the apperception of  
ghostly emanations from  
a long-vanished mind  
that left an eloquent legacy  
defying barriers of time and tongue—  
a stunningly impracticable relic  
from an incalculably brutish and dangerous world  
beyond utilitarianism  
embellished with a virtuoso’s elegance:  
What is transmitted  
is the model of a mind  
wistful, inarticulate yet gripped  
by a shadowy aesthetic  
lingering

like the man who pauses  
 over his adept handiwork.  
 (Locke, 2004).

This poem was prompted by a long quotation from Loren Eiseley in Joseph Carroll's book *Evolution and Literary Theory* (1995). Carroll describes the extract as a "meditation on the integration of knowledge and beauty in human cognition" (p. 83). Eiseley was an essayist, philosopher and literary naturalist who "likened the brain of a writer to 'an unseen artist's loft' in which 'pictures from the past' were stored and brought forth to be magnified or reduced in order to form a pattern" (Brill, n.d., p. 1). What I was really celebrating in this poem was the evolution in the human species of aesthetic delight—of the sense of beauty as arising from one's realisation of the formal qualities of something.

I have to say that it was written *before* I had engaged with Brian Boyd's outstanding new work, *On the Origin of Stories* (2009). Without making a Dawkins of myself, I find Boyd's account of the evolutionary origins of art as a "Darwin machine" both compelling and stimulating. Viewing art as a behaviour, he suggests that "we can view art as a kind of cognitive *play*, the set of activities designed to engage human *attention* through their appeal to our preference for inferentially rich and therefore *patterned* information" (p. 85). I suspect this is actually old news for my colleagues in early childhood education. Boyd (2009) proposes two principal functions for art:

1. First, it serves as a stimulus and training for a flexible mind, as play does for the body and physical behavior. The high concentrations of pattern that art delivers repeatedly engage and activate individual brains and over time alter their wiring to modify key human perceptual, cognitive, and expressive systems, especially in terms of sight, hearing, movement, and social cognition. All of art's other functions lead *from* this.
2. Second, art becomes a social and individual system for engendering creativity, for producing options not confined by the here and now or the immediate and given. All other functions lead *up to* this. (pp. 86–7)

There is no time here to rehearse Boyd's closely argued case that nature *evolved* art to *create creativity* (p. 119). The case I am making here relates to the crucial place of art and the aesthetic in cognition and (later) the implications of all of this for education.

In terms of this case, there is no room for a binary opposition between scientists and scientific thinking on the one hand and artists and artistic thinking on the other. Robert Root-Bernstein, professor of physiology at Michigan State University and long-time researcher in creativity, has written articles with titles such as "Sensual Chemistry: Aesthetics as a Motivation for Research". In many books and articles, he has argued for a common creative aesthetic shared by scientists and artists alike. More specifically, Root-Bernstein argues that

- "The most intense aesthetic experiences ... are always multi-modal" (1996, p. 66),

- “Thinking and feeling are integral” (p. 66),
- Scientific insight comes from what he calls *synscientia*—knowing in a synthetic way—“being able to conceive of objects or ideas interchangeably or concurrently in visual, verbal, mathematical, kinesthetic, or musical ways” (p. 66),
- A distinction needs to be made between the language used to communicate results in science—words and mathematics—and the “aesthetic tools necessary to actually do science” (p. 71). The former are inadequate of themselves, and
- The arts provide a source of skills and insights that science needs to progress (1996, p. 71) and elaborate “possible words that can be evaluated for the insights they provide to the real world” (2003, p. 268).

Root-Bernstein’s work provides dozens of examples of artistic insight leading to scientific discovery. In just one example, Ilan Golani and Philip Teitelbaum made advances in analysing and recording movement disorders arising from neural disease by adapting the Eshkol-Wachman movement notation, used widely for dance in clinical and laboratory settings (1996, p. 73). Indeed, Bernstein’s hope for the future of innovation rests with the polymath, with people like van’t Hoff, the first Nobel laureate in chemistry (1901), who was also a musician and poet, and who also argued that the development of a scientific imagination needed the fostering of artistic, musical and poetic talents (2003, p. 268).

Before moving on to some considerations about the aesthetic in New Zealand education, there are three matters I would like to cover briefly:

- the cultivation of an aesthetic disposition,
- the place of skills and disciplinary knowledge, and
- the place of analytical reason.

I will be arguing that these relate respectively to the three phrases of aesthetic knowledge production discussed previously: the awareness of pattern, the embodiment of pattern in form, and the response to this formal embodiment. They also point to three conditions which I argue need to prevail in a classroom or education system if it is to successfully safeguard and nurture aesthetic knowing.

### **The cultivation of an aesthetic disposition**

I want to introduce this topic in a somewhat unlikely way by inviting you to listen to a polymath, American poet and doctor William Carlos Williams, talking to an audience about responding to poetry:

All art is sensual. Listen ... never mind, don’t try to work it out. Listen to it. Let it come to you. Let it ... sit back, relax and let the thing spray in your face. Get the feeling of it, get the tactile sense of something, something going on. It may be that you will then perceive, have a sensation that you may later find will clarify itself as you go along. So that I say, to understand the modern poem, listen to it, and it should be heard. It is very difficult sometimes to get it off the page but once you

hear it then you should be able to appraise it. In other words, if it ain't a pleasure, it ain't a poem (Williams, 1951, Compilation 13, Track 1).

There are a number of things to note here. First, Williams is inviting us to engage in an act of attention where all of our senses are at play. Second, he is inviting a disposition where the conscious will to order is suspended, offering us the rather radical notion in this age of outputs and performativity that valuable knowledge creation just *might* occur in state of relaxation! Third, with a basis in sensation, clarification is presented as outcome that is *not willed* but which happens, again effortlessly. Finally, evaluation (or to use his word “appraisal”) is presented as an activity which *follows* perception—a way of testing or validating the emerging order.

I do not think it is fanciful to put Williams's statement alongside Einstein's description of how he worked in a response to mathematician Jacques Hadamard's psychological survey of scientists:

The words of the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be “voluntarily” reproduced and combined. ... Conventional words or other signs have to be sought for laboriously only in a secondary stage, when the mentioned associative play is sufficiently established and can be reproduced at will. (Root-Bernstein, 1996, p. 71)

Einstein is also describing a resting of the will in the initial stages of the process where pattern emerges and the sensuous basis of the process in image-based thinking. The labour related to verbal articulation comes later.

One of the best descriptions of this disposition I have been referring to can be found in poet and teacher Anne McCrary Sullivan's (2000) article in the *Harvard Educational Review* entitled “Notes From a Marine Biologist's Daughter: On the Art and Science of Attention”. She argues that aesthetic vision is a kind of complex attention, a “high level of consciousness about what one sees. It suggests an alertness, a ‘wide-awakeness’ that Maxine Green ... has urged educators and researchers to learn from artists”, involving a “sensitivity to suggestions, to pattern .... a fine attention to detail and form” and so on. (p. 220). “My mother, the scientist,” she writes, “taught me to see” (p. 221).

### **The place of skills and disciplinary knowledge**

Aesthetic knowing builds on but is distinct from foundational disciplinary knowledge and training. I am making this point here, lest I be seen as suggesting that these things do not matter. Those of us involved in arts education know that arts disciplines—and I am including the literary arts here—are characterised by enormous repertoires of skills, all of which need to be learned, from the correct way to hold marimba beaters, to mask construction, to applying paint, to using a chisel, managing continuity in film sequences and developing a lighting plan.

There are two additional and related points I would like to make here in relation to this topic.

- I have little sympathy for current “knowledge wave” arguments that assert that information is just a “mouse click away” and that, therefore, teaching can be reduced to the facilitation of information access. The latest New Zealand curriculum is seriously lacking any emphasis at all on disciplinary thinking and may in fact be reflecting a crisis in disciplinary knowledge among New Zealand teachers. My intuition is that we are confusing interdisciplinarity with non-disciplinarity—an anything goes attitude to programme design which is being exacerbated by the fragmentation of knowledge represented by the Qualifications Framework and the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) [more on this later]. In recent research on teaching literature in the multicultural classroom, my colleagues and I found disturbing evidence of an erosion of professional content knowledge in relationship to literary study. And this was among teachers who were able and enthusiastic.
- We can overestimate, however, the size of the repertoire of skills required for meaningful aesthetic knowledge production. Early childhood educators know that young children are already equipped with the modal resources (a repertoire of physical movements, sentence generation capability and vocabulary, a sense of rhythm, recognition of rhyme, shape-making ability, and so on and so on) and can be both directed into activities conducive to aesthetic knowing or be left, equally productively, to their own creative play.

### **The place of analytical reason**

As Guy Claxton (2000) points out in “The Anatomy of Intuition”, “intuition can be mistaken and misleading” (p. 42). Analytical reason can be thought of as a balance or complement to aesthetic knowing, a means of interrogating intuitions thought of as hypotheses and/or evaluating the products of aesthetic knowing through various kinds of tests, whether in the laboratory, the field, the auditorium or through collegial dialogue. As a poet, I know the value of the cold light that analytical reason brings to bear when I’m revising a poem I have written and deciding what works. The same goes for analysing research data and writing research reports, with or without the painful feedback of anonymous reviewers.

The point, then, is that analytical reason, which, as Claxton suggests, the Enlightenment raised to a high art and bequeathed to us as the privileged way of knowing (p. 32) is not the enemy of aesthetic knowing but rather its partner in building knowledge and, with an ethical dimension added, wisdom. We demean it, of course, if we equate it with the kind of rationality that has characterised our education system in New Zealand since 1990. It is to this system that I now turn.

### **THE DEMISE OF AESTHETIC KNOWING IN THE NEW ZEALAND EDUCATION SYSTEM**

The kind of rationality which I see as dominant in our education system (and in our research culture also) is described thus by Claxton (2000):

Action that is not planned or premeditated, answers that come without reasons, understandings that cannot be clearly and quickly put into words, are stigmatized as essentially second-rate. Forms of learning

that do not involve articulation, and ways of judging that have no explicit criteria, are treated as lazy and inadequate. Instead, our professional and educational cultures are preoccupied with planning, deliberation, calculation, measurement, justification and accountability. Everything from developmental plans to attainment targets must be spelled out and nailed down. (p. 34)

This rationality is characterised by a logic that disregards complexity and diversity, simplifies cause-effect relationships, resists challenges to its own assumptions, views its own norms as common sense and ignores discursive complexity or what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia—the way characters in the real world and the world of fiction make meaning out of a variety of languages and stances (Bakhtin, 1986).

I have referred to 1990 as a kind of watershed year in terms of educational policy in New Zealand. By talking in such generalities, I am not suggesting that the period before 1990 was some kind of Edenic Golden Age of education whence we have all been exiled. However, I do find it hard to imagine the present context producing anything comparable to Elwyn Richardson's (1972) *In the Early World*, or anyone quite like music educationalist Linda Francis, whose life and passing we honoured recently. Nor am I suggesting that there are not many, many teachers doing work in classrooms that fosters aesthetic knowing. What I am arguing is that the current policy climate is tilting teaching in the direction of a managerial, deprofessionalised, instrumental model.

One of the drivers of 1990s educational “reforms”—inverted commas deliberate—in New Zealand and elsewhere was a policy of economic rationalism which John Codd (1997) has described as bringing “the agencies and apparatus of the state into line with the policy prescriptions of neo-liberal (or free market) economics and contractual managerialism” (p. 131). The technologies developed to produce this alignment included extrinsic accountability measures; a curriculum increasingly reduced to ladders of decontextualised achievement objectives against which the performance of some universal child and his or her teacher might be measured; outcomes fetishism with a focus on skills; a qualifications framework which fragmented knowledge, undermined connectivity, put a flawed approach to assessment in the driving seat and commodified learning as credit accumulation; and, latterly, the introduction of national standards as a measuring stick for students, teachers and schools.

All of this is rationality rampant. As with the NCEA and standardised testing, the rhetoric can make the logic sound compelling: *until* the light begins to dawn that something is not working. As we embark on the brave new world of national standards, Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families in the United Kingdom, has abandoned key stage tests, largely because teaching to the test (as many predicted) was detrimental to learning. The NCEA has had many tinkering since it was first inflicted in 2002. However, the emperor still parades naked, surrounded by sycophants expressing admiration for his attire. Meanwhile, the essential design flaws remain

I want to focus for a while on some unintended consequences of the NCEA, with particular reference to the subject I have dedicated my life to, English. It is a

verity of education that the principle determinant of classroom practice is the prevailing assessment regime. As I have argued elsewhere, the NCEA is a deeply flawed, ideologically driven system that has promised far more than it can deliver and has so far failed thousands of our students. It is fundamentally unreliable, of questionable validity, work intensive, inadequately moderated and philosophically bereft. Let me offer a few examples of its impact on learning practice and, more pertinently, on the kind of thinking and learning it engages teachers and students in. You will see that it is remote from aesthetic knowing.

I would invite you to imagine yourself as a member of a diminishing band of new English teachers who did a degree in English at university, not because you wanted to be a cultural anthropologist, but because you had been inspired in a love of literature. Because you read the *Listener*, you may have read the following words in a letter published on November 25, 2006: "I am a 16-year-old NCEA student and I despise it. I particularly dislike English. It is no longer about how well one writes or the vocabulary used; it is now about how well you use the 'format'." But you are not going to be deterred by this; nor by recent research done by Sister Helen O'Neill (2006), mapping the causes for the disappearance of poetry from senior secondary school English classrooms.

Recent teachers would have been told in their pre-service training that there are particular NCEA standards with a literary orientation. Standards with names such as "AS90052: Produce creative writing (Level 1)", which is internally assessed, and "AS90055: Read, study and show understanding of a number of short written texts (Level 1)", which is tested in a 40-minute examination question. Beginning teachers find that for any one English class from year 11 to year 13, they could be assessing up to nine separate standards. While these teachers attempt to design an English programme that integrates in its units of work a range of standards, they know that each standard is nevertheless to be assessed with different sets of criteria and that their performance as a marker is going to be under scrutiny from the start. They also begin to realise quickly, as Jenny Ellis (2005) discovered in her study of the impact of the NCEA on teaching and learning at Hamilton Girls' High School, that students have begun to view themselves as credit gatherers and to question learning activities that do not appear to contribute to this function. They also realise quickly that league tables already exist whereby schools can be compared in terms of credits earned against credits entered. Suddenly, teachers are not thinking about how to teach a subject but what the students need to do to fulfil a particular standard with its attendant currency of credits.

One of the external standards teachers are asked to prepare their Year 11 students for is "AS90055: Read, study and show understanding of a number of short written texts". To get this standard, students select merely two texts from one of the following categories: short stories, poems, print media and short hyperfiction, and write an essay of 200 words. Teachers realise with a jolt that students can get these two credits without studying a literary text at all, let alone poetry. Still, teachers persevere. Intent on maximising students' chance to succeed in this system, a study is made of the question options in the 2007 examination paper, and it is discovered that students need choose *one* only from the following list to write their 200 words on:



1. Describe **an important character or individual** in each text.  
Explain **why** this character or individual was important in each text.
2. Describe **an interesting aspect of setting** in each text.  
Explain **why** the setting was **important** in each text.  
*Note: "Setting" may refer to time and / or place.*
3. Describe **a change** that happened in each text.  
Explain **how** this change helped you **understand a character or individual** in each text.
4. Describe **an important idea** in each text.  
Explain **how** you were **shown** that this idea was important in each text.
5. Describe **at least ONE interesting technique** in each text.  
Explain **how** these techniques were used to show you **an important idea** in each text.  
*Note: Techniques could include language, structure, and narrative point-of-view.*
6. Describe **a memorable event** in each text.  
Explain **how** this event was made memorable for you in each text.

With a sinking feeling, a teacher would realise that impoverishment can occur in a number of ways. One is in the kind of reductionism which evaluates a student's response to a (literary) text on the basis of drilled writing on just one feature of it. Another is the reductionism which equates literary response with a repetitive "describe/explain" formula shown in this list of questions. Suddenly, it is realised what that 16-year-old student meant when he talked about the "format".

What I am drawing attention to here is a "formulaicism" or rationality that is the antithesis of aesthetic knowing. It connects with an email I received in 2006 from Emeritus Professor Warwick Elley:

I have compared the last three years' [NCEA] papers at Level 1, for the standard "Show understanding of short texts" that were studied, and find strong support for a criticism I have rarely used, that standards-based assessment has a restrictive effect on what is taught and how. The four-point scale has the fatuous distinctions that students are assessed on whether they show *understanding*, or *convincing understanding*, or *perceptive understanding* of the texts they studied—but that is not my point. Students are to choose one out of six topics, and apply it to two short texts. Several of the six topics are almost identical in each year. In each year, students can choose to describe a character or individual you like and say why. Or they can describe an unusual or surprising event and say why. Or they can choose an unusual [language] feature and say how it helps understanding ... I can see teachers priming their Level 1 students with model answers to be memorised for such predictable questions.

Another technology related to this impoverishment relates to widespread ways in which teachers prepare students by having them emulate (a kinder word than "drilling") downloadable national exemplars which offer models of exam answers

in not achieved, achieved, merit and excellence categories. The “describe/explain” formula also applies for “AS90054: Read, study and show understanding of extended written text(s)”, where students also write a 200-word essay on either a novel, non-fictional work, play or extended hyperfiction. There is no room in this system for an aesthetic response to a literary text to be demonstrated by the production of an aesthetic product such as an image, dance or poem. Since, to use Elley’s words, most achievement criteria for these standards are “fatuous”, exemplar dependence has become endemic in the work of secondary English teachers as they try to figure out how to grade their students’ work.

Let us look now at how a teacher might react to all of this. The teacher, rather like our friend Dr Williams, as a poet decides to introduce students to some of his poems, including “The red wheelbarrow”.

so much depends  
upon  
a red wheel  
barrow  
glazed with rain  
water  
beside the white  
chickens. (Williams, 1969, p. 30)

There is not a lot to be said about this poem other than enjoy it, though you *could* at a pinch, say that he is drawing your attention to the kind of close attention scrutiny that Sullivan (2000) was talking about.

Hey presto! An “Excellence” exemplar for the Achievement Standard is found: “Read, study and analyse short written texts”. By this time, the teacher barely notices that words such as “respond” and “interpret” are missing from the descriptions of such competencies. The exemplar is a five-paragraph literary essay, with an introduction, conclusion and three “body” paragraphs, each dealing with a different poem addressing the question, “Demonstrate the way in which particular uses of language or characteristics of style had significant impact in texts you have studied.” The teacher notes wryly that the question-writer is suggesting that the impact of a poem occurs *in* texts and not *on* readers. And ... hey ... here is a paragraph on “The Red Wheelbarrow”:

Williams (1923) again shows a simple scene to be surprising and affecting in his poem “The Red Wheelbarrow”. From the striking start of his poem “So much depends on.” it is clear that the poem places an emotional response in what he sees. The nature of the image “a red wheelbarrow, glazed with rainwater, beside the white chickens” leaves it open as to why he reacts in such a way (it could be nostalgia?)—but the emotion is visibly there. The technique of unifying what the reader sees through run-on lines and lack of punctuation is used again. The chickens and the wheelbarrow appear inseparable, but the brevity also heightens the feeling that this is poetry as an immediate emotional response, rather than being formed later as an overprepared “second

impression”. The feeling that “Red Wheelbarrow” is a fragment of a longer poem, or train of thought, contributes to this (NZQA, n.d., p. 5).

Certainly, the anonymous examiner liked this paragraph, which, he or she says, “persuasively integrates comment with question topic”, “uses evidence” and shows “insight in conclusions drawn from analysis of examples”. What is not said, however, is that the paragraph is a dreadful example of how to respond to poetry and a wonderful example of drilled, nonsensical artifice.

Let us turn to writing. If a teacher is like the ones who attended a workshop I offered on teaching the writing of poetry a couple of weeks ago, he/she will not even consider having students write poetry in order to fulfil the Level 1 “AS90052: Produce creative writing”. My research indicates that teachers are likely to use nationally developed tasks, which engage students in so-called “creative” writing that bears scant resemblance to literary writing in the real world. In addition, teacher focus is likely to be, again, on national exemplars for different levels of achievement and the criteria a teacher is compelled to use for assessment purposes. In certain powerful ways, the structure and wording of these criteria will be affecting teaching.

**Table 1. Achievement criteria for NCEA Standard: AS90052**

Achievement	Achievement with Merit	Achievement with Excellence
Express idea(s) with detail in a piece of creative writing.	Develop idea(s) with detail in a piece of creative writing.	Develop idea(s) convincingly with detail in a piece of creative writing.
Use a writing style appropriate to audience, purpose and text type.	Use a controlled writing style appropriate to audience, purpose and text type.	Use a controlled writing style appropriate to audience, purpose and text type, and which commands attention.
Structure material in a way that is appropriate to audience, purpose and text type.	Structure material clearly in a way that is appropriate to audience, purpose and text type.	Structure material clearly and effectively in a way that is appropriate to audience, purpose and text type.
Use writing conventions without intrusive errors.	Use writing conventions accurately.	Use writing conventions accurately.

(NZQA, 2010, p. 1)

What do I mean by this? Well, to use one example, once upon a time, teachers marked creative writing holistically. The presence of mechanical mistakes might affect a grade but would not doom a student’s writing to failure if there were other redeeming qualities, such as a wonderfully fresh way of looking at the world. With the NCEA, if there *are* errors deemed to be “intrusive”, a student fails the standard. The result, of course, is that “error correction”, proven by 100 years of research *not*

to improve student writing, is dominating the teaching of creative writing. And many write-on grammar books, also proven by research to have no impact at all on writing performance, are being purchased by nervous English departments.

I have been focusing this section on the “nitty gritty” of classroom practice and on the actual effects of curriculum and assessment policy on teachers’ professional knowledge and work, because *these* are the effects that determine the experience of schooling for our students. The aesthetic knowing I described earlier has little place in this system. There is no place here for the cultivation of an aesthetic disposition. As I have argued in a number of places, the skills and disciplinary knowledge of English teachers are being eroded and erased by the pressure to adapt their teaching to specious and ill-constructed standards formulations. And analytical reason has been replaced by a rationality fixated by the need to produce results.

### **WHAT MIGHT BE DONE TO MAKE AESTHETIC KNOWING CENTRAL TO CLASSROOM PRACTICE?**

There are several possible actions to establish in classrooms the conditions I argued earlier foster aesthetic knowing:

- the cultivation of an aesthetic disposition,
- the appropriate fostering of skills and disciplinary knowledge, and
- ensuring a place for the rigour of analytical reason.

I will share just a few suggestions. I am sure teachers will have many of their own.

1. With regard to the NCEA, it is not too late to dismantle it and start again. Between 1997 and 2004, I directed a project which developed and trialled in a number of schools the English Certificate of Studies as an alternative qualification to the NCEA and owned by this wonderful university. The qualification was evaluated independently by Professor Cedric Hall of Victoria University. NZQA steadfastly refused to engage in a dialogue on qualifications and effectively stymied the project. Central to the study was task-based learning, that is, it began by asking the question, “What constitutes a rigorous, comprehensive, programme of study for a year 12 or 13 student?” It used an integrated standards model of assessment rather than a separate standards model, thus encouraging students to make connections across aspects of a subject or knowledge domain, enhancing reliability and solving issues of moderation. Ironically, a qualification using the Waikato model would have cost the New Zealand taxpayer a fraction of the NCEA. In a letter to Anne Tolley, written in November last year, Warwick Elley compared the nine professionals running qualifications at three levels in the 70s and 80s with the 384 currently running the NCEA.
2. We need to invest in teachers in all sorts of ways such as raising the entry bar and paying teachers more, and restoring the four-year teacher education degree as the norm or complement the current three-year degree with the equivalent of a year’s paid professional development in the first five years of a teacher’s working life.

3. Serious consideration needs to be given to the constitution of teacher professional content knowledge and how it is to be acquired. As mentioned earlier, foundational disciplinary knowledge is a prerequisite for aesthetic knowledge production and problem-solving. There are no short cuts in the development of disciplinary knowledge; it needs sustained investment in time and money. I suggest that this investment include encouraging teachers as writers and arts practitioners. In “The Anatomy of Intuition”, Guy Claxton (2000) mentions “expertise” as one of six “varieties of intuition”. A reason for prioritising investment in teacher expertise is that, as he puts it, “the smooth, unreflective mastery of complex but familiar domains” like the classroom allows for the moment-by-moment, creative decision-making that is one of the characteristics of the artistic teacher. There is ample research to show that teacher workloads have intensified under test- and outcome-oriented regimes and that the head- and soul-space required for aesthetic knowing has been drastically eroded.
4. Maybe we need to rethink our current determination to make literacy and mathematics the core curriculum focus. Suppose we think of the arts and sciences as the core and mathematics and literacy—with literacy conceived multimodally—as the attendant languages required for effective teaching and learning in these twin domains.
5. The arts need to be given a much greater place in the curriculum, not so much by increasing their time allowance as distinct disciplines—though this is important—but rather as playing a central role in teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge, that is, in *how* they teach. In terms of the evidence writers like Root-Bernstein provide, the literary, musical, dramatic, kinetic, visual and plastic arts have a huge amount to offer mathematics and the sciences pedagogically.
6. Finally, I think it is time we laid off our children and stopped testing or asTTle-ating or standardising them relentlessly against one-size-fits-all measures. If we *want* to know how schools and teachers are doing, I suggest that we develop criteria for evaluating school schemes and classroom programmes and leave the children the green space to dream on, play on, envisioning creatively, and yet with intellectual and critical rigour the world our grandchildren will be living in.

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