HISTORICALLY-BASED PERSPECTIVES

SOCIAL FACTORS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY ART EDUCATION:
A COMPARISON BETWEEN NOVA SCOTIA'S PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Donald Soucy

The social context of 19th century art education in Nova Scotia is explored, with comparisons made between the art curricula found in the Province's public and private schools. The social context of art education in Nova Scotia is also compared to Efland's (1985) interpretation of art education in 19th century Boston. It is shown how social factors affected not only access to education but also the type of art education a student received.

Efland's (1985) study of 19th century art education in Boston discusses how gender and social class were important factors in determining curriculum trends. According to Efland:

Common school art with its emphasis upon practical application and industry was frequently promoted by such upper class men as Mann and Boston industrialists .... One can characterize this as masculine art education. Feminine art education, by contrast, tended to promote the teaching of art as high culture. This occurred in private schools for women, infiltrating the public common schools as these individuals assumed roles as teachers (p.40).

Efland particularly avoids claiming that his findings on art education in Boston provide interpretations applicable to all of North America. Such a claim would obviously require analysis of historical data from other centres. The aim of this paper is to provide some of that data by examining the development of art education in the schools of 19th century Nova Scotia. Access to education is discussed in the paper's first section. This is followed by a comparison of teaching methods used in private and public school art programs. The social implications of these programs are examined, with comparisons made between the social contexts of art education in Nova Scotia and Boston.

Education for All Who Could Afford It

Private schools were prevalent in 19th century Nova Scotia despite the numerous legislative acts which attempted to establish a uniform public education system. The reasons for this were many. Some people rejected all public funding for schools, others supported education subsidies only for the poor. There were also many communities which could not or would not comply with the requirements of the provincial school acts, such as constructing a school house. Even where a school house was provided, many well-to-do parents balked at sending their children to a common school with a limited curriculum taught by an itinerant schoolmaster of questionable competence. They preferred to leave such schooling for the poor, while their sons and daughters secured what was hoped to be a better education in the private schools.

Operators of private schools catered to this hope. In a typical advertisement a Milton, Nova Scotia schoolmaster assured all those with...
high cultural aspirations that their daughters would receive a "course of study [which] is equal to that of first-class schools in England and on the Continent" ("Padfield's Seminary," 1875). Many other private schools made similar claims, but only some of the schools actually lived up to these standards. Other schools were allowed by the unregulated system to offer a program which was often less than mediocre.

Fees at the schools were generally based on the program chosen by the student. For example, at the Establishment for Young Ladies in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, a program restricted to the 3-r's cost three pounds per annum, while an expanded program cost twice that. Over and above this basic fee was an annual charge of three pounds each for French, drawing, or music ("Miss Tupper's," 1847). Even in the missionary schools, which were usually run by the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, and which usually focussed on reading and religion, tuition in extra subjects such as geography, Latin, or navigation could often be purchased by those who could afford it.

It is evident, then, that the benefits derived from a colonial schooling generally increased in proportion to one's wealth. An ability to pay high fees did not guarantee quality schooling, but the inability to pay often meant no schooling at all. The colonial government did, however, take some steps to increase accessibility. Land grants had been given to schoolmasters since 1749, and financial grants were first offered with the School Act of 1808. Yet, immediately prior to the Free school Act of 1864, only 40% of the province's children between the ages of 5 and 15 attended school on a regular basis. Furthermore, 43% of these school-age children could not read, while 58% of them could not write ("1861 Census,"

While instruction in the 3-R's was far from universal in mid-19th century Nova Scotia, there was at least a general consensus that such instruction was appropriate for all social classes. A similar consensus did not yet exist in regard to instruction in art. Drawing and painting were still generally perceived as leisure pastimes reserved for privileged classes and therefore appropriate for private schools only. This perception, however, gradually began to change in the second half of the century. In 1865 only 15 public school students in Nova Scotia were reported to be taking drawing, which was even fewer than the 22 students listed as taking cricket. By the following year, 3,734 students, about 5% of the public school population, took drawing, and that percentage increased to 10 within the next few years. It remained at about 10% until Nova Scotia implemented Walter Smith's industrial drawing program in the 1880's, which was eventually taught to 46% of the province's students (Annual Report, 1866-1887). This growth in public school art was partially brought about by changing notions of art's role in training and mollifying the working class. These notions helped establish social objectives for public school art which differed markedly from objectives for art programs in private schools.

Private School Art

While even a rudimentary education was out of reach of many working class Nova Scotians in the first half of the 19th century, a private school education for the more well-to-do was usually not without some instruction in so-called ornamental accomplishments and elegant recreations such as drawing, painting, decorative crafts, music, and dance. This was especially true for females aspiring to be cultured ladies. A typical private female school, such as the one opened in Halifax in 1830 by Mrs. Crosskill,
and Miss Sturmy, offered not only the 3-R's, but also drawing, fancy and plain needle work, and painting, including velvet painting ("Female School," 1830).

One of the better known private school drawing instructors was Maria Morris, who began teaching at her mother's Halifax school for young ladies and later opened a school of her own. An 1834 advertisement for the Morris School reveals 19th century attitudes towards "ornamental accomplishments" and "useful acquirements":

The Misses Morris beg leave to observe that their unremitting exertions shall be to counteract those tendencies in female education that too often enfeeble the judgement; and while their endeavors shall be directed to ensure proficiency in ornamental accomplishments, their utmost efforts will be studiously directed to the advancement of their pupils in solid information and useful acquirements; and in whatever can be considered valuable to the female character. (Drawing and Day School," 1833, p.285)

Morris probably used teaching methods practiced by her first art instructor, W.H. Jones. Originally from Boston, Jones conducted a Halifax art class for about forty pupils, mostly from the upper ranks of society (Piers, 1914). Like other Nova Scotian drawing masters, Jones apparently assigned works for his students to reproduce faithfully ("Exhibition of Pictures," 1830). In addition to using this copying method, Morris' own studio work would also have influenced her art teaching. Morris was a published botanical illustrator. This work required her to render directly from wild flowers, and she presumably would have taught her students to also draw and paint from closely observed nature.

In Morris' work a factual reproduction of the referent constituted the finished piece. Carter (1983) suggests that another Halifax art instructor, William H. Eagar, required his students to use their sketches from nature simply as studies. These would be brought back to the studio where they would provide the basis for a picturesque composition. In order for his students to acquire the graphic vocabulary associated with the picturesque, Eagar had them copy works of other painters along with examples of his own engravings.

Eagar taught adults, not children. Like Jones, his students usually came from the more fashionable sectors of society (Sparling, 1980). But teaching methods similar to those used by Eager and Jones would have filtered down into the private schools. Many other Nova Scotian drawing masters also taught their adult students with these methods. Some of these students who, like Morris, were instructors in private schools, would teach their own students in the same manner they themselves had been taught. A number of private school drawing programs could be expected to have emphasized drawing from nature and copying art works, with the main purpose being to produce pretty pictures. This was not to be the purpose of art in the public schools.

**Private School Versus Public School Art**

In contrast to private schools, there was no room for polite, artistic pursuits in government-funded and charity schools of the early 19th century. In these schools, only practical aspects of art and handwork were considered appropriate, and again there was social stratification. For example, some charity schools provided indigent youths with training in a potentially income producing craft. Students who were better off economically could pay a supplementary fee for instruction in
map drawing or geometric drawing, skills which could possibly lead to more lucrative careers than those available to their indigent classmates.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that education is the fine arts was not the exclusive domain of private schools, nor were the practical arts found only in common schools. For example, Efland (1985) cites William Bentley Fowle as being one of Boston's early proponents of practical, geometric drawing. Yet Fowle's drawing system appears to have been used in at least one Halifax private school for young ladies ("Boarding School," 1831). Conversely, the fine arts were being advocated for the province's common schools by prominent mid-century educators. The most consistent of these educators was Alexander Forrester, the first principal of Nova Scotia's Normal School and the province's second Superintendent of Education. Forrester (1867) believed that the common school program should include painting and drawing from nature, three dimensional construction, and art appreciation. Although this was similar to the content of private school art programs, the objectives were different. Whereas private school art was to prepare the privileged for participation in a refined, upper class milieu, Forrester's common school art was to prepare the masses for duteous participation in society.

Forrester promoted William Bartholomew's drawing books, which included exercises in representation—drawing as opposed to the geometric drawing found in other school texts. Bartholomew, a painter who taught drawing in the Boston Girl's High and Normal Schools, had his drawing texts distributed in a number of North American centres. According to Efland (1985), a principal reason why Bartholomew's non-geometric drawing was accepted in the public schools was that "Young women preparing to teach needed to be ladies of high moral character. Accomplishment in art and music was often taken as evidence that a high standard of moral refinement was met" (p.139).

It was also for moral reasons that Forrester, a Protestant minister, espoused the need for art and aesthetic education. But while Efland posits that such education was aimed mostly at women, Forrester (1867) wanted fine art taught to both sexes. Art, Forrester claimed, would induce the masses to rise above "the low, the degrading and groveling pursuits of the animal" (p.171) to seek a higher moral purpose. This would occur because in looking for the source of aesthetic beauty "we have only to trace the various steps in the process, until we can get no further, and then assign all to the omnipotent Creator" (p.172). Because of the purported role in inculcating morality, art and aesthetic education were needed for all social classes, not just those who could afford private schooling. Fine art, therefore, belonged in the common schools, where educators like Forrester hoped it would "exert a powerful tendency in elevating the whole refinement of the generation" (p.226).

The generation which Forrester wanted to refine was growing up in an increasingly industrialized era. Partially because of this industrialization, the moral objectives for art education began to be supplemented by economic ones. In Boston in the 1870's and Nova Scotia in the 1880's, Bartholomew's fine art program gave way to the industrial drawing of Walter Smith. In both places, members of the educational hierarchy advocated industrial drawing for its utility. As Smith told a Truro, Nova Scotia audience in 1882, his program of art education could play an important role in Canada's industrial development (Annual Report, 1882).

Despite this perceived role for industrial drawing, by the end of the
century public school art in both Boston and Nova Scotia had moved again toward the fine arts. Moral education was again a central objective of the general education agenda. This objective is especially evident in picture study materials for the younger grades, but it also appears throughout the curriculum. For example, New Brunswick Normal School students in the late 1880's were told that a reason for teaching about colours was that "they appeal to the children's [sic] sense of beauty e.g. they have a moral value in cultivating correct tastes" (Evans, ca. 1887-88, p.136). Similarly, history was to be taught through biographical sketches whose subjects were "selected with the special reference to bringing out prominently strong points of moral character. In this way the history lesson will serve as a means of giving moral instruction" (p.61).

Stankiewicz (1984) and Efland (1985) conclude that a reason for the swing from an economically rationalized industrial drawing program to a fine arts program with moral overtones was the large influx of women into the teaching ranks. When this influx did take place, it did not, however, change the male domination of educational management. This may explain why the supposedly male industrial drawing program was adopted in the 1870's and 1880's even though, as Efland notes, "women in increasing numbers [had already] entered the teaching profession" by the 1860's (p.133). It must also be remembered that male educators, many of whom, like Forrester, had strong religious affiliations, regarded public schools as agencies of moral transmission even before the influx of female teachers. Furthermore, there were other male influences of the late 19th century school fine art program, such as the romantic critics (Soucy & Webb, 1986, April; Stankiewicz, 1984) and art education entrepreneurs such as Louis Prang (Korzenik, 1985). These facts suggest that the feminization of education can provide only a partial explanation of how private school art infiltrated the public schools.

**Conclusion**

Events in 19th century Nova Scotia support many of the interpretations drawn by Efland concerning art education in Boston. A desire for upward social mobility was a principal reason for fine arts in the private schools. It was especially important for females to acquire skills in polite, cultural pursuits. In the common schools, however, the introduction of art was only justifiable if it could be seen as serving the needs of all social classes. Thus, fine arts appeared first in the private schools, where students copied works of more accomplished artists and learned to sketch from nature. In contrast, only practical and applied arts were allowed in government-funded schools prior to the mid-century. When the entry of fine arts did occur in the common schools, it was not to elevate the social status of working class students. Rather, one of its main objectives was to inculcate them with Christian morality. Increased feminization of the teaching profession also helps to explain the growth of fine arts in the public schools, but other influential factors still need to be explored.

These distinctions between public and private school art are, of course, generalized. Nevertheless, they do make it clear that Efland (1985) was correct in calling for an examination of the ways in which gender and social class "have played a role in influencing how art was taught and for which reasons" (p. 140). Perhaps such historical examinations may even provide insights into the social class contexts of today's art education. Indeed, history, which provides the luxury of hindsight and emotional distance from an event, may for some educators
reveal the class nature of curriculum
more easily that would a study of
contemporary contexts.

References

Annual report if the Superintendent of Education in the common academic, Normal
and Model Schools of Nova Scotia [for the years ending 1865 to 1886

Boarding school and day school. (1831, November 24). The Novascotian, 4 (68),
380.

Eagar (1796-1839) [exhibition catalogue]. Halifax: Saint Mary's
University Gallery.

Drawing and day school, the Misses Morris. (1834, September 8). The
Novascotian, 7 (36), 285.

Studies in Art Education, 26 (3), 133-140.

Unpublished. (in possession of Donald Soucy)

Exhibitions of pictures. (1830, February 10). The Novascotian, 3 (6), 47.

Female school, Mrs. Crosskill and Miss Sturmy. (1830, March 31). The
Novascotian, 3, (13), 104.


England.

Miss Tupper's Establishment for Young Ladies. (1847, April 8). Yarmouth
Herald and Western Advertiser, p.4.

Padfield's Seminary for Young Ladies [Prospectus]. (1875). (Available at
Yarmouth County Historical Museum and Research Library)

Historical Society, 18, 138-140.

education in Nova Scotia. Paper presented at the National Art Education
Association annual convention, New Orleans, LA.

1749-1848 [exhibition catalogue]. Halifax: Art Gallery Mount Saint
Vincent University.


Donald Soucy is on the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick,
New Brunswick, Nova Scotia.