



The Sutton-Smith Award 2011

Margaret MacDonald

Margaret MacDonald, University of Canterbury, is the recipient of the 2011 Sutton-Smith Award for excellence in a doctoral thesis in education. Margaret's thesis is titled *Elwyn Richardson and the Early World of Art Education in New Zealand*.

Margaret's work provides a detailed and rich account of the philosophy and practice of Elwyn Richardson, an innovative and masterful New Zealand educator whose work has won international notice and acclaim. Her thesis places him against the background of reforms and innovations in New Zealand art education policy and its implementation. The study combines historical and biographical research methods with ethnographic techniques to present a richly textured and deeply felt, multi-levelled portrait of a teacher, a schools system, and an educational movement and a school at a pivotal moment in the history of teaching and learning.

The historical and educational contexts surrounding the emergence, nature and shape of art education policies and practices in New Zealand, Margaret observes, highlight the complex (often personal) interrelationships and conflicts between art advisors, specialists, teachers, school inspectors, educational officials and the then Department of Education.

The thesis exemplifies the work of a scholarly imagination that subtly weaves together an account which operates on the levels of the historical and the biographical. This result is achieved by integrating an analysis of the early and continuing professional life of Richardson with an explanation of the national development of thinking, policy and practice in art education. A further contribution of the work is the use and description of a letter-writing methodology, which makes a valued and original addition to the body of international accounts of various qualitative research approaches.

Before Dr MacDonald's research the story of art education in New Zealand during the twentieth century had only be told in a fragmentary fashion. The thesis repairs these weaknesses in a way that engages the reader from the beginning and offers new interpretations of our country's art education.

One of her examiners, UNESCO Chair in Arts and Learning, Professor Larry O'Farrell, writes: "It rates as a superior study and one that will undoubtedly earn a place in the literature for the cogent insights it offers and for its value as a model of historical/biographical research in arts education. I feel quite sure that this will come to be regarded as an authoritative, even definitive, study of Richardson and his work in the context of progressive education experiments in New Zealand in the mid-twentieth century."