

‘An Antidote to Bookishness’

LOCAL HISTORY, EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES AND COLONIALISM IN NEW ZEALAND PRIMARY SCHOOLS, 1900–1940



IN 1938 the New Zealand Education Department gave notice to its teachers of a ‘Centennial Competition’ to be held in 1940 to judge the best ‘regional surveys’ submitted from primary, native, secondary and technical schools around the country. By the time the competition closed, 70 schools’ entries had been received. Afterwards, W.B. Harris, a lecturer at the Christchurch Teachers’ Training College, and H.C.D. Somerset, an expert in rural education and the author of the celebrated *Littledene*, a study of a New Zealand rural community, reflected upon some of the competition’s results. In some areas of the country, they reported, the competition had prompted participating schools to document the local histories of their districts for the first time. The pupils of the Kairakau Primary School in the Chatham Islands, for instance, had collected stories about the Moriori, Māori and Pākehā habitation of their islands, circulating them among the local community for verification. Kairakau School, Harris and Somerset wrote, was ‘the centre of a community which had suddenly become history-conscious’.¹

While the 1940 Centennial formed the immediate impetus for the pupils of Kairakau and other schools to research their local history — and prompted considerable official and public effort towards putting New Zealand’s past on permanent record — the undertaking of local history research by primary school children had educational precedents. Situating the history-making efforts of the schools who contributed work to the Centennial Competition alongside earlier educational initiatives to promote local history research by primary school children highlights the significance of the local within the pedagogy of the early twentieth-century New Education movement. History was a component of a school system that was both imperial and national in orientation, and the national primary curriculum and textbooks performed many functions that can be seen as legitimising colonial authority. However, local histories produced by schools, this article contends, also need to be understood in the context of a set of imported pedagogical theories and educational practices that had less to do with a colonial context than with the aim of developing particular qualities and capacities in children through the medium of locally based lessons.

Recently several historians have attempted to shift the context of the historical debate over the connections between knowledge and colonialism in New Zealand from one almost exclusively devoted to examining the ‘textual outputs’ of colonial knowledge. Instead, they argue scholars need to recognise the importance of the institutional foundations of intellectual life in the shaping of colonial knowledge, and of the sets of processes and practices

that governed knowledge's production and reception.² In this piece, I extend this critique to the domain of education, specifically history education. New Zealand historians have long been attentive to the potential power of schooling — particularly the compulsory state primary school system — in the work of cultural transmission, such as in instilling imperial ideologies.³ However, despite several decades of scholarly interest in the role of knowledge in furthering colonialism that followed Peter Gibbons's influential theorisation of 'cultural colonization', this avenue of investigation has yet to be taken up by historians of education in this country, although Gibbons himself signalled the possibilities for further research in this area.⁴ While a body of scholarly writing engaging with Gibbons's work has appeared over the past few decades, critiques of the approach taken by Gibbons and historians influenced by his ideas have also begun to surface. Chris Hilliard first pointed to some of the limitations of the cultural colonisation approach in 2002, arguing that 'while hardly anything in New Zealand is unconnected with colonization, not everything is adequately *explained* by its colonial entanglements'.⁵ In two recent articles, Tony Ballantyne has criticised the tendency of historians of colonialism in New Zealand to concentrate on the products of the textual exchanges of a small national intellectual elite, while ignoring the vast amount of everyday interactions and knowledge practices that went on 'under' the nation, centred on 'specific practices, institutions and sites'.⁶ This article examines how a nationally controlled state school system deriving its institutional frameworks and practices from British patterns interacted with a set of imported pedagogical theories which prioritised local knowledge, and were then translated into local-level teaching practices in primary schools.

A 'top-down' and textually focused approach similar to that criticised by Ballantyne in relation to histories of colonialism has also characterised histories of history in New Zealand education. There has been an overwhelming focus on educational *content*, usually in the form of nationally produced textbooks and curriculum topics, to the exclusion of pedagogy and educational *practice*.⁷ In general, while textbooks loom large in the historiography of history education, historians of education have failed to interrogate the limitations of textbooks as sources of information on what history education was 'like' in the past: by asking, for instance, how textbooks might have actually been used in classrooms, what their intended pedagogical outcomes were, and what other strategies teachers might have employed — alongside or instead of textbooks — to convey historical content or skills to their pupils. The observations of Peter Taylor and Julian Thomas in relation to the historiography of history education in Australia also apply to New Zealand. Taylor and Thomas contend that Australian studies of history education have been preoccupied with identifying the political ideologies contained in history lessons — often condemning such lessons as 'unnecessarily or falsely' ideological — while 'ignoring the ways in which the actual teaching of a course of study over time might have been less about producing political ideas or passing on a discrete quota of historical knowledge than about producing "kinds of persons" with particular skills and capacities'.⁸ In this spirit I aim to return history textbooks to their proper place in early twentieth-century classrooms by considering their rise and fall relative

to other methodologies for transferring historical knowledge and capacities to school children.

In 1904 a new primary school syllabus co-authored by George Hogben, the head of the Department of Education, and William W. Bird, an inspector of native schools, heralded a shift in the prescriptions for history from a subject based around memory and the acquisition and retention of select historical facts to one based on the reading of textbooks, supplemented by questioning of the class by the teacher.⁹ The 1891 syllabus for 'English history' had required inspectors to test each pupil individually on 'a list of about twenty-five persons and events and about a dozen dates', to ascertain that they had been 'thoroughly impressed' on children's memories.¹⁰ The new syllabus moved away from this memory-based approach by specifying that history be treated as a reading subject only, to be taught using historical readers chosen from a designated list of texts approved by the department. This was in line with similar turn-of-the-century changes to history syllabi introduced in several Australian states by reform-minded Directors of Education, and represented the first significant attempt to incorporate the ideas of the 'New Education' pedagogy into a New Zealand primary school syllabus.

Late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century New Zealand educationists participated in an international traffic in ideas about educational reform. Emanating from North America and Europe, the ideas were known as the 'New Education' or 'progressive education'. School inspectors writing after the publication of the 1904 syllabus detected the 'spirit' of the English philosopher Herbert Spencer's 1861 book *Education* in the new regulations, as well as the influence of James Currie, the Scottish author of a nineteenth-century teaching manual.¹¹ Another inspector described the new syllabus as a 'compound of Herbartian psychology and American utilitarianism', referring in the first instance to the German psychologist Johann Herbart.¹² When Hogben introduced his new syllabus to a 1904 conference of inspectors he cited Friedrich Froebel, a German educational theorist and the founder of the kindergarten movement, as an influence.¹³ The New Education contained a number of distinct threads, making it difficult to summarise as a coherent movement. Its common features included an increased focus on child development, and an attempt to incorporate scientific and psychological principles into pedagogical theory and practice. In terms of method, advocates of the New Education stressed the importance of practical, activity-based and experiential approaches to learning. The New Education was also associated with an increased focus on 'character' development and education as a preparation for democratic citizenship, and with the introduction to the syllabus of new curriculum subjects such as nature study, elementary science, agriculture, manual and domestic training, handicraft, physical education and civics.¹⁴

During the same period the New Zealand education system underwent important institutional changes. One of the most significant of these was the introduction of professional training for new teachers.¹⁵ This is an essential point: teachers who entered the service from the early years of the twentieth century were systematically exposed to 'modern' educational thought in a way that their predecessors — trained under older apprenticeship-style

arrangements — were not, although the extent to which teachers translated new theories into educational practice should not be exaggerated.¹⁶ The role of school inspectors also changed in the early twentieth century: instead of being tasked with carrying out individual examinations of pupils as had been the case in the nineteenth century, inspectors were now expected to take on an advisory role, observing teachers at work and investigating the 'character of the teaching'.¹⁷ Another important reform to the inspectorate involved the transfer of responsibility for inspectors from the Education Boards to the Department of Education, under the Education Act 1914.¹⁸ A new group of university-educated professionals — senior teachers, training college lecturers, school inspectors and Education Department officials — played a central role in communicating the latest educational theories derived from Europe and the United States to the New Zealand teaching force at large, through training colleges, school visits, lecture tours and professional teachers' journals.¹⁹ The first decade of the twentieth century also saw the Department of Education's first successful venture in the production of national textbooks, with the establishment of the *New Zealand School Journal* in 1907. The department remained closely involved in both producing and commissioning textbooks destined for use in its national network of primary schools for much of the twentieth century.²⁰

The reform of history from a subject based on memorisation to a reading subject was greeted positively by most school inspectors, and had been anticipated in some of their reports in the years leading up to the introduction of the new syllabus. In 1901 Wellington inspectors commented: 'It is now generally admitted that the intelligent use of a historical reader is satisfactory for primary instruction in the subject, and that the old-time memory work is valueless.'²¹ In his 1902 report, William Fetch, the inspector of schools for Grey district, observed: 'In most of our schools history is taught according to the syllabus — so many dates and so many events. I do not place much value on it except as a memory exercise, and much prefer treating it by reading-lessons from some Historical Reader.'²² Nevertheless, over the next four decades, the appropriate role of textbooks in history lessons would become a topic of lively debate among inspectors and teachers. Even education officials sometimes expressed ambivalence about the effect the textbooks produced by their department had on the quality of classroom teaching. At the same time as it announced its issue of a new series of history textbooks, *Our Nation's Story*, to accompany a new syllabus issued in 1928, the Department of Education cautioned teachers against 'slavishly following the text-book, which is intended to be the teacher's servant not his master'.²³ The growing prominence of textbooks in primary school history curricula was contested, and a significant current of opposition came from those educationists who believed that children learnt best through lessons drawn from their immediate surroundings.

Professional educationists objected to textbooks, or teachers' use of them, on a number of grounds, and these can be detected in the reports of school inspectors.²⁴ A common criticism of teachers' textbook use was by inspectors who linked teachers' over-reliance on textbooks to a decline in the historical knowledge retained by pupils. North Canterbury inspectors, writing in 1910, reported that pupils' knowledge of history had fallen in their district, a fact that

they attributed partly to teachers' 'undue reliance' on textbooks: 'Prior to the introduction of the Historical Reader and when definite courses in history were demanded, the amount of accurate knowledge and thoughtful appreciation of the story of British history possessed by the pupils was considerably greater than that which now obtains.'²⁵ Looking back on the 1904 reforms 20 years on, Auckland inspectors wrote that, while the reform of the previous memory-based method of history teaching had been necessary, it had nevertheless resulted in a decline in pupils' knowledge of the subject: 'To-day there appears to be a tendency to swing too far in the other direction. Pupils are asked to trace movements and seek causes and effects without knowing the outstanding events. Memorization to the exclusion of everything else has in many schools given place to no memorization at all, with the result that scholars have but the haziest notions of the subject.'²⁶

For other inspectors, textbooks limited the effectiveness of history lessons by forming a barrier between teachers and their classes, interfering with teachers' ability to carry their own personality, historical interests and 'passion' for the subject over into their classroom practice. The poor results obtained in history in the Wanganui district in 1909 could, its inspectors observed, mainly be attributed to the fact that 'the reading-book cramps the intelligent teacher, and deters him from throwing his own personality into the lesson'.²⁷ Twenty years later former teacher and training college lecturer Fanny Irvine-Smith urged 'young teachers' to 'realise that the complete history lesson is never to be found entirely within the covers of a text book. The text book should be regarded merely as a summary which can be read by the pupils themselves, while from his own store of knowledge the teacher must supply those added details which make history live.'²⁸ For other educationists, it was not teachers' textbook use *per se* but the inappropriate nature of the texts in circulation that prevented pupils from engaging with the subject. In the writings of some teachers and inspectors, the aim of inspiring a 'love of history' in pupils of primary school age seemed almost antithetical to the goal of imparting historical information. If teachers were to have any hope of inspiring a 'love of history' in their primary school pupils, one teacher correspondent to *National Education* warned in 1931, they should steer clear of any textbooks that were 'didactic, expository, and instructive'.²⁹ Adherents of this approach tended to stress the importance of history lessons that drew pupils' attention to the 'story' and 'romance' of history, and left the acquisition of more systematic knowledge of the subject either to the higher classes of primary schools or to the secondary schools.

Inspiring a passion for history in students was a recurring theme in inspectors' reports and in information supplied to teachers by the Education Department. New departmental guidelines for history, issued in 1926, declared that 'If the subject is made so attractive that the pupil is constantly asking himself "What comes next?" and if, when his school days are over, he continues to read and study history, the teacher has achieved his purpose',³⁰ while the Canterbury inspectors wrote in 1929 that 'One of the most important aims in the teaching of history should be to create in pupils a love for the subject, so that when they leave school they may read it for themselves'.³¹ A desire to inspire a love of

history in students might seem self-evident. Educationists interested in history education were well aware of the subject's reputation among students as one of the most 'dull' on the curriculum. But the wish of educationists to inspire a love of history in their pupils, aside from enhancing the effectiveness of history lessons, also spoke to an anxiety about the problem of leisure in modern life, a common preoccupation in the educational literature of the early-to-mid twentieth century. One teacher, I.M. Kirk, wrote that if teachers succeeded in making history 'live and real to the child', then the 'foundations of a useful hobby will have been laid. The problem as set out by prominent educationists of the day — the profitable spending of the leisure hour — will have been solved for your children.'³² For these educationists, creating future citizens with a capacity to use their more ample opportunities for leisure rationally was just as important as, if not more important than, imparting a discrete quota of historical knowledge to children.

Finally, the place of history textbooks in the educational programmes of primary schools should also be understood in the context of a pedagogy which emphasised child activity and experience over knowledge obtained from books. Twentieth-century advocates of the New Education frequently accused their educational forebears of having dwelt too much upon abstract ideas and book learning, both of which they felt interfered with young pupils gaining a 'real' understanding of the world around them. Writing in 1905, Wanganui inspectors claimed that the teacher's aim should be to 'interpret' to the pupil 'the phenomena he meets with daily in his contact with nature'. 'The facts and processes he memorises', they added, 'must be those he has discovered and seen for himself, not merely those stated in text-books'.³³ Young children, these educationists argued, would be naturally more interested in and able to comprehend matters of an abstract or remote nature if teachers related all new concepts back to ideas that their pupils had already mastered. In designing schemes for young children, teachers were told to draw upon their pupils' existing interests and knowledge of the world. As for most children these were primarily 'local' — based around their immediate circles of home, family, school and community — educationists argued that young pupils' lessons should be drawn as much as possible from the children's surroundings. Lessons which proceeded from the local also conformed to what early- and mid-twentieth-century educationists regarded as the most 'natural' sequence of instruction. 'A lesson should not violate the following principles', wrote Taranaki inspectors in 1901: 'Teach from the simple to the complex, from the particular to the general, from the concrete to the abstract ... from the near to the remote, and generally from the known to the unknown.'³⁴

Educationists diagnosed a range of deficits in pupils that might flow from a lack of local referents in educational work. The preface to one of the earliest series of textbooks to be published in New Zealand, *The Southern Cross Readers* (c.1890), claimed that a lack of local knowledge formed an educational handicap for New Zealand school children, as many 'thoughtful friends of education' had observed that New Zealand children had weaker powers of observation than the children of 'older' lands in which local knowledge was more firmly embedded in the culture. 'This defect', they pronounced, 'seems

to be largely due to the fact that the reading books in current use deal with a world to which the young in our land are strangers.³⁵ And, Otago inspectors argued in 1902, a lack of local material in history and geography might hinder the development of ‘imagination’ in New Zealand children, as children could not form a picture of the world ‘brought before them through the medium of another’s mind’, unless they had first mastered their own environs: ‘The samples of nature and experience that lie beyond their own horizon are very like those that lie within it; but unless they know their own well they cannot imagine those of the rest of the world.’³⁶ ‘A child should know and understand his surroundings’, agreed Wellington inspectors in 1928: ‘as such knowledge is the only real foundation on which, by comparison, he can build a correct conception of the world beyond his experience.’³⁷ Still, teachers’ failure to incorporate sufficient local knowledge into their schemes was not an exclusively colonial shortcoming. As Taranaki inspectors pointed out in their 1900 report, educational authorities in England complained of the same defect in their schools, ‘referred to by Inspectors in the Home-country under the head of “absence of local colouring”’.³⁸

Some educationists also saw locally based lessons as a way of developing and deepening children’s emotional attachments and loyalties to their local community — and to their nation and empire. J. Ironside, president of the Otago branch of the New Zealand Educational Institute, told the branch’s 1922 winter conference that he was glad that local history was receiving more attention from educational authorities, because ‘the boy that is soon to take an active and affectionate interest in his town or his district will surely have that interest deepened and quickened if he knows something of its past’.³⁹ Educationists who favoured what they termed ‘sane’ forms of patriotic education argued that local history lessons would help to strengthen the child’s ‘innate’ love for his or her own home, family and town, which, in turn, could be transformed into broader and more abstract attachments to nation and empire. T.B. Strong, the Assistant Director of Education, told readers of the 1926 *Education Gazette* that it was easy to inculcate patriotism in young children through the study of the past, as ‘children respond very readily to the comparatively elementary sentiment of love for and pride in their own school and their own town. The study of history serves to deepen this sentiment and change it into love of country.’⁴⁰

In 1928 the Department of Education, with Strong as its director, issued a new primary school syllabus which contained the most significant exposition on the theme of the local in a New Zealand syllabus to that date. The influence of the New Education’s emphasis on realism and experience was evident. Speaking to an audience of teachers in 1929, Strong vowed that the new syllabus had ‘cut out everything that had no counterpart in real life’.⁴¹ This syllabus was the first to include local history as a distinct topic within its history prescriptions, and a large component of the expanded course in ‘New Zealand history’ for pupils from Standard III upwards was, in fact, local history.⁴² In the teaching suggestions accompanying it, primary school teachers and pupils were directed to become local historians, and local history projects were endorsed. ‘Every New Zealand child should know something of the history of his own town, district, and province, thus enriching his store of stirring detail, and adding

reality to the whole study of history', the syllabus stated. 'Most parts of the country are rich in historical incidents, and these both the teacher and the pupil should take a pride in seeking out and recording.'⁴³

The addition of local history research to the primary school syllabus had been anticipated by the subject's inclusion in the programmes of some training colleges. During 1926, trainee teachers at the Auckland training college specialised in local history projects. 'Much admirable work was done in collecting and putting into readable form the early history of various parts of the Auckland province with which the students are familiar or acquainted', the principal of the college reported.⁴⁴ By 1934, similar research projects had been incorporated into the requirements for some advanced levels of teachers' qualification. Candidates for a 'C' level teachers' certificate in that year were required to submit a thesis on 'the history of some locality in New Zealand', incorporating 'new historical matter ... not previously published'.⁴⁵ Of course, educationists who wrote in support of including local history in the teaching programmes of New Zealand primary schools also credited such research projects with a range of educational benefits unrelated to their specific historical content. References to 'project work', classroom activities in which the pupils themselves researched a particular topic and then presented their findings, first entered the New Zealand educational literature in the 1920s, from the United States.⁴⁶ Educationists who wrote in favour of project work credited it with developing pupils' capacities for independent study, strengthening their powers of reasoning and enhancing their skills in artistic, oral and written presentation. In such projects, textbooks became simply one of a range of possible resources that students might draw upon in the course of their own self-directed research. Another approach to local research, the 'regional survey', attracted the attention of New Zealand educationists during the 1930s. Regional surveys were projects based on descriptions of the local environment, encompassing a district's past, present and possible future.⁴⁷ 'A regional survey', W.B. Harris declared, in an article aimed at teachers of classes preparing entries for the 1940 Centennial Competition, 'is a record of direct observation of the local district: it is an antidote to bookishness.'⁴⁸

We can gain some sense of what local histories produced by school children might have been like from teachers' professional journals. From the late 1920s and through the 1930s, *National Education* published weekly subject guides and detailed lesson plans for teachers. These were written by senior teachers or training college lecturers, and were intended for new teachers. The authors of *National Education*'s classroom guides provided teachers with a range of practical suggestions on how to source information on the history of their local areas and interpret it to children. One way of sourcing information about a district's past was to search out oral testimonies. Irvine-Smith suggested that pupils use older people as sources: 'Ask your grandparents or somebody else's grandparents to tell you something about the early days of the district in which your school is situated, and then re-tell it to your classmates.'⁴⁹ In 1935, A.J. Graham, a teacher at Wellington's Te Aro School, advised teachers of Standard IV classes that: 'In most places, particularly in the country, it is quite easy to discover who were the first white settlers, and to discover many incidents

connected with the early history of the district. Parents and other settlers are usually perfectly willing to talk upon this topic.⁵⁰ Māori history was sometimes included in such schemes. A 1934 column by senior teacher Leonard F. de Berry suggested that pupils studying ‘the coming of the Maori fleet’ might ‘try to discover if there are any Maoris living near your school who can trace descent from those who came by the great canoes’.⁵¹ The *Education Gazette* reported the efforts of a number of primary school teachers whose classes had completed local histories based on interviews with elderly people. Pupils in Nelson had been studying the ‘development’ of their valley by ‘talking to all the old people of our acquaintance, searching for old photos and articles of interest’. ‘We want to make a book about it!’, their teacher exclaimed.⁵²

Another strategy frequently recommended to teachers hoping to include local history in teaching programmes was a trip to a nearby site of historical interest. The notion of the class trip had been popularised in the early twentieth century as a way of bringing children into closer touch with nature and the school surroundings.⁵³ What teachers might have considered to be a site of historical interest was very much up to individual interpretation, and in planning such local history schemes teachers might have been confronted with the popular attitude that New Zealand ‘had no history’. ‘It is sometimes said that New Zealand suffers historically and culturally, when compared with the Homeland, because we have no historical buildings or places with historical or literary associations’, de Berry wrote. In rebuttal, de Berry suggested that in the vicinity of any school there was ‘abundant material’ upon which to base lessons in local history. Teachers needed to look no further than such ‘memorials’ (his term) to pioneer achievement as ‘the school itself’, ‘the church’, ‘the oldest shop’, ‘the road’ and ‘the oldest buildings’.⁵⁴ In another history column published in 1934, de Berry proposed that pupils in the upper classes of primary schools be put to work in making lists of ‘the oldest places in your town — the oldest shop — the oldest road — the oldest house’, and ‘the first people who came to your town ... where they came from and what they did’. Once teachers and their pupils learnt to interpret the signs of the past in their local landscape, almost any aspect of the built environment — even an ordinary road or bridge — might thus be ‘read’ by children as a memorial to the vision, labour and ideals of the ‘pioneers’ who had made their district’s history.

This growth of interest in local history was not a phenomenon isolated in educational circles. Fiona Hamilton described a late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century surge in interest among Pākehā in the foundations of European settlement, manifested in the formation of local early settler societies, publication of pioneer memoirs and commemoration of local jubilees.⁵⁵ Hilliard documented a similar public interest in preserving local history in the 1920s and 1930s, which shared ‘a commitment to collection, the accumulation of narratives and artefacts before their keepers died and their cultural possessions vanished with them’ with ethnological approaches to the Māori past in the same period.⁵⁶ Educationists evoked the same sense of disappearing knowledge, and they clearly regarded the salvaging of local pioneering memories by school children as tantamount to a patriotic duty. During 1927 inspectors found pupils in one part of Taranaki ‘intensely interested’ in local history: ‘They have in

many cases pieced together a story that would be well worth preserving for future generations.⁵⁷ In 1929, Auckland inspectors wrote that while projects in local history had been attempted in a few of the district's schools in the previous year — with one school having compiled a short history of the settlement of their district, complete with 'old-time photographs' — much history was still 'being lost to our country which might easily be put into valuable form by the children of our schools'.⁵⁸ De Berry suggested in a 1933 history guide that, in covering the Standard IV syllabus topic of 'the story of your own town and province', pupils should work with their parents and friends to write a history of their school or nearest town. 'There is no reason whatever why the schools should not write really good local histories. In fact, local sources could be drawn upon to give facts that unless caught and recorded now will soon be irrecoverably lost.'⁵⁹

The labour involved in recovering the traces of the rapidly disappearing past, whether by collecting oral testimonies or visiting local sites of historical interest, also gives a sense of the potential obstacles teachers might have encountered in seeking to fulfil the syllabus's ambitious prescriptions for local history. To succeed, such programmes ultimately rested upon teachers either possessing the requisite quota of historical knowledge themselves or being able to readily obtain such knowledge from other sources and then possessing the time, resources and enthusiasm to embark upon research projects with their classes. In connection to the former point, the inadequacy of many teachers' historical knowledge had been the subject of persistent criticism by inspectors from early in the century, and was still drawing regular comment in the 1920s. In 1920, for example, Canterbury inspectors reported that history was still poorly taught in many schools in their districts, an observation that they attributed to the fact that 'very many of the teachers have little knowledge of the subject beyond what is found in the school text-book'.⁶⁰ Teachers might have sought out published local histories on their areas, but in the case of districts like Kairakau, where pupils of the school were 'first' to put the details of their local area's past to paper, these were not always at hand. In 1939 the head teacher of the Otoko Pa Native School, near Wanganui, J.S. Isbister, summarised the difficulties associated with meeting the syllabus's local history prescriptions. He confessed that he had encountered great difficulty in teaching the syllabus topics 'Stories from Local History — Founding of the Town or District' and 'Tales of the Maoris; Local Maori Legends' because of a lack of local information. His attempts to encourage his pupils to gather information from their relatives had proved fruitless; textbooks were just as silent regarding the 'local happenings of the past'. 'The outlook was not bright for the history of 1938', Isbister wrote. 'What was I to do?'⁶¹ His solution was to arrange for a local kaumātua to tell stories to his class, recording them 'for the school records'. For other teachers the obstacles to achievement of the syllabus's prescriptions may have been insurmountable.

This brings us back to the place of nationally produced history textbooks in primary school classrooms. As I have said, while many early- to mid-twentieth-century educationists, including Department of Education officials, expressed discomfort with teachers' use of textbooks, the same period

also witnessed growing investment by the department in the production of textbooks for use in schools. The attitude of the department and its officials to textbooks was pragmatic: while admitting the desirability of teachers using textbooks sparingly and in conjunction with other teaching methods, officials also recognised that, aside from memorisation, most alternative approaches to teaching history relied upon a level of knowledge of history, and enthusiasm for the subject, that not all teachers possessed. In such classrooms, centrally produced resources such as the *School Journal* or *Our Nation's Story* were likely to be influential in determining what teachers — and therefore pupils — knew about historical subjects.

Local history, in its strictest sense, was not well catered for by publications intended for a national audience, and the local histories which appeared in textbooks were usually district or provincial histories. Nevertheless, the *School Journal* published several series of articles on the history of various localities in New Zealand, and *Our Nation's Story* included articles intended to supplement the local history component of the 1928 syllabus.⁶² Local histories in textbooks shared uniform features. They invariably slotted the history of the European settlement of the district whose past they recounted into progressive and national narratives — which not only told the story of past development, but also contained prophecies of a district's future progress. Even provinces which could not easily be described as more prosperous in the present than they had been in former times — most of New Zealand's gold-mining regions fell into this category — were moulded into progressive narratives through assurances that their 'golden time' awaited them in the near future. A 1922 *Journal* article on the history of Greymouth's port, while noting that the region was not currently prospering to the same degree as other New Zealand districts, assured its readers that the labour and planning invested by the district's 'pioneers' would surely soon bear a dividend: 'as the district becomes more closely settled and industries begin to make great strides forward, the port will still be needed, and the efforts and foresights of those pioneers who planned the harbour will not have been in vain.'⁶³ The chief protagonists in such local histories were the European pioneers, and the local and national governments who partnered them in their endeavours. By drawing attention to the personal characteristics of pioneers, the authors of such articles drew on the same Victorian belief in the value of history as a source of emulation as did de Berry's schemes based around 'memorials' of the pioneering past. In recounting the deeds of 'great men and women' of the past, textbook writers hoped that young readers might be inspired to follow the example set by their forebears. The pioneers, a 1911 article on the history of Dunedin told children, were individuals who 'would not be beaten', 'worked hard early and late' and 'cleared the way for those who came after, and who are not always so grateful as they might be'.⁶⁴ Local histories in textbooks typically paid little attention to Māori, except in relation to the 'savage' or 'unimproved' state of a district as it was when Europeans encountered it, or as impediments to settlement in areas where European settlement had encountered significant Māori resistance. Thus, local histories in textbooks performed colonising functions by their celebration of the achievements of European settlement and their failure to register that the

same processes they celebrated were also those which alienated Māori from their traditional lands. The strong impression conveyed by these histories was that, except for slight regional variations, the trajectory of European settlement in New Zealand had followed a uniform path of development.

Out of the 70 entries to the Education Department's Centennial Competition, only one could be located in the course of this research. *The Story of Hinakura*, written by the pupils of its primary school, documented the history of a small settlement in the Wairarapa district. One of the winning entries in its category, *Hinakura* was, after the competition, reproduced in booklet form by publishers A.H. and A.W. Reed. *Hinakura*, it appears, was compiled largely on the basis of oral testimonies. The booklet's foreword reveals the pupils' chief informant as 'A. Sutherland', who had provided its young authors with a 'long address about our district in the Maori times and when the first white settlers came'.⁶⁵ In devising a structure for their study, the pupils and teachers of Hinakura School most likely followed the guidelines for 'regional surveys' that Harris set down in one of his articles on the competition. These recommended that classes begin such projects with a description of the physical environment, then cover Māori history and Māori use of the land, before moving on to the 'white man, and the foundations of today's settlement'.⁶⁶ Accordingly, early chapters of *Hinakura* cover the Māori history of the district, and list a number of local sites of significance to Māori. There is little sense of an enduring Māori presence beyond the district's 'early days', and the remainder of the booklet is devoted to documenting the growth and main features of the European settlement. The third chapter of the work relates the story of the area's European settlers, centering on the family of the pupils' informant, Mr Sutherland, and some of the other notable families of settlers who lived in the school's vicinity in the 'early days'. The activities of these families are discussed in considerable detail, right down to the pecuniary details of property transactions. Later chapters contain descriptions of the natural environment (accompanied by a sense of lament at the settlers' destructive patterns of land use), the climate, primary industries and important buildings, concluding with a description of local pastimes: 'On Sundays the [farm workers] wash their clothes in the morning and do as they please in the afternoon. Most of them have a sleep in the afternoon, while two play golf The citizens of Hinakura always go into the Carterton show and another pastime is tennis, but that is played only by the farmers.'⁶⁷

Hinakura, although peopled with local identities and based around local sites, eventually conformed to a progressive narrative similar to those local histories found in textbooks — a fact which can probably be attributed to its adherence to Harris and Somerset's guidelines. It is difficult to draw broader conclusions on the character of these histories on the basis of one example, but Chris Healy's study of a collection of over 700 local histories produced by Australian school children for the occasion of Victoria's 1922 state jubilee of 'free, compulsory, and secular' education, provides a point of comparison. The local histories Healy analysed ranged from those which adhered very closely to the 'national, progressive, and modern' outlook of the curriculum and textbooks, to those which reflected different, more local, forms of historical orientation and memory. Some local histories in this latter group described

by Healy expressed a sense of decline and of a golden age existing in the past, and many evoked local rather than strictly chronological senses of time. These works also performed colonial functions in that they concentrated on the history of particular sites, and were concerned with the 'domination of space' and with demonstrating the continuity of European occupation. Rather than being suppressed by or clashing with the universal narratives of national history represented in textbooks and the official curriculum, such local histories, Healy argues, were able to be 'acknowledged and fashioned as components to be admitted into national history'.⁶⁸ Local and national forms of history were not incompatible: the two could and did co-exist. In the same way, the organisers of the 1940 Centennial Competition did not necessarily see their encouragement of local history research by school children as incompatible with their goal of promoting a national historical commemoration.

Despite the eventual convergence between *Hinakura* and the textbook histories, to conclude that the only function served by local histories was to convey colonial ideologies would be inadequate. As this article has shown, educationists advocated local history projects and other educational methodologies with a range of pedagogical objectives in mind, many of which had no direct relationship to the colonial context, and were instead related to the New Education's objectives of developing 'real' skills and knowledge, improving pupils' capacities for independent and creative thought, or a range of other concrete or less tangible educational goals. History in schools was never a simple transference of political ideas or allegiances, and this point applies as much in relation to colonial ideology as it does to national or imperial ideologies.

This article has highlighted the growing importance of state activity in the production of colonial knowledge in schools during the interwar period. That Ballantyne's work on intellectual life in colonial Gore ends in 1914 and therefore focuses on an earlier period than that under scrutiny here is probably significant in the relative weighting he accords to local knowledge and institutional practices as opposed to the influence of national institutions. The state primary school system comprised a set of institutions and knowledge practices which blended local and national endeavour, interests and governance. While schools undoubtedly remained important as local sites for knowledge exchange and community-formation, and locals maintained a say in their direction, by 1940 the role of the state in education was far more conspicuous. Developments such as the Department of Education's increasing monopoly over the production of textbooks and the shift of control of the inspectorate to the department meant that the reach of the national school system was far greater than it had been at the start of the century. Educational practices and local institutions are a vital part of this picture, yet the growing influence of the state over the production of knowledge is undeniable. The role of historians interested in questions of colonial knowledge and the state education system, I suggest, is not to elevate the local above the national, or vice versa, but rather to develop a conversation between the two.

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NOTES

1 W.B. Harris and H.C.D. Somerset, 'Regional Surveys. The Centennial Competition for Schools', *Education Gazette* (EG), June 1940, p.93.

2 Tony Ballantyne, 'Culture and Colonization: Revisiting the Place of Writing in Colonial New Zealand', *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, 9 (2010), p.10. See also Chris Hilliard, 'Colonial Culture and the Province of Cultural History', *New Zealand Journal of History* (NZJH), 36, 1 (2002), pp.82–97 and Tony Ballantyne, 'Thinking Local: Knowledge, Sociability and Community in Gore's Intellectual Life, 1875–1914', NZJH, 44, 2 (2010), pp.138–56.

3 See, for instance, Colin McGeorge, 'Race, Empire and the Maori in the New Zealand Primary School Curriculum 1880–1940', in J.A. Mangan, ed., *The Imperial Curriculum: Racial Images and Education in the British Colonial Experience*, London, 1993, pp.64–78; E.P. Malone, 'The New Zealand School Journal and the Imperial Ideology', NZJH, 7, 1 (1973), pp.12–27; Roger Openshaw, 'Imperialism, Patriotism and Kiwi Primary Schooling between the Wars', in J.A. Mangan, ed., *Benefits Bestowed? Education and British Imperialism*, Manchester, 1988, pp.113–31; Keith Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart: New Zealand's Search for National Identity*, Wellington, 1986. On secondary schools see Alison Derbyshire, 'Anyone's But Our Own: The Teaching of New Zealand History in New Zealand Secondary Schools, 1925–2000', MA thesis, The University of Auckland, 2004.

4 Gibbons outlined his 'cultural colonization' approach in a series of essays published between 1986 and 2002. See Peter Gibbons, 'A Note on Writing, Identity, and Colonisation in Aotearoa', *Sites*, 13 (Spring 1986), pp.32–38; 'Non-Fiction', in Terry Sturm, ed., *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, Auckland, 1991, pp.31–118; and 'Cultural Colonization and National Identity', NZJH, 36, 1 (2002), pp.5–17. For work which has engaged with Gibbons's 'cultural colonization' approach see Chris Hilliard, 'Island Stories: The Writing of New Zealand History 1920–1940', MA thesis, The University of Auckland, 1997; Chris Hilliard, 'Stories of Becoming: The Centennial Surveys and the Colonization of New Zealand', NZJH, 33, 1 (1999), pp.3–19; Giselle Byrnes, *Boundary Markers: Land Surveying and the Colonisation of New Zealand*, Wellington, 2001; Fiona Hamilton, 'Pioneering History: Negotiating Pakeha Collective Memory in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', NZJH, 36, 1 (2002), pp.66–81; Jacob Pollock, 'Cultural Colonization and Textual Biculturalism: James Belich and Michael King's General Histories of New Zealand', NZJH, 41, 2 (2007), pp.180–98; Kirstie Ross, *Going Bush: New Zealanders and Nature in the Twentieth Century*, Auckland, 2008; Rachel Patrick, 'Teaching the Storied Past: History in New Zealand Primary Schools 1900–1940', MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 2009; Giselle Byrnes, 'Introduction: Reframing New Zealand History', in Giselle Byrnes, ed., *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, South Melbourne, 2009, pp.1–18.

5 Hilliard, 'Colonial Culture', p.85.

6 Ballantyne, 'Thinking Local', p.138.

7 In addition to the titles cited in note 3, see also Colin McGeorge, 'Learning about God's Own Country', *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 18, 1 (1983), pp.3–12; Colin McGeorge, "'New Zealand" in New Zealand School Books before 1930', *History Now*, 10, 2 (2005), pp.4–10; Colin McGeorge, 'What was "Our Nation's Story"? New Zealand Primary School History Textbooks Between the Wars', *History of Education Review*, 28, 2 (1999), pp.46–59; Roger Openshaw, 'New Zealand State Primary Schools and the Growth of Internationalism and Anti-war Feeling, 1929–1934', *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society*, 9, 2 (1980), pp.1–14. Marcia Stenson's article on history in New Zealand schools between 1870 and the 1980s contains a limited discussion of pedagogy in primary school syllabi. See Marcia Stenson, 'History in New Zealand Schools', NZJH, 24, 2 (1990), pp.168–81.

8 Peter Taylor and Julian Thomas, 'History in a Moral Regime', paper presented at *Histories in Cultural Systems* conference, Australian National University, 1991, paraphrased in Chris Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory*, Cambridge, 1997, p.107.

9 Department of Education, 'Regulations for Inspection and Examination of Schools', *Supplement to the New Zealand Gazette*, 21 January 1904, p.296.

10 Department of Education, 'Inspection and Examination of Schools', *Supplement to the New Zealand Gazette*, 8 October 1891, p.1128.

11 Department of Education, 'Reports of Inspectors of Schools — South Canterbury', *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* (AJHR), 1904, E-1B, p.39. Spencer was a follower of the Swiss-born pedagogist Johann Pestalozzi. Spencer's 1861 book *Education*:

Intellectual, Moral and Physical argued for a ‘complete’ education, encompassing all the elements described in the book’s title, as well as a ‘scientific’ approach to learning, by which he meant a progression from the particular to the general. Currie’s manual *The Principles and Practices of Common School Education*, also published in 1861, stressed the importance of moral and character education through the establishment of ‘habits’.

12 Department of Education, ‘Education: Reports of Inspectors of Schools — Marlborough’, AJHR, 1905, E-1B, p.27. Herbartian educational psychology stressed the importance of ‘apperception’, linking all new ideas to a child’s existing knowledge and interests, and of ‘correlation’, the grouping of one or more curriculum subjects into a lesson on a single topic. It is not clear which specific theorists the inspectors were referring to in their remark on ‘American utilitarianism’. Early twentieth-century inspectors mention the work of a number of American educational writers in their reports, including the philosophers John Dewey, William T. Harris and Noah Porter.

13 G. Hogben, ‘Proceedings of Conference of Inspectors and Teachers’ Representatives, 1904’, AJHR, 1904, E-1C, p.2. Froebel emphasised the importance of the child’s self-activity and play in the educational process.

14 For a general overview of the New Education, see Clifford Turney, ‘Introduction’, in Clifford Turney, ed., *Pioneers of Australian Education*, Vol. 3, Sydney, 1983, p.1; and R.J.W. Selleck, *The New Education: The English Background, 1870–1914*, Melbourne, 1968. Selleck’s book, while dated, is still the most comprehensive overview of the New Education in the British context. Selleck argues that the movement became influential in English education after the release of the Cross Commission into elementary education in 1888. John Ewing dates its arrival in New Zealand to around the same time. John L. Ewing, *The Development of the New Zealand Primary School Curriculum, 1877–1970*, Wellington, 1970. For an account of Australian educationists’ reception of Dewey and other New Education theorists see Lesley Dunt, *Speaking Worlds: The Australian Educator and John Dewey, 1890–1940*, Melbourne, 1993. Peter Meadmore’s, ‘The Introduction of the “New Education” in Queensland, Australia’, *History of Education Quarterly*, 43, 1 (2003), pp.372–92 provides an account of the arrival of the New Education in one Australian state.

15 From 1905, to be eligible for certification new teachers were required to work for two years as pupil-teachers and study for two years at a training college. See Ewing, p.123.

16 For the first few decades of the twentieth century the teaching force was made up of a mixture of teachers trained under the old and new systems, and it is likely that at least some of the former group of older, more experienced teachers resisted official efforts to ‘update’ their teaching methods.

17 Department of Education, ‘Regulations for Inspection and Examination of Schools’, p.266.

18 Ewing, p.133.

19 The New Zealand Educational Institute commenced publication of its professional journal, the *New Zealand Journal of Education* (EG), in 1899. It was continued by *National Education* from 1919. The *New Zealand Education Gazette*, produced by the Department of Education for New Zealand primary and native school teachers, began publication in 1921.

20 The *New Zealand School Journal* was issued monthly, free of charge, to every pupil of a state primary, native or technical school, and to pupils of private schools at cost price. The *Journal* was written or compiled by officials employed by the Department of Education. An earlier New Zealand government venture into the publication of textbooks, the 1896 *New Zealand School Reader*, by William Pember Reeves, was a commercial failure, and only a limited number of copies were ever sold. Ewing, pp.68–70. *Our Nation’s Story*, a four-volume series of history readers commissioned (anonymously) by the Department of Education to match its 1928 syllabus, came into use in 1929 and was used in primary and native schools throughout the 1930s.

21 Department of Education, ‘Education: Reports of Inspectors of Schools — Wellington’, AJHR, 1901, E-1B, p.15.

22 Department of Education, ‘Reports of Inspectors of Schools — Grey’, AJHR, 1902, E-1B, p.31.

23 Department of Education, ‘New Books for Primary Schools’, EG, 1928, p.225.

24 Inspectors were required to report annually to the Minister of Education, but their reports were directed at teachers, and were circulated back to schools for teachers to read. Archives New Zealand holds a full run of the original inspectors’ returns for Nelson, and partial runs of the returns for Wellington, Auckland and Canterbury. For the remaining districts the original returns

are no longer extant. Extended extracts collated from senior inspectors' returns were published annually as part of the Reports of Education Boards in the AJHR. For reasons of consistency I cite the AJHR reports, except on a few occasions where a fuller version of the returns was available in EG.

25 Department of Education 'Reports of Education Boards — North Canterbury District', AJHR, 1910, E-2, Appendix A, p.139.

26 Department of Education, 'Reports of Inspectors of Schools — Auckland District', AJHR, 1924, E-2, Appendix C, p.vii.

27 Department of Education, 'Reports of Education Boards — Wanganui District', AJHR, 1910, E-2, Appendix A, p.105.

28 F. Irvine-Smith, 'History Teaching', *National Education* (NE), 1 June 1929, p.254.

29 'Old Timer', 'Old, Unhappy, Far Off Things: A Thesis on History', NE, 1 Feb 1931, p.2.

30 Department of Education, 'Suggestions for the Teaching of History', EG, March–April 1926, p.50.

31 Department of Education, 'Extracts from Inspectors' Reports: History', EG, October 1929, p.200.

32 I.M. Kirk, 'New Syllabus Problems: The Place of Expression in the History Scheme', NE, April 1929, p.140.

33 Department of Education, 'Education: Reports of Inspectors of Schools — Wanganui', AJHR, 1905, E-1B, pp.12–13.

34 Department of Education, 'Education: Reports of Inspectors of Schools — Taranaki', AJHR, 1901, E-1B, p.9. The phrase was taken verbatim from Spencer's *Education*. The educational maxim 'teach from the known to the unknown' was frequently invoked by educationists in this period.

35 *The Southern Cross Readers: The Third Standard Reader*, Christchurch, c 1890, p.ii, cited in McGeorge, 'Learning about God's Own Country', p.4.

36 Department of Education, 'Education: Reports of Inspectors of Schools — Otago', AJHR, 1902, E-1B, p.44.

37 Department of Education, 'Report of the Chief Inspector of Primary Schools', AJHR, 1929, E-2, Appendix A, pp.20–21.

38 Department of Education, 'Education: Reports of Inspectors of Schools — Taranaki', AJHR, 1901, E-1B, p.9.

39 J. Ironside, 'Training for Citizenship: An Interesting Address at Dunedin', NE, July 1922, p.214.

40 T.B. Strong, 'The Teaching of History', EG, July 1926, p.114.

41 Strong, 'The New Syllabus and Its Ideals', NE, 1 February 1929, p.9.

42 Department of Education, *Syllabus of Instruction for Public Schools*, Wellington, 1928, pp.31–35.

43 *ibid.*, p.30.

44 Department of Education, 'Extracts from Reports of Principals of Training Colleges: Auckland', AJHR, 1927, E-2, pp.53–54.

45 Department of Education, 'History (For Class C Certificate)', EG, May 1934, p.66.

46 The 'project method' was first outlined by William H. Kilpatrick, a professor at the Teachers' College, Columbia University, in an influential 1918 essay published in the *Teachers' College Record*.

47 The term 'regional survey' was derived from a British geographical movement of the same name, which made its way into British schools and youth organisations such as the Boy Scouts during the 1930s. See D. Matless, 'Regional Surveys and Local Knowledges: The Geographic Imagination in Britain, 1918–1939', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 17, 4 (1992), pp.464–80.

48 Harris, 'School Centennial Surveys,' EG, May 1939, p.91.

49 Irvine-Smith, 'The Teaching of History', NE, June 1932, p.256.

50 A.J. Graham, 'The Teaching of History', NE, March 1935, p.73.

51 L.F. de Berry, 'The Teaching of History', NE, March 1934, p.70.

52 E.B. Pay, 'February Freedom', NE, February 1940, p.11.

53 Selleck, p.128.

54 de Berry, 'The Teaching of History', NE, August 1933, p.351.

55 Hamilton, 'Pioneering History'.

- 56 Hilliard, 'Island Stories', p.21.
- 57 Department of Education, 'Report of the Chief Inspector of Primary Schools', AJHR, 1928, E-2, Appendix A, p.22.
- 58 Department of Education, 'Extracts from Inspector's Reports: History', EG, October 1929, p.200.
- 59 de Berry, 'The Teaching of History', NE, September 1933, p.403.
- 60 Department of Education, 'Abridged Reports of Inspectors of Schools — Canterbury', AJHR, 1920, E-2, Appendix B, p.xvi.
- 61 J.S. Isbister, 'Native Schools' Column: The Teacher's Part in Recording Local History', EG, November 1938, p.217.
- 62 Of course, not all of the history which appeared in nationally produced textbooks was New Zealand in content or origin. As a number of scholars have pointed out, local publications such as the *School Journal* and *Our Nation's Story* contained significant amounts of imperial content. Colin McGeorge has calculated the New Zealand content of *Our Nation's Story* as just under one-third of the total content of the four volumes. See McGeorge, "'What Was Our Nation's Story?'" , p.49. By my analysis, just over 22 per cent of civics and history articles published in the *School Journal* between 1907 and 1940 dealt with New Zealand topics. Apart from British and imperial content, world and European history also featured prominently in the pages of the *School Journal*.
- 63 Department of Education, 'New Zealand Rivers and their Ports: Greymouth', *New Zealand School Journal* (NZSJ), Part II, October 1922, p.144.
- 64 Department of Education, 'Dunedin, The City of the South', NZSJ, Part II, August 1911, pp.108–109.
- 65 Pupils of Hinakura School, *The Story of Hinakura*, Wellington, c.1940, p.3.
- 66 Harris, 'Centennial Competition for Schools', EG, April 1939, p.68.
- 67 Pupils of Hinakura School, *The Story of Hinakura*, pp.31–40.
- 68 Healy, pp.118–29.