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Submission on the New Zealand Draft Curriculum 2006
Concepts, Ideology and Implications

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humanistic, pedagogy and social-reconstructionist idealism. This juxtaposition of ideologies is most strikingly illustrated by the three phrases “knowledge-based economy” (which appears in the first line of the minister’s covering letter), Taha Wairua- (the spiritual component of Hauora or well-being), and “critical action” (challenging assumptions). “Hauora” and “critical action” appear on pages 16 and 17 respectively, as foot notes to the Health and Physical Education curriculum. While the rhetoric of this document urges economic realism, respect for the wellbeing and unique potential of every student and critical reflection on social processes, it is the economic agenda which remains firmly in control of the terrain on which teachers and students must operate.

This essay begins with an analysis of the draft document in terms of 6 curriculum concepts and 5 designs promulgated by current curriculum design theory. A discussion of the cultural, political and economic influences active in the curriculum’s three component ideologies then follows. Finally the draft curriculum is evaluated in terms of its implications for teachers and common criteria for judging curriculum design. I conclude that an urgent shift of emphasis is required, away from a purely subject based design toward one giving equal weight to the key competencies, by way of integrated studies and crucially, that this shift must be accompanied by a corresponding supportive evolution in secondary schools assessment for qualifications.

with its centre somewhere between the academic rationalist and cognitive processes conceptions in this continuum. In terms of design, it is a combination of the broad fields, subject centred and the National, core designs.

The technological conception has only a minor part in the NZCD. The paragraph within the *effective pedagogy* section under the heading *E-learning and pedagogy* promotes the individualised, pre-programmed learning and assessment typical of this conception. In line with the rapid evolution of this field, *E-learning* now also includes a strong emphasis on the long distance communications potential of computer technology.

The NZCD is dominated by the Academic rationalist conception with respect to all four elements of curriculum design; *purpose, content, approach* and *evaluation*. The design is based on eight *essential learning areas*, defined on p.12 of the document as “broad groupings of knowledge”. The eight learning areas (Arts, English, Health and Physical Education, Learning Languages, Mathematics and Statistics, Science, Social Sciences, and Technology) are the central organising principle for the curriculum. Each learning area is organised into eight horizontal developmental *levels* and a number (usually two to five) of vertical *strands*. Typically five or six achievement objectives are identified at each of the eight developmental levels per strand. This format, we are told on p.34, facilitates cross-curricular collaborative planning and assessment.

Considerable freedom seems to be given teachers to choose from a range of assessment methods at primary and middle school levels. On page 30 we read;

[Assessment] involves the focused and timely gathering, analysis, interpretation, and use of information that can provide evidence of student progress. Much of this evidence is “of the moment”. Evidence is obtained by using a range of informal and formal assessment approaches. (Ministry of Education, N.Z., 2006)

The focus of formal assessment at levels six to eight (years 11 to 13) is however qualifications which, for most students will be the National Certificate of Educational

Relationship of curriculum to social, economic, cultural and educational factors in the NZCD

The political terrain that the NZCD attempts to span includes three distinct ideologies; first, the government's strategic technical, economic agenda, which I term the "knowledge-based economy" (KBE); second, the humanist and Kaupapa Maori perspectives which I refer to as the Taha Wairua-Humanist ideology (TWH); third the social justice "critical action" (SCA) agenda of reform minded educationalists. Each ideology favours a particular conception of curriculum. Each ideology has strengths that compensate for the vulnerabilities of the other two.

The "knowledge-based economic" (KBE) ideology and academic rationalism

In the first sentence of his covering letter to the NZCD, Steve Mahary refers to "transformation of the NZ economy into a knowledge-based economy and society". Later in the first paragraph he states, "We need to build an education system for the twenty first century". *Knowledge-based society* appears also in the first paragraph of the page titled "A Vision", and *Twenty first century* again under the "Values" heading. The nation's economy is clearly a high priority and knowledge itself is being presented as a marketable commodity. A sense of considerable urgency is conveyed by the inference that we are not there yet. In a market driven world where fair minded cooperation cannot be assumed, pursuing a "knowledge based economy", makes excellent economic and strategic sense. Having a marketable trade, profession or product makes just as much practical sense for the individual.

The KBE ideology is strongly associated with the "academic rationalist" conception and subject-centred designs of curriculum, not because it necessarily has a materialistic or pragmatic bias, but because its subject based content, methods and values are those most

society if the central premise of their education is that each and everyone of them is at the centre of all teaching and learning” (Lee, G. et al, 1997).

Academic realists regard indoctrination as a danger of social reconstructionist oriented teaching which emphasises teaching children what to think and not how to think (Irwin 1996). Nash (1991) points out that if schools become sites for politically biased teaching, the left will not have the field to itself. For the KBE ideology not all differences in socio-economic status (SES) are the result of social injustices. Some, if not most of socio-economic variance may be attributed to a natural order related to real differences in individual predispositions, abilities and aspirations that cannot be legislated away. The proper exercise of power and authority is therefore a discipline, a vital service and a grave responsibility. The social reconstructionists tend to begin however, with the assumption that those in positions of power are necessarily self serving and corrupt. Furthermore, they do not offer plausible alternatives to democratic capitalism. Education that invokes critical action should be balanced therefore with a discussion of what constitutes legitimate power and the meaning of social justice. In this connection it is interesting to note that the word “discipline” appears in the NZCD nine times in reference to subject disciplines, but not once in connection with student behaviour management.

Both the TWH and the SCA ideologies, from the KBE - academic rationalist point of view, are soft on standards of academic achievement. They are seen as weakening students in their attempts to be self affirming and inclusive, by giving young people the impression that the world of economic reality sets no objective standards for knowledge and skills. Gramsci (cited in Nash, 1991) notes this problem when discussing how to encourage working class students to master the complex skills of intellectual labour. He says, “it will be necessary to resist the tendency to render easy that which cannot become easy without being distorted”.

1. Managing self
2. Relating to others
3. Participating and contributing
4. Thinking
5. Using language, symbols, and texts.

The key competencies are the secondary organising principle of the curriculum. They are conceived of as independent to and running across all eight learning areas (the primary organising principle). Although the alignment is not exact I suggest that *managing self* effectively corresponds to strong self-concept and spiritual well being. *Relating to others* refers to the affective domain and corresponds with social and emotional well being. *Participating and contributing* refers to the psycho-motor (and also social) domains and physical well being. *thinking* is clearly the cognitive domain and mental well being. *Using language, symbols, and texts* is a component of all three domains although most easily associated with *relating to others*.

The correspondence between the Maori concept of Hauora and the humanistic self concept with its three human facultative domains does not imply that Taha Maori and humanism are the same thing. Hauora for instance, expresses mental and emotional well being with one name, Taha hinengaro, whereas European humanism separates thinking quite definitely from emotion. Hauora also makes a separate category of Taha whānau whereas humanism tends to combine social with emotional well being. The two cultures differ markedly also in their view of legitimate authority and social power structures.

The distinctive identities of the humanist and Taha Maori traditions are most obvious when we examine their respective educational manifestations. The humanist conception of education is practiced within the alternative schools movement of which the Montessori and Rudolf Steiner schools particularly are well established examples. The Maori schooling

sense the concept of society can be expanded to include the whole biosphere and the most disadvantaged groups are then endangered wildlife species and our earthly environment itself.

While supporting the principle of individual well being the radical social reconstructionists regard the TWH ideology as being in danger of elitism and self defeating isolationism (Apple, 1981). The minority educational movements seem keen to ignore the serious failings of their wider social context and its pervasive negative impact on their student's individual and social well being.

The paradigm of *hegemony*, (according to Apple, 1981) refers to the relationship of coupling between the economic structure and the various superstructures of society (which includes schools) on which the economic system depends for its own reproduction. These two independent but interrelated spheres form what Gramsci (cited in Apple, 1981) referred as the 'structure-superstructure complex'

Our kind of economic system is driven by profit defined in monetary terms and not primarily by such considerations as job satisfaction or even customer satisfaction. To motivate employment and high worker performance efficiently the system requires a permanent level of unemployment of around 4 to 6 percent (Apple, 1979, p 35). Schools by virtue of their interdependence with the economic sphere, tend to reproduce the unemployment phenomenon in the form of scholastic underachievement, which like poverty, is not an aberration but a necessary outcome of the system. Schools largely determine also which individuals will rise and which sink by taking as natural the cultural rules and knowledge of the middle class (Pakeha middle class, in New Zealand), i.e. their cultural capital, and employing it in the classroom as if all children have equal access to it (p 32). Seen in this light, claims such as "all students are empowered to learn and achieve to the best of their abilities and to seek personal excellence regardless of their individual

ordained them to inherit their parents SES. By affirming manual work and physicality, the students affirm their own identities and class. Sadly at the same time by rejecting “mental labour” they help perpetuate the system they oppose (Apple, 1981 p.147). This resistance gives them some satisfaction in terms of self affirmation but changes nothing essential and only results in fatigue for both students and those that end up “managing” them.

The inescapable conclusion appears to be that the options of an individual or group seeking self determination within a larger social power structure are limited to futile resistance, ambitious progress on the power holders’ terms, or departure, foregoing both the benefits and costs of belonging. A fourth possibility is suggested by the social reconstructionist conception of curriculum, i.e. changing the system from within by way of a grass-roots campaign of critical action and awareness. SRC teachers have to accept however, the consequences that follow from encouraging students to challenge the very system on which their own teaching authority ultimately rests. Such teachers either need a great surplus of personal authority or the support of a whole school culture that is collectively seeking to reconstruct the larger socio-political environment. For the sake of real long term solutions they need also to assiduously avoid the convenience of indoctrination, encouraging students to base their arguments on evidence and their critical actions on an ethic of universal inclusion.

Imbalance of Power relationships among the three ideologies and curriculum

conceptions

In 1992 Maori education won the right to its own Maori language curriculum (Te Marautanga o Aotearoa,) which gives expression to Maori’s own preferred pedagogies, knowledge and information systems (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). This document is nevertheless based upon the exact same set of achievement objectives as the English language version and

Implications

Implications for Classroom teachers;

The increasing role played by Maori spiritual values in all NZ schools presents a crucial challenge to Pakeha New Zealander's complacency and discomfort about such matters. What really is it that we believe about the nature of human existence; do we even have an opinion? Can we find from our various religious, atheistic and agnostic backgrounds any sort of common ground? Are we just going to passively adopt the spirituality of the Maori tradition along with its customs and rituals? And what is it that we as a people value most? Is it true that the values outlined in the NZCD are,

those that the New Zealand community supports because they enable us to live together and thrive in a diverse, democratic society in the twenty-first century. (Ministry of Education, N.Z., 2006)

On what grounds does the Ministry make this assertion? These are issues with which I believe all NZ teachers should be urgently concerning themselves.

The NZCD vision attempts to weld the KBE and TWH ideologies by placing them together on one page under the heading of "A Vision". The role of the key competencies and individual potential is explicitly subordinated to the KBE ideology in the opening paragraph where it stated that, "It is by developing these competencies that [students] are equipped to participate fully in New Zealand society and contribute to the growth of its economy ... and to its successful transformation into a knowledge-based society."

The graphical layout that fills the rest of this page appears to give high priority to competencies and the TWH vision of what our young people will be. There is no hint of the SCA ideology in this vision and the young people pictured look extremely content with their lot and implied "even-more-of-the-same" future. Although it declares its economic bias to the

technological, economic, or political practices and consider alternatives that might prove more durable for the economy, for society, and for the environment), Citizenship, Enterprise and Globalisation.”

Integration initiatives have a long history in this country. Their value lies in their potential to reverse and ameliorate the damaging effects of content fragmentation. These initiatives have never become permanently established in the majority of NZ secondary schools because, first they not only challenged the role and purpose of schools but were also perceived as being critical of teachers themselves and [their] role definitions and second, because the separate subject hegemony in NZ is supported by exams and exams perpetuate the system McKinnon (1991).

The capacity for high stakes senior school assessment to lead curriculum and teaching practice across all levels of the secondary school is well documented, Shepard (1991, cited in NZ Ministry of Education, 2003a), Bush, W.S.,(1998), Black, P., (2001a & b). Whitehead (1974) in discussing the failure of the humanistic intentions of the Thomas report in New Zealand, in the years following its first publication in 1942 identifies three major factors one of which was the School certificate qualification which,

rapidly became ... the paramount concern of pupils and teachers alike. For the latter it was especially important because a good record of passes contributed greatly to a teacher's promotion prospects, both in terms of the classes he was assigned to teach and his long-term career prospects. (Whitehead, C., 1974)

The probability of success for curriculum innovations directed at integration across learning areas, would be greatly increased, if teachers were able to work with a rigorous secondary schools qualification that not only credited subject based standards but also standards that specifically reward a student's capacity to *integrate* subject knowledge. Many ways of creating such *integrated standards* might be explored. One possibility is to assess key competencies, not merely in a formative way within the limits of subject achievement

Conclusion

The NZCD contains its own self assessment criteria. In the section on *Designing a School Curriculum* we read; “careful planning results in a school curriculum that is connected, coherent, and balanced and that reflects the particular needs and interests of the school’s students and community.” Irwin (1996) adds that “to be durable a [curriculum] framework must be based on a sound philosophy of education including a wise purpose for schooling,” Biddulph et al., (2000) also stress coherence and ask “are all aspects consistent or are some (e.g. assessment) in conflict with others (e.g. goals)?”

The NZCD (2006) is an attractive and accessible document. It will serve very effectively as the shared focus that the minister wishes it to be, if cynicism about the humanistic and reconstructionist window dressing of the government’s economically driven agenda does not undermine the consultative process. The curriculum is certainly “connected” even if only tenuously at important points. It does have a degree of coherence but only within the expressions of each of its three component ideologies. Overall coherence is very weak and no unifying philosophy of education is evident, but that is still a big ask given the current breadth of education’s theoretical literature.

In my view this draft curriculum does not have the balance among its component ideologies that we need to “raise all levels of achievement” to anywhere near what they need to be. In my view, such balance will only be gained when the bottom line values of our society, conveyed to students through summative assessment, give equal weight to critical action for social justice based on evidence and inclusion, Hauora - well being based on relationship, a robust strategic “wisdom based economy” and the healthy integration of these three ideological currents through strong leadership.

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