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Lake Taupo Christian School
Kiddle Drive
Taupo

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Draft Curriculum Feedback
Ministry of Education
PO Box 1666
Thorndon
Wellington

Re: Submission on New Zealand Curriculum: Draft for Consultation

This submission is written on behalf of the Teachers and Principal of the Lake Taupo Christian School but was also formulated in consultation with Totara Christian College in Dannevirke. We have chosen to write this submission as we have a number of concerns relating to the draft document and feel that the feedback form provided is very directive and limiting.

We would like to deal with each section in turn.

Overview

The draft document states that it is to apply to all school students. As a similar statement was made in the last curriculum document, 1993, we expect that the same exceptions will apply for private schools and homeschoolers as are currently the case.

Vision, Principles and Values

In the Vision statement we found a number of positive features. It is admirable to aim for confident, connected, actively involved and lifelong learners, however we feel that there are some omissions in this area. Nowhere is "content" valued. While it is important to be confident, it is short sighted to be so while being uninformed and ignorant. If New Zealand continues down this path there is greater difficulty for students to participate in national and international issues when they do not have the breadth of knowledge to contribute logically. All people in New Zealand need to be able to contribute to global issues if they desire. If content is just for the realm of the expert it is easy to disregard the wishes of the majority because they are just uninformed or misinformed.

The use of the term creators of knowledge is vague and could be open to interpretation. It could mean creators of our own misconceptions. This we are opposed to and clarification is sort on this issue.

We also take issue with the "Connected" section of the Vision. The vision seems to be very self centred on this issue and deal with relationships from the learners point of view. We feel that this does not go far enough. There needs to be more on relating to, belonging, and being a valued member of a community. Schools are an important part of this as they provide a structured environment where students can belong to and participate in a supportive caring environment, however this should never be at the

expense of the learners primary relationship to their parents. We are very concerned that parents are not mentioned at all in the Vision, Principles and Values. Families are mentioned just once. We see this as an undermining of the families right, in fact need, to be involved in their sons or daughters education. It is well documented that support from the parents is one of the key motivational factors towards a student's success at school. The Ministry of Education needs to promote this relationship in its key document. While we recognise that the Community is talked about on a number of occasions (we take this to include parents, students, teachers and Board of Trustees) we do not feel that parents should be dealt with on the same level as the rest due, to their primary importance in the learning process.

We believe that "Spiritual Wellbeing" is a principle on which a learner's education needs to be based. This is important as it will affect the ability of a student to integrate moral and social values into their lives. As Christian School's we see the absolute necessity of this. Students without a strong sense of spiritual wellbeing do not grow up to be as well adjusted or responsible members of society.

Therefore we are concerned at attempts to undermine this well being. We do not believe that getting students to explore value systems and negotiate solutions is positive to their future success in society. In fact we see this as a disadvantage. We are sure that the Ministry of Education wants to promote workers who do not back down. This is part of the entrepreneurial drive. If obstacles arise we do not see that backing down is going to see the entrepreneurial projects succeed. Instead the Ministry needs to see values as foundations in a person's life that help them to overcome problems. Relativistic values undermine a strong sense of mental wellbeing. We do see that secular state schools will be at a disadvantage to counter this due to the relativism of thinking in New Zealand society today. But as Christian Schools we value this opportunity.

We were delighted to see that one of the values was diversity. We understand this to mean that the draft curriculum values differences of opinion and belief and that it promotes these in New Zealand society. As Christian Schools we see that we promote this diversity in New Zealand Society by providing another option for the parents to choose for the schooling of their child.

Key Competencies

Next we will deal in turn with each of the key competencies stated in the draft.

Managing Self

We recognise the value of this and the need for all the key competencies for good role modelling by parents, teachers and the wider community. We feel that this relates strongly to the values and believe that those who are able to manage self the best are those with a strong foundation. We believe that Christian values are the best foundation for this.

We felt that managing self needed to include the idea of not only setting goals but working to fulfil those goals. The setting of goals should include the idea of short, mid and long term goals and the students should be striving to achieve those goals.

We are concerned about those that do not fit into the draft curriculum model. While this curriculum addresses 98% of students, what about the other 2%, those with physical or intellectual disabilities. Is this document saying that they are not full members of New Zealand society?

Relating to Others

This key competency draws heavily on a person's identity and self worth. Once again the word negotiate is used in the discussion. While relating to others is about listening to others and caring for others, this does not necessarily mean negotiating to the lowest common denominator. We desire to see students communicating from a strong sense of self.

Participating and Contributing

While this has been the realm of the school in the past, we see a shift in this document to define participating and contributing outside the school boundaries. While there are positives in this we see a number of dangers. On the whole the school has been able to protect students from malicious outside influences. By getting students to participate on a far more global scale we need to be particularly careful to continue to protect the students from sinister influences. This is particularly the case in online communities. It is problematic to become a member who participates or contributes in these communities as this is the yardstick which the ministry has placed in the draft curriculum. There are more opportunities to participate when schools collaborate. The Ministry of Education must institute safeguards for these online communities if they are to consider them an important part of a students learning.

Thinking

The creating of knowledge has been discussed previously in this document. We would once again reiterate that students are, on the whole, discoverers of knowledge that was already there. Students need to be taught to discern the difference between truth and false knowledge. With the advent of the web there are clearly many falsities being presented. Part of learning is the need to learn strategies for telling the difference between right and wrong information. We reject the claim that all knowledge is good and just needs to be interpreted or understood in a relativistic fashion.

Thinking needs to take into account the different learning styles such as kinaesthetic, etc. Students need to have a better understanding of how they learn.

Using Language, Symbols and Texts

We assume this last key competency is what we have been doing in Schools for many years. That is teaching students to understand and use language and information.

Learning Areas

We would now like to address individual issues in the different learning areas, both in the introductory page and the achievement objectives.

English

It is noted in the present Curriculum Document that English is for all, across Ethnicity, Gender, Maori Students, ESOL students, Learners with Special Needs and Gifted and Talented students. It is assumed that the new Curriculum will take into account the specific needs of each of the aforementioned groups and make provision for their identified requirements. There is no identification of these in the Draft Document.

Likewise no mention has been made of guidelines with regard to Literary Texts introduced to students. Are we to assume that a "Free for all" mentality will be the norm here; that teachers are free to introduce students to any texts they desire, according to their individual beliefs and values? While we at Christian Schools appreciate this independence, to be able to introduce students to Literature that is morally sound and based on high ethical principles, we have a concern that many texts do not reflect appropriate values on which to base a healthy society.

The present document does make some effort to address this concern. There appears to be no reference to Literature in the Draft Document.

Health and Physical Education

The Health and Physical Education curriculum appears to not have changed greatly. The only noticeable implication is the addition of Home economics. Our concern is that the outworking of the curriculum is a complex one according to the structure that is presented in the document. As stated: "the learning activities in health and physical education arise from the integration of the above concepts, the following four strands and their achievement objectives, and seven key areas of learning.... The strands are divided into sub strands, each with its own achievement objectives." This statement just proves the complexity of the curriculum that is being presented. The danger of including too much in the Health and Physical curriculum is that teachers are going to try and cover too much when is not our primary emphasis on getting students active? I am aware that this activity has to be backed up with health education and that they need to have the skills and the knowledge to equip them for taking responsible action towards their wellbeing. But could the curriculum in Health and Physical Education be simplified.

We see the Health Curriculum as being the prime responsibilities of the family. It is impossible to change a student's values if it is not matched by what is happening within the home, especially within the early years. The Health and Physical Education is too large. However, that is not to say that there is some place for health education in schools. Physical Education has a right to stand alone. Many of the values, stated above, come through in Physical Education from the teacher teaching out of whom they are.

Learning Languages

It is interesting to note that the current English Curriculum Document could have been titled 'Language in the New Zealand Curriculum'. In a sense, the content of this document could be applied in any language learning situation because every language has a communicative strand that is built on oral, written and visual features of that language. The writers of this draft have made some links to parts of the English language document in relation to the teaching of the target language and this is good to see.

It is also good to see that the teaching of English is headed as 'English' in this draft which does away with the frustration of how to set and manage a second language program using conventions, functions that are part of, and go beyond the teaching of English.

Mathematics and Statistics

It is very pleasing to see the inclusion of numeracy strategies in the new curriculum. It is also a positive step that number and algebra have been combined. However, we are unsure of the reasoning why statistics becomes one of three major strands and the emphasis on this seems unwarranted. This is out of proportion with the amount of assessment that is done in Year 11 and over in NCEA.

Science

While there are differences between the current New Zealand Curriculum and the draft proposal, there is only one change we would like addressed. While there is a lot of research into the area of evolution, there is still no concrete evidence to support the theory. Scientists are yet to show how a cell formed, how one species became another species and so on. So to base a whole sub heading in the achievement objectives to an unproven theory is bizarre. We accept that at senior levels it is important for students to understand the theory and in many other countries this is the same. Some countries, like France, have even abandoned the teaching of the theory of evolution. So we question why New Zealand is going to set this as such a high priority. At all levels this heading could be changed to "Diversity" which would much better explain the subpoints.

Social Sciences

The draft states:

1. The focus of the curriculum is on New Zealand contexts.
The focus should be on people and society with an emphasis on New Zealand contexts. We live in an increasingly globalised world. To understand and appreciate our place in it requires considerable study beyond the New Zealand context especially as much that shapes New Zealand society happens beyond our borders.
2. Social inquiry is a particular learning process that has value in some situations. Of itself, it does not presuppose students arriving at determined understandings. Social inquiry is one of the learning tools that teachers will use to achieve the objectives. It does not deserve that exclusivity or pre

eminence that the draft gives it. Generally the expected understandings should be highlighted and emphasised rather than the process.

3. At Level 3; understanding, the statement would be better stated:
"The migration of Tangata Whenua and other people is significant for people in New Zealand," as migration is a significant factor that has shaped and continues to shape New Zealand society.

Effective Pedagogy

We acknowledge that this is the first time that the Ministry of Education has included a Pedagogy section in the Curriculum document. We are not concerned that there is such a section but that the section could limit the way in which teachers teach. We note that much of what is said relates to one theory of learning, that of co-constructivism. While there is value in this style we note that other theories of learning have value as well. To place a statement that appears to support just one theory is extremely short sighted. We realise that all students are different and to say that all students learn the same way is unbelievable. To overcome this, we at the Christian Schools teach in different ways, but we try to encourage students to learn whatever the style.

We need to be aware that we are teaching students the skills that they need to learn in the future after their time at school. Whether it be for university or for a job, they will not always be able to learn in a co-constructivist way. Often they will have to learn from books and seminars. We must prepare our students for any learning opportunity.

We are concerned that if new research into learning was to occur during the time that this document is in operation and a new theory was accepted, then the curriculum document as it stands would exclude that theory.

In the making connections area we are concerned with the words "unnecessary duplication of content." We are all aware of the learning spiral and the need for students to repeat their learning in an area many times so that they can build upon it. This statement, as it stands, makes no sense in the light of this.

We recognise that for there to be a supportive learning environment that the teacher's professional culture must include their personal values. As stated before, students learn best when what is being learnt is role modelled. This can only be done effectively if the teacher personally believes what they are teaching. Therefore the teacher's professional culture can not be divorced from their personal values system.

Conclusion

As the two Christian Schools, we have covered a number points in the draft curriculum document. We look forward to your response to these as the curriculum is finalised.

Kevin Short



On behalf of the:
Principal and Teachers of the Lake Taupo Christian School, Taupo