

SUBMISSION ON THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM

Draft for Consultation 2006

Rex Bloomfield N Z Amnesty International School Curriculum Group¹**General approach**

The submission notes the statements in the Foreword to the Draft Curriculum [p3] that “when schools develop their programmes they will take account of the diverse learning needs of their students and the expectation of their communities” It is noted further that “Increasingly, New Zealand is part of the global community and influenced by international events and trends” Conflict arising from religious intolerance has in the 21st century become a major issue for the global community. School curricula can no longer avoid the challenge of educating young people towards an understanding of the nature of cultural and religious diversity both within and beyond this country. The question is how we can best review the draft National Curriculum to ensure that schools are required to take up this challenge.

The context of this submission

In recent years Government Ministers, including the Prime Minister, leaders of various religious faiths and human rights organisations, and representatives of the Ministry of Education have attended National Inter Faith conferences on how as a nation we might better acknowledge and celebrate religious and cultural diversity.

In introducing the September 2006 Inter Faith Conference the Hon Steve Maharey acknowledged the government’s commitment to inter faith discussions and to promoting education about religious diversity within the national curriculum. The September 2006 Conference has approved initiatives for producing a “Draft National Statement on Religious Diversity” This submission aims at assisting the National Curriculum Working Party to incorporate some of the suggestions on educating for understanding religious and cultural diversity coming from these conferences

Two schools of thought about education for religious diversity and tolerance

There have been two schools of thought about ways education for religious tolerance and diversity might be included in the school curriculum, one being that a series of studies of world religions be developed, such as the Religious Education curriculum in the UK The second view has been that we should be looking across the whole school curriculum, the learning processes and the subject area to review and assess how in various ways understanding about religious issues can be developed.

This submission focuses largely on a “curriculum infusion,” encouraging schools to plan a whole school approach to education about religious and cultural diversity across the curriculum. This submission demonstrates that learning experiences to enhance students’ understandings of religious diversity and religious beliefs are part of the overall principles, values and key competencies set out in the 2006 Draft Curriculum Placing religion in the context of cultural and religious diversity incorporated in various learning areas moves us away from the argument commonly heard that “we should not be teaching religion in schools” This hoary debate is thus pre-empted!

¹ The two Co-ordinators of this Amnesty Curriculum Group are Rex Bloomfield, formerly Senior Education Officer Social Science in the NZ Department of Education and Jean Holm, Project Manager U K. Religious Studies Curriculum

Starting points for those adopting this whole school approach to planning will be the following components of the Draft²:

- the principles and values on which the curriculum is based [pp7-12 in the Draft Statement]
- the Learning Areas [pp 13 -23]
- Designing the School Curriculum [p 26]
- the Key Competencies set out in the Achievement Objectives by Level [pp34 ff]

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY WITHIN THE CURRICULUM

The section which follows indicates the kinds of changes which would help achieve the goal of better equipping students to understand and value religious and cultural diversity in their own and other communities. Material underlined is proposed change or addition to the draft³

Principles [p.9]

“The same principles should guide each school as it designs and implements its own curriculum” [Draft statement p.9]

Under ‘Equity “All students identities cultures, religious beliefs languages and talents are recognised and confirmed”

Values[p10]

New Zealand students are encouraged to values The eight values listed could be part of the planning for a study of religious and cultural diversity.

Take for example the “ care for the environment” Science or poetry or literature or politics can focus on feelings for and about the environment ~~can be~~ introduced through sayings from spiritual or religious leaders over the centuries

Key Competencies [p11-12 of the 2006 draft]

The New Zealand Curriculum identifies five key competencies:

- Managing self
- Relating to others
- Participating and contributing
- Thinking
- Using language symbols and texts

² It will be noted that the suggested alterations and additions to the text of the Draft Curriculum made in this submission are aimed at emphasizing the relevance of education for religious as well as for cultural diversity. Interest groups making submissions on a curriculum document all too often limit their task to arguing for particular content or topics to be taught in schools. The debate then becomes one about which topics and content should be taught, in what subject, at what level and to which group of students. The point of why such studies should be taught is lost sight of.

³ Learning experiences relating to understanding cultural and religious diversity should not be seen simply as teaching specific topics in the social sciences. There is a special place for education about religions in the social sciences and history but the arts language and music may for some schools be as good if not better than traditional social studies topics for achieving these goals The National Curriculum should encourage and confront schools with the need to plan and provide for learning about religious diversity within and beyond school.

The sections underlined below are suggestions to consider in the revision process,

- **Managing self** [involves students developing self motivation, acquiring “can do” attitudes and an increasing ability to clarify their own personal goals values and beliefs. Students act appropriately and are aware of the effects their words and actions have on others]
- **Relating to others** [Students become increasingly able to make decisions on how to interact effectively and sensitively with people of diverse cultures and beliefs, in a range of formal and informal situations]
Note “contexts” better replaced by “situations”
- **Participating and contributing** [Students are able to participate effectively in groups, become competent in making opportunities for others to join in group activities, and are able to recognise that others may prefer to belong in groups which follow practices and beliefs which differ from their own]
- **Thinking** -using creative, critical and reflective processes to explore and question information experiences ideas and values This competency can be well practised in studies of people and their beliefs in a range of learning areas

Thinking skills will be important in exploring religious diversity:

“Students reflect on their own learning and beliefs draw on personal knowledge and intuitions, ask questions and challenge the basis of assumptions and prejudices”

- **Using language symbols and texts** Developing students competence in using a wide variety of forms of language and symbols to develop and communicate a variety of beliefs and ideas
Note This competency is explained in the draft [p 12] more in terms of mathematics than in language. The language of poetry and of religion is often similar – depending on symbols and personal perceptions and feeling

Learning areas [P14 – 23 in the draft]

There are many opportunities for using the statements on the learning areas as a springboard for exploring various religious beliefs and practices within New Zealand communities and beyond Here are some examples

Arts The arts, visual movement drama sound have over the history of humanity been used to explore religious beliefs feelings – the religious expression of the artist [McCahon or Michael Angelo!!] or dramatist [Shakespeare or Shaw} are part of exploring the art or drama. The introductory paragraph p14 could well acknowledge “community culture religious beliefs and our unique environment.

English See note above about competencies – using language to explore feelings and beliefs including religious and cultural beliefs -

Health and Physical Education The spiritual [taha wairua] and family and cultural beliefs deriving from Maori culture are set out [p16 of the draft] for this Learning Area. This would be a starting point for exploring what beliefs are held in various religions about the mind, body and spirit. The prohibitions that Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems and Christians put on the spirit and the body could be explored as an effective and relevant approach to understanding differences and similarities between religions.

Learning languages To quote the draft curriculum: "Language and culture play a key role in shaping our personal, group, national and human identities. *He taonga nga reo katoa.* All languages are to be treasured. The draft statement notes that "languages provide access to the origins of thought and civilisation"

Science Questions related to how to make our occupation of the earth sustainable have a moral and spiritual aspect – why should we bother to be concerned about climate change for example – or about saving the blue mountain duck? Much environmental study gets back to ethical and moral questions. It is appropriate to enquire what the major religions have to say about these questions.

Social Sciences The draft statement on social sciences has little to say directly about the ways beliefs and religions have influenced the world's cultures and civilisations over time. The statement on "The Economic World" for example indicates that students will "understand their place in the economic world" rather than indicate that people have over time, and in various cultures sought ways to ensure that economic activities have often been subjects for debate about human rights and social justice, as expressed in the major religions. The beliefs and values and competencies set out in the early part of this draft curriculum [pp10 -11] receive little mention in the statement on this learning area.

History and the social sciences could be seen as a major focus for developing understanding of religious and cultural diversity. More work is needed on the statement for this learning area and the related key competencies.

Technology What is technology about? Technology is continually changing. It is influenced by, and in turn impacts upon the cultural, religious, ethical, environmental, political and economic factors of the day, both local and global. [Note the addition of religious factors – the move to nuclear energy in Shi-ite Iran is in part driven by religious conflict and uncertainty!]

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: DESIGNING THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The Draft Curriculum has made a clear statement on what it expects of schools. P 26 "While the New Zealand Curriculum sets the national direction for learning for all students each school will design and implement its own curriculum in ways that will engage and motivate its particular students. Schools have considerable freedom in how to do this. Curriculum design usually starts with the shared values and beliefs of the community or with an assessment of the learning needs of the students"...

Cultural and religious diversity: suggestion for another thematic approach to planning the school curriculum

There is considerable merit in our view in schools adopting a thematic approach as a focus for their curriculum. We would argue for the inclusion of the theme of "Cultural and religious diversity" as one of the thematic approaches. Planning around this theme would acknowledge the cultural and religious diversity of many school communities, and allow this to be a feature of their curriculum development. Maori spirituality would be recognised as a legitimate aspect of overall curriculum planning instead of being just an add-on for special events. Schools with significant numbers of Moslem families would be able to include their cultural/ religious features alongside other cultural/religious groups, and so avoid the tendency already becoming apparent in some areas for Moslem parents to seek to establish specific separate times for the Koran and Islamic education.

A format for Diversity: Cultural and religious

Students A explore what it means to be members of different cultures and religions. They participate in various cultural and religious events in their community, and invite member of the community to share their findings and experiences in significant school event – hui, Christmas celebration, Id [the end of Ramadan] Diwali.. harvest festivals... and the like. Students become confident in their own cultural and religious experiences and confident and open minded in exploring the experiences and beliefs of others

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The Secretary
Draft Curriculum Working Party
Ministry of Education
Wellington

Dear Sir/Madam,

I submit herewith a response to your call for submissions on the 2006 Draft of the New Zealand Curriculum. Members of the NZ Amnesty Curriculum group would be pleased to answer any queries about the ways we have approached this submission. We have favoured the curriculum infusion approach to introducing issues about religious tolerance and diversity because this kind of study needs to be seen to be an essential aspect of the overall curriculum

We would be prepared to develop a teacher guide of some kind on planning for and teaching about diversity, using the widespread contacts we have with faith communities in New Zealand.

We will be interested to hear your response to this submission and a possible teacher guide and other resources to support this aspect of the curriculum

Yours sincerely



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