

# Asia New Zealand Foundation submission on Draft New Zealand Curriculum

30 November 2006

## ***Executive summary***

- The Asia New Zealand Foundation (Asia:NZ) has worked extensively with the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the last two years to raise the status, study and understanding of Asia in New Zealand's schools.
- The growing social and economic importance of Asia to New Zealand is not reflected in the Draft New Zealand Curriculum (DNZC) and it needs to make explicit reference which can guide teachers, schools and their communities.
- The main elements of the DNZC allow an increased focus on Asia in all Learning Areas and the Key Competencies.
- A locally driven curriculum, while potentially being able to meet more closely the needs of the Asian communities in New Zealand, also poses the risk of Asian content being marginalised within areas with small or no Asian populations, if there is no mandate to provide it nationally.

## ***Background to the submission***

Asia:NZ was founded in 1994 as a non-profit, apolitical organisation dedicated to building New Zealand's links with Asia. It aims to promote initiatives which deepen understanding and relationships between New Zealanders and the peoples and countries of Asia. Through the DNZC we see an opportunity to prepare New Zealand for a future that is increasingly closely bound to Asia. This need is urgent.

This submission is based on outcomes from the Asia Knowledge Working Group project – an innovative collaboration between the MoE and Asia:NZ. The project involved leading figures in New Zealand education and other sectors. Its main focus was the urgency of preparing for an imminent future with Asia. The result was publication of *Preparing for a Future with Asia*<sup>1</sup> in which the education sector is identified as a key driver in changing perceptions and increasing understanding about Asia and Asians in New Zealand and abroad.

Schools are under pressure to include messages from many sectors, communities and interest groups. Asia:NZ recognises the important contributions that local Asian communities can give to enrich the school programme. We recognise that there are differing views on Asia within New Zealand's population. These differing views mean that it is essential that students have access to up-to-date, factual information and are able to interact with members of Asian communities in order to build their knowledge and understanding. This will help break down stereotypes and project a view of Asia based on present day realities.

## ***The Importance of Asia***

From a historic, cultural and economic perspective, Asia is a most significant region of the world. Asia:NZ believes the education sector, primary and secondary schools in particular, has a responsibility to educate young New Zealanders for the world they will live in – one in which the countries and peoples of Asia will be increasingly influential.

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1. Ministry of Education and Asia New Zealand Foundation (2006) *Preparing for a Future with Asia*.

- Asia is the cradle of two major civilisations (Chinese and Indian), and the birthplace of two major practicing religions (Buddhism and Hinduism).
- Asia has a population of 3.8 billion (60% of the world's population) with a purchasing power GDP in excess of US\$15 trillion which is growing faster than any other global region.
- Three of the world's top five economies are Asian: China, Japan and India.
- Four other Asian countries are in the world's top 25 economies.<sup>2</sup>

Asia's economic power has grown steadily since the 1980s, with its dominance predicted to grow, and China becoming the world's largest economy by 2017. Soon after this, India and Japan will vie for third and fourth positions in terms of world economic power.<sup>3</sup>

In previous decades, the United States led the globalisation push with cultural and consumer influences. However with the shifting of economic power balance to Asia, Asian influences, including consumer, business and cultural, will increasingly permeate our society.<sup>4</sup>

As Asian economies have grown in world importance, so too have New Zealand's trading links with the region. Half of New Zealand's top 20 merchandise export destinations are in Asia.<sup>5</sup> Asian investment in New Zealand is also on the increase, with three Asian countries among the top 10 sources of direct foreign investment.<sup>6</sup>

As Asia's economy continues to grow, so too will its political influence. Japan and India are seeking a permanent place on an expanded United Nations Security Council.

From a national perspective, by 2021 15% of New Zealand's population will be of Asian descent with the majority located in New Zealand's larger cities.

Geo-political and economic trends are currently favourable for New Zealand benefiting from the emergence of Asia. However, they are unlikely to be realised unless New Zealand's understanding of, and links with, Asia improve.

### ***The research***

Many schools currently include studies of Asia in their classroom programmes. Recent research<sup>7</sup> shows this is driven by current events, student interest and the proportion of Asian students. However, this falls short of the goal of consistent, ongoing commitment to studies of Asia. The research also shows that teachers' knowledge of Asia varies, depending on personal exposure to Asia, age and general interest levels.<sup>8</sup>

The same research also shows that studies of Asia are haphazard and out of date, with depth and breadth of study highly dependent on individual teachers. It also shows

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2. World Bank (2006) *Purchasing Power Parity Gross Domestic Product 2004*.

3. *The Economist* (2006), 'The World in 2026', from *The World in 2006*, London: Economist Newspaper Ltd.

4. US National Intelligence Council (2004), *Mapping the Global Future: Report of the National Intelligence Council's 2020 Project*, Washington.

5. *Statistics New Zealand* (2006), *Overseas Merchandise Trade – February 2006*, Table 3: Exports by Destination, Wellington. Economies in the top 20 include: Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong (SAR), Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

6. *Education New Zealand* (2006), *Key Indicators for Export Education Levy for Period 1 January to 30 August 2005*, Wellington.

7. *Asia New Zealand Foundation* (2005), *Research on Studies of Asia in New Zealand Secondary Schools*, Wellington.

8. *ibid*

that Asian contexts are often used to study negative themes such as war, famine, dictatorship and disease.<sup>9</sup>

By offering teachers opportunities for pre-service and in-service training, access to good quality current resources and more flexible NCEA options, Asia's profile within New Zealand classrooms could be raised and a more accurate picture presented. Including Asian studies at all age levels is important, starting with the youngest learners.

## ***The draft New Zealand curriculum***

### **The Document**

The DNZC has been generally welcomed as a clear statement of learning outcomes, principles, values and competencies. In it, teacher professionalism is respected and useful guidance is given on designing a local school curriculum that reflects student and community needs.

One of the underpinning principles of the DNZC is that each school's curriculum is planned and managed by the school and its community. This self-governing approach is based upon the concept that a school's community is in the best position to decide what is best for its students and can develop programmes that meet the diverse learning needs of their students.

### **Asia in the curriculum**

The positive aspect of offering a more flexible curriculum is that schools have more opportunities to form links with groups in their communities that can offer enrichment to the studies offered, including studies of Asia. It also assumes that available pedagogy is effective to deliver these aims.

The controversial nature of the values component of the DNZC in relation to studies of Asia could work against content seen as risky or difficult. It may deter school boards and teachers from tackling Asian topics. The willingness, or not, of schools to plan for studies of Asia depends heavily on the capabilities of teachers, the availability and appropriateness of current resources, and the costs of making changes to school programmes.

On all three counts, most schools are unprepared. Australia, by contrast, resources studies of Asia far better and offers exciting post-graduate opportunities for teachers. This is of great encouragement to them as knowledge and confidence in teaching Asia is boosted and relevant new materials can be incorporated into curriculum delivery.

### **Asia's place in the Key Competencies**

The Key Competencies provide a structure for schools to include Asian studies through the ideas of relating to others, participating and contributing, thinking and using language, symbols and texts. If applied as the DNZC intends, the Key Competencies will:

- encourage students to think more globally, with less prejudice, and will empower them with confidence to travel, study and work with Asian peoples in the future.
- It will also hopefully address the increased diversity of New Zealand society and allow students to recognise and strengthen the importance of cultural identity and understand the implications of living in a society with multiple identities.

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9. *ibid*

However, the increased emphasis on the primary school sector to deliver the basics, that is, literacy, numeracy and other priority programmes, and for secondary schools to prepare for and deliver national qualifications may act against Asian content in both sectors.

### **Asia and School communities**

We see the new curriculum as being positive if the explicit objective of representing local communities and their potential contribution to the local curriculum can be realised. If this happens, there will be opportunities for schools to link with their local Asian communities, but this will depend heavily on the determination and confidence of school boards and teachers.

We also believe it is important that the concept of community with which learners engage has not only a local flavour but is also represented at a national level. For urban-based students, for example, understanding the nature and significance of rural communities is important, just as for rural-based students, an appreciation of the diversity of urban communities is equally important.

While we support the goal of representing local communities, there is a risk that schools with little exposure to Asia and the Asian community will consider it a low priority. The DNZC should, therefore, explicitly mention Asian settings and content, and offer guidelines for programme planning. This would ensure that all students study Asian topics. We see a major risk in a community driven curriculum in which geo-political and global economic trends are sacrificed by an inward looking approach.

### **Professional development on Asia**

Only a small proportion of teachers and school principals have specialist knowledge or understanding about Asia or parts of Asia, and there is little commitment to Asia in teacher education. Relatively few people of Asian descent are employed as teachers.<sup>10</sup>

To include and successfully deliver studies of Asia, the pedagogical capability of teachers will require enhancement. Teacher education at the pre-service level will need to focus more on Asia and a commitment made to ongoing professional development to implement effective strategies to use in learning programmes.

### **Resources on Asia**

Another key element for successful inclusion of Asian studies into the new curriculum is the provision of educational resources for classroom use.

By providing educators with access to high quality, current information that they can use with their classes, educators will experience a boost in confidence in teaching about Asia.

The use of online portals such as Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) can provide guidance and ideas on how to incorporate Asian studies into the new curriculum in appropriate, meaningful ways.

Opportunities for initiating teacher exchanges and sister schools should also be encouraged. Immersion experiences, particularly sustained cultural encounters are an effective way of increasing understanding and cross-cultural competency.

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<sup>10</sup> Renwick, J. and Renwick, M. (2003), *Teaching Asian Studies in Primary Schools: A National Survey of Schools*; and Asia New Zealand Foundation (2005), *Research on Studies of Asia in New Zealand Secondary Schools*.

Asia:NZ currently offers a number of teacher study opportunities to Asia as well as an online Educating for Asia resource for teachers but both have limitations due to lack of funding.

### **Asia in Learning Areas and Extra-curricular activities**

It is also important for the future of New Zealand's economy to encourage the uptake of Asian language study in the schools. Where offered, the uptake of Asian languages is relatively low and requires encouragement from the government.<sup>11</sup> The creation of a Languages curriculum area is positive but we question whether the uptake of more Asian languages will be successful without a push for more qualified teachers and adequate resources.

Encouraging schools to include Asia throughout the curriculum and not as a 'token' unit in a subject such as Social Studies, the Arts or Languages is essential to help to ensure that Asia receives significant representation in a crowded curriculum and is recognised for its historical and cultural value as well as its strategic importance in New Zealand's future.

Using specific and manageable measurement criteria to help schools know when they have achieved appropriate objectives or standards could support this. Exemplars of best practice across all learning areas, including NCEA standard assessments, would also support good teaching in this area.

Some of the most effective work that schools do in building understanding of Asia happens outside the present curriculum. It includes cultural and sports exchanges, multi-cultural food fairs and festivals, and visiting speakers and artists. We recommend that the new curriculum acknowledges that extra-curricular activities play a vital role in setting the context for learning and increasing understanding in different and important ways. The Key Competencies, in particular, are a good reference point for the ways in which such activities can contribute to a school's programme.

### **Asia New Zealand Foundation's recommendations**

Given Asia's contribution to world civilisation and its increasing significance to New Zealand and globally we strongly recommend:

- explicit identification of it as a priority area in the curriculum
- improved pre and in-service teacher education
- wide access to good quality current resources in a range of learning areas and
- exemplars of school communities and their successful practices in relation to Asian studies.

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11. Peddie, R. (2003), *Languages in New Zealand: Population, Politics and Policy*, published in *Bilingual Children's Language and Literacy Development*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, cited in Torquist, M. (2006), *New Zealanders' Knowledge of Asia: A Literature Review*.