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Dear MaryAnne Mills

Draft Curriculum Feedback

Context:

I am the CEO of a business employing 130 New Zealanders primarily in the apparel industry - from design through product development, production, wholesale, retail, licensing, franchising, marketing and we have a restaurant too.

I am a woman, and I meet socially with six other women about six times a year, these women I have been meeting with for over twenty years. Each one of them is associated with teaching, either are teachers themselves or married to teachers. This gives me a unique insight for a business person into what is going on in schools from Decile one to ten, private and public.

I am also the Chair of the Untouched World Foundation, which partners with the Christchurch College of Education; DOC, Auckland Regional Council, Auckland University School of Education, the seven cities of Auckland, Transwaste, Terra Nova, BNZ Kiwi Recovery Trust, Waikato School of Education and local iwi. The partnerships deliver four experiential learning programmes to secondary school students that equip them with leadership skills, in the context of social/cultural, environmental and economic sustainability. The partnerships also provides professional development opportunities for teachers (see Education Gazette 24 April 2006).

I have a number of concerns about this Draft Curriculum in relation to sustainability. Currently sustainability is major global, national and local issue in many countries and it is interesting to note that issues and concerns are cross sectoral (business, local government, community, education and indigenous). Without a complete re-design in education it is difficult to see how New Zealand is addressing key issues related to sustainability. To address these concerns I have outlined my feedback in three key areas to promote a broader vision for education. The three key areas address the notions of vision, spirit and leadership.



VISION

I am truly surprised at how little the environment and the intersection between social/cultural and economic activity is mandated in the current draft education curriculum.

It is important in trying to build a knowledge economy, that we understand what the current and future drivers of the economy are. It is no longer GDP at any (environmental or social) cost.

It is important to understand what sort of knowledge is likely to be the 'currency' going forward, and while none of us know twenty years out what sort of conditions we face, we do know the environment and the ability of the planet to sustain its human populations will be a most likely the number one issue for the foreseeable future.

If the curriculum is to 'sustain our nation's development', it must articulate a position of leadership which takes account of the fact that New Zealand is a very small nation at the bottom of the world about whom the global community cares very little (regardless of what we might like to believe). Furthermore, if we are to 'sustain' our way forward we need to be offering something tradable in that global community which is both unique, sustainable and genuinely high value. And that offering must be exciting and challenging enough to prevent the wholesale long-term flight of our best educated talent to foreign markets.

Strategically Education for Sustainability could provide an underpinning context for curriculum that would help re-orientate our national and global wellbeing and promote the concepts of sustainable economic activity (rather than raw economic growth) sustainable social/cultural and environmental outcomes and the need for a more sustainable political agenda. Therein lies the potential for staking out a truly unique leadership position for this nation on the world stage.

If the vision statement recognised that **sustainable economic activity, based on the ability of the planet to regenerate resources for future use**, was essential to our future well being, then we would have an education vision that addresses future needs.

Sustainable economic activity **requires** sustainable social, cultural and environmental outcomes. These include, social equity, fair trade, social justice, peace, conservation, climate change and biodiversity.

If conservation and in many cases protection of resources are critical for the needs of future generations then a complete re-orientation of this curriculum is required now. Education that does not place a strong emphasis on sustainability is not an education system designed for our national or global future needs. Sustaining our environment will allow New Zealanders to pursue both economic and social aspirations.

We need sustainability built into the core of our education curriculum, not as an 'option'. Cross-curricular learning in real life contexts that specifically address sustainability is as fundamental as the learning in specific 'learning areas' that are currently described as essential because they address the compliant assessment requirements for the curriculum.

SPIRIT

I am not an expert on teaching.

What I do know is that we as a nation need to increase the potential in each child that is taught in our schools.

This in production speak is like lifting our productivity levels, increasing our skills, level of innovation, cooperation and efficiency.

There is no one way to access intelligence and creativity.

We have proven through the Untouched World Foundation programmes that by focusing on sustainability we can unlock a wide range of skills, attitudes and values and the action potential of each participant. The feedback from teachers and students indicates that the Untouched World Foundation learning experiences in real life contexts has opened up opportunities for students that are meaningful and has encouraged them to think in different ways. This new thinking around the notion of sustainability is already starting to have an impact on communities the students return to. As students progress their knowledge and understanding in sustainability their ideas will help re-orientate the economy and other social activities.

To unlock and fire the spirit we must encourage a model of competition and achievement. This type of competition will encourage individuals to work with mentors, coaches, managers, business and community leaders and with colleagues to achieve success either individually or collectively.

The human spirit demands stimulation in order to grow and competition still remains one of the best modes of achieving that end.

When one embraces competition the innate qualities that every human has to begin to come to the fore: effort, focus, determination, passion, love, imagination and strength immediately start to surface. Call it survival, call it a desire to win or simply call it a desire to feel great...it all adds up to energy. If one does not work with the above qualities one does not have energy...and without energy success at what you wish to achieve becomes extremely difficult.

The secret to success is to never forget the heart...as to dwell in the head for too long dries out the spirit.

Therefore, we must access the heart of our students and connect that with the head and the hands to ensure successful integrated learning and understanding.

An outflow of learner energy, passion and action will lead to a feeling of accomplishment and sense of wellbeing. A positive sense of oneself coupled with an education based on an integrated approach as described above, will deliver a student able to constructively live in the future world and contribute to a lively sustainable economy.

LEADERSHIP

New Zealand needs young people who can provide innovative leadership with a long-term vision of a sustainable future.

Leaders need character and the formation of this is “imbued from an early age through the observations of behaviour in family, teachers and peers” (Prain 2004). The educative process of schooling has a major impact on character and the development of leadership.

A sustainable vision of leadership in all fields of work, recreation and society are the key to the future well being of our country and planet. Great leaders are visionary, inspirational and action orientated. Leaders currently, and in the future, will need to use these skills to address a range of environmental, social, cultural and economic issues and their decisions will have a major impact on the viability of our planet to sustain human existence. The New Zealand curriculum needs to model and promote a leadership approach that addresses sustainability and encourages sustainable enterprise in a wide range of areas.

While I am not qualified to challenge whether the current curriculum promotes leadership or not, it is evident that schools do attempt to develop leadership in a range of disciplines (sport, arts, cultural, sciences, technology to name a few). However, the lack of emphasis in the curriculum in sustainability makes it difficult to promote leadership in this area. This is in contrast to current leadership models in business and governance that are a promoting genuine capacity building grounded in systemic redesign, new thinking, reflection and action for a sustainable future.

I believe we have a small window of opportunity to make significant changes in our life style choices that will have a huge impact on our future. New Zealand needs to take a leadership role in developing a curriculum that helps young people position themselves to take a leadership role in sustainability.

Sincerely



Peri Drysdale
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