

*Values Education in Perspective:
The New Zealand Experience*

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Historical Background

New Zealand, like Australia, was colonised from Great Britain and the colonisers brought with them the assumptions about education that were common back 'home'. These depended on a version of Christianity, moderated by a strong secular philosophical tradition from which stemmed the commitment to democracy and to freedom of speech, association, conscience and religion.

But the country was in the possession of Maori who for centuries had been bringing up their children in accordance with a rich spiritual tradition. The irony is, however, that the Maori were converted to Christianity and incorporated it into their traditions so that religious values imbued the whole of life. Pakeha, on the other hand, saw religion as merely a part of life and, overcome with the conflict between Christian denominations, decided that the society must be pluralistic and the education system 'entirely secular in character'.

The 1877 Act, which established a national system of education, decreed that primary schools should be secular. Secondary schools, few at the time, but later to expand to take all young people up to at least aged 16, were not bound by the secular clause but came to restrict themselves to a token form of religious observance which became even weaker during the latter part of the 20th Century.

The primary school, thought officially secular, was never devoid of values. From earliest days, the primary curriculum has involved a values dimension. The official syllabuses laid down lengthy lists of values, though it is unclear how much or how little they affected practice in the schools.

After 1877, the Roman Catholic Church set up a system of schools which taught the Catholic faith and the values which went with it. Former students have stressed the fact that in convent schools in particular girls were imbued with the ideal of social justice. After a century of conflict about government support, the Integration Act was passed in 1975 to enable the Catholic schools to become part of the state system and to receive large amounts of state money. (only capital works remained the responsibility of the church). All Catholic schools integrated so that, unlike in Australia, the independent sector is quite small (under 2%). Indeed some non-Catholic schools have also integrated. That many of these continue to charge high fees is a source of much friction, especially when state schools claim to be seriously under funded.

Developments in the 1970's and 1980's

In the 1970's there was a renewed concern for 'moral education' which later became 'values education'. The government of the day (a progressive Labour government) set up various committees which produced reports which stimulated much discussion. Prominent among these was the Johnson Report (1976) which, though wide ranging in its concerns, became associated with a liberal agenda on sex education and a proposal that

the school curriculum should include a 'non-sectarian spiritual dimension'. Suggestions about sex education were very controversial and were shelved at the time but resurrected later. The idea of a 'spiritual dimension' was almost universally rejected; by secularists because it sounded too religious and by Christians because it seemed too secular! Rather ominously, the Johnson Report was also opposed by business interests which protested that it did not deal with 'the real world of work'! The state department also commissioned a 'state of the art' book on values education. This was published in 1978. (Snook and McGeorge, 1978). After 1978, a morally conservative minister of education (Mr Wellington) made sure that little happened in relation to values education.

Values education was revived again in the early 1980's with the election of another Labour government. In 1985 the minister released a curriculum review which stressed values in particular those of non-sexism and non-racism. But this was out of step with the real agenda of the government which was to institute a social revolution along the lines of the New Right; state assets were privatised, managerialism took control of institutions and, in 1989 education was subjected to serious reforms. It is often said that these 'reforms' swept value education away but, in my view, this misrepresents what happened in those years. I shall take this up later.

Recent developments

In recent years there has been an upsurge in demands for a more explicit form of values education. Ironically, these have come largely from those who, in the 1970's, were opposed to such programmes. Independent schools and the Catholic integrated schools have been to the fore in making such demands, often in the context of claiming that their schools are uniquely fitted to conduct values education.

New curriculum statements in the 1980's made values more explicit particularly in the social studies and health syllabuses. Incidentally, the social studies syllabus went through several versions its values being a 'site of struggle' between conservatives and progressives. Clearly, while all saw values to be important, interest groups had different ideas about what these values should be. Of some significance was the fact that the general curriculum statement included the notion of 'spiritual values'. Many, particularly from the of the independent schools and the Catholic integrated sector, have hailed this as a new milestone but they overlook the fact that even in the 1937 syllabus there was talk of 'securing for every child the fullest possible spiritual, mental and physical development'. (Education Department, 1937)

In recent years the Ministry has been cautious (it clearly has memories of the huge fuss generated in the 1970's). It has encouraged 'debate' about values education, pointed to programmes available and given some minimal financial support to pilot programmes. The main thrust of values education has come from particular groups with different agendas.

In March 1998, the NZ Commission for UNESCO organised a **Values in Education Summit** attended by more than 100 participants across many sectors. A notable feature of

this Summit was that the lengthy tradition already established was not referred to and no person with a professional or academic interest in values education was invited to speak. Speakers and presenters were drawn from the political area (the Prime Minister, the Minister of Education) and from ‘celebrities’ (eg Sir Paul Reeves a former governor general and Judith Ablett Kerr QC, a prominent defence lawyer and Penny Jamieson, the Anglican bishop of Dunedin.). Along with the *Living Values Trust*, the UNESCO office sponsored a series of seminars throughout the country in 2000.

Among the other initiatives were:

The Virtues Project: There are five basic strategies in the Virtues Project: speak the language of virtues; recognise teachable moments; set clear boundaries; honour the spirit; offer the art of spiritual companionship. The Virtues Trust has offered intensive courses for teachers. A number of schools have adopted a virtues approach, typically taking one value per week and incorporating it in the daily life of the school.

Living Values: This is a programme which emerged from the Independent schools in partnership with the Ministry of Education, and the Fletcher Challenge Trust. There are three key components: a set of core organisational values understood by all at the school; harmony between stated values and action; specific values education programmes. Twenty schools participated in a pilot project, of which 10 were state schools and the other ten integrated or private.

QPEC's Activities: The Quality Public Education Coalition has included values education in its many activities. In July 2000 it held a conference *Values in Education* attended by more than 100 participants. The keynote addresses at this conference have been published (Delta 2000). At the conference, QPEC launched a book *Values in School* which promoted the notion that for values education to succeed the school should itself practise the values it is preaching. With financial support from the Ministry, QPEC conducted a pilot study of a whole school ‘values audit’ and accompanying programme. (For an elaboration of these programmes see, J.Clark 2000. pp 69–71).

The Ministry of Education: Within the past year, the Ministry has renewed its interest in values education, commissioning a researcher from the University of Waikato to undertake a series of consultations with a view to re writing the curriculum statement. A list of ‘agreed’ values is to be included. It appears that the Ministry does not intend to promote any programme but wishes to authorise schools to take up values education more resolutely, choosing programmes which suit their particular situation.

I want now to isolate some of the problems which beset these attempts to provide common sets of values for use in schools.

Problems with current approaches to values education

1. Current programmes are fond of talking of the values which we all share but it must be obvious that conflict, not consensus, marks the values domain: young people in

schools should confront these conflicts and learn to handle them rationally and tolerantly. There must be a place for the disparity of views which mark a pluralistic society.

It is easy to say that we all agree on (for example) obedience, kindness and fairness. But this is true only at the most abstract of levels. The Nuremberg trials demonstrated dramatically that obedience is sometimes a vice. Fairness is an important virtue. But what does it mean to be fair in a society where many people are treated unfairly? We can all support fairness but differ strongly about pay parity for women, equal rights for homosexual couples, and wide disparities in income. Fairness does not unite us: it divides.

Similar points can be made about the other values that many seem to find 'unproblematic'. We can share them in the abstract but argue bitterly when they are made concrete.

2. It is not sufficiently recognised that all programmes of values education are in some way political. The ideas being promoted in the 1970's and 1980's presumed an open, democratic, pluralistic society, which was to be non racist and non sexist. Those who did not favour such an open society were opposed the values programmes being advocated because they were against the communal and cooperative values proposed; on the contrary, schools had to be won over to individualism and competitiveness.

If we are to make progress, the political nature of all programmes must be acknowledged and debated and steps taken to balance rival values. Values are to be found not in the genial sharing of platitudes but in the cut and thrust of vigorous debate.

3. A further weakness of current programmes is that they neglect the school as an institution. The way the school is organised is a much more powerful influence than what teachers say in class. The policies of the Board and the decisions of the principal constitute powerful moral lessons not lost on young people. When schools accept funding even when it is unfair they make a moral stance. When school principals promote their school on the basis of exam results, they are being dishonest. When schools cream off students who are talented and decline to enrol children with special needs they are announcing their true values whatever the school 'values statement' might say.

The power relations in schools and the way these are handled constitute daily lessons in values. Pious exhortations on kindness and fairness will be perceived by students as adult hypocrisy unless the relationships between principal, teachers and students are benign, professional and consultative. The rules of the school are themselves models of what the school values. Rational rules necessary for the smooth running of the school have to be distinguished from those which violate the students' civil rights (eg by searches of lockers and the like) or which merely reflect the narrow current prejudices of the community (eg about hair length and jewelry).

4. Finally, contemporary values programmes neglect to analyse the characteristics of the students who are to undergo them. Many programmes assume a neutral ‘aseptic’ student who could exist in the 1930’s, the 1980’s or today – and exist in any culture.

It is appropriate now to give my view of the ‘reforms’ of the 1990’s. Conventional wisdom holds that in those years values education was replaced by the stress on administrative changes. Certainly the administration of schools in New Zealand underwent profound changes but I want also to argue that this decade saw the most effective values education ever seen in New Zealand.

The agenda for the 1990’s was clearly stated by Finance Minister, Ruth Richardson in introducing the 1991 Budget: ‘Tonight’s budget is not about figures and finance; it is about who we will become a generation into the future.’ (In Richardson, 1995).

Evidence, anecdotal and other, suggests that this programme has been successful and that we now face a new breed of student referred to by some as ‘children of the market’. Much of the evidence for this is anecdotal but it is starting to show up in more formal studies. A *Consumer Lifestyles Study*, by the Marketing Department at the University of Otago, noted the emergence of a new group (between 1995 and 2000). They called them ‘Young Pleasure Seekers’ and found that they comprised some 13.5% of the sample. These young people exhibited high levels of materialism and consumption, had few political or social interests, lacked any concern for a healthy diet, did not place any value on family life and focused on individual activities such as TV and video games. (2000, p 18)

These points are reinforced by the growing international literature on ‘kinderculture’. This comes from an emphasis on business values. Video games, internet, instant messaging, music, CDs with earphones, food chains with special attractions, and movie videos create for children a world in which their main role is as **consumer**. It would be hypocritical to ‘do’ values in the curriculum and leave these wider influences unchallenged. It would be even worse to invite these insidious influences into the school by means of business partnerships and the like.

Values education cannot get any grip on the reality of children’s lives unless it is based on clear analyses of what our students already value.

Conclusion

In sharing with you some of the history and recent developments of values education in New Zealand, I hope that I have added something to the large amount of work which you have already done here. In drawing attention to some of the weaknesses in our programmes, I hope I have alerted you to problems which may beset yours. Beyond that, I can only wish you well in this important task of shaping the ‘hearts and minds’ of your young people and so ensuring a vibrant and critical democracy.

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