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**HAVE WE GOT THE RIGHT FOUNDATIONS FOR  
THE SCHOOLS' DRAFT CURRICULUM??**

The recently launched Draft New Zealand Curriculum for Schools has been welcomed by education sector groups as a forward looking document which is in tune with the realities of teaching youngsters in this early part of the new millennium.

The document's emphasis on skills acquisition, attitude formation, gaining of knowledge and the rehabilitation of the place of New Zealand history, are all positive developments to be applauded.

Where there will be substantial public debate about the proposals is the focus on the values that underpin the curriculum.

Nobody is going to disagree very much with the values presented. They are important. The question is, do they go far enough for New Zealand to become a resilient, harmonious, society where everyone has a place in the sun and where the mosaic of diversity is recognized as the strength that holds us together as a functioning democracy.

The document's weakness is its lack of boldness in addressing what constitutes the foundational values that most New Zealanders believe are necessary if we are to live together in freedom. A free society requires a set of ideas and values based on the acquisition of virtue. Education after all, is a moral endeavour.

Finding meaning in life, establishing reasons for living and achieving some authentic sense of identity, are key tasks any young person faces. While the word spirituality is not a term many people use, it refers to the way the spiritual and moral dimensions of life are woven together. There is a fundamental linkage in the foundational structure of any curriculum between meaning, identity and spirituality. This is missing from the draft.

Vaclav Havel, the former President of the Czech Republic, when speaking to the Congress of the United States of America, probably got it right when he said, we need "to be a people with an elementary sense of justice, an ability to see things as others do, a sense of transcendental responsibility, archetypal wisdom, good taste, courage, compassion and faith.

The various dimensions of Havel's statement provide the philosophical, spiritual and social dimensions which are the life blood of a successful curriculum in a post-modern, pluralistic democracy.

It is worth remembering that in 1996 the landmark UNESCO Report, 'Learning The Treasure Within', emphatically stated that if national education systems did not actively start addressing the moral, civic and spiritual dimension of public education, democracies would falter in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and civilization itself could well be in jeopardy – fast forward to 2006 and you can come to your own conclusions about the accuracy of this prediction.

It is interesting that a number of nations have recently started teaching their students how to be happy – surely happiness is a product of knowing who you are, where you are going and having reasons for living. All of this is linked to the spiritual dimension of education.

Our schools have to be bold in putting programmes together which expose students to the great ideas of past and present civilizations, as well as the world's major religions.

Given the diminishing influence of religion in society it is incumbent on the State to at least provide a minimal exposure to nurturing the spiritual dimension of young people's education formation.

Those schools which have sought to be up front about their values and core relationship expectations are the ones parents seek out. It is not an overly difficult task for a diverse range of parents and caregivers to agree on what ethical and moral standards their school ought to espouse with students. After all, any school needs to be sure about its point of view when it comes to something as fundamental as its philosophy and what it stands for.

It is to be hoped, when parents, teachers and other stakeholders in our education system make a submission on the draft curriculum, they raise the issue of what the spiritual dimension of education looks like in our 21<sup>st</sup> millennium democracy.

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