



**HOW HUMAN IS THE EDUCATION
WE OFFER OUR YOUNG PEOPLE?**

Hardly a day goes by without the importance of human rights to the well-being of nations being raised in the halls of the international power brokers. Democracy itself, and democratic principles in particular, are now more pivotal with the international community than at any time in recent history. Leaders of any nation who do not treat their citizens properly are quickly questioned and put under pressure by the international community when they step over the mark by abusing or not recognizing the human rights of their people. Such is the importance of the issue, almost monthly, some nation or other is brought to task for offending in the area.

New Zealanders, being great travellers, very quickly come to the realization that despite our nation's geographic isolation, we increasingly share so much with other nations in the way we do things. Satellite communication systems are becoming so extraordinarily sophisticated that close connectedness between peoples, no matter where they are, is simply a fact of life and the cost of this connectedness is fast declining. Shared information, knowledge, skills and understandings; trade in goods and services, transport connections, cultural and artistic sharing, all are strong illustrations that we live in a 'wired-world' where so much is now held in common.

One of the major pluses that comes out of this rapid incremental growth is that individuals and nation states are quickly coming to the realization that we all, not only share a common humanity but also share many common attitudes, values and aspirations. The mosaic of cultural diversity surely exists, but so does the compelling focus on the commonness of our humanity and our democratic human rights, simply because we are human and empathize with others, no matter who they are and where they come from or where they live.

It is against this background that it is prudent to ask the question, just how well does our education system prepare young people for understanding other people who are different from us? Prejudice against others who are different is a fact of any human's experience. Emotionally charged thinking is often anti-foreign, anti-ethnic, anti-society and anti-religious.

Therefore in order to prepare our young people for their roles as citizens of New Zealand and citizens of the world, numeracy, literacy and skill development are vital, but far from enough. New Zealand, long term, needs to build on its reputation as a country committed to democratic principles, and educate our young people to enable them to make an active contribution to the world on the national and international levels.

Human beings are more motivated in their behaviours by the personal, social and emotional dimensions of their being, than by their intellectual attributes. Very seldom, however, are overt efforts made in education and domestic settings to teach youngsters how to nurture and strengthen their personal, social and emotional side. These 'softer values' of our humanity are in fact the more important ones in terms of maturely navigating society and at the same time providing some leadership for others in the area.

Therefore, supporting young people to develop positive attitudes, emotional maturity and the spiritual strength of knowing who they are and where they are going in life, is crucial to a sound rounded education.

Students can be encouraged to participate in sport, part-time employment, service activities, the arts and can be given opportunities to develop leadership skills at various levels through engagement in responsible activities. The simple art of engaging and connecting with them as human beings is part of the recipe, too.

If we do this, our young people will soon learn that trust and connectedness with others are the oils that enable them to build a successful life. They will also learn that serving others in various settings brings about happiness, which cannot be bought by fame, wealth, power or destructive behaviour.

The twenty-first century is rapidly blending people from all sorts of backgrounds into more heterogeneous and healthy social frameworks. In turn this demands that they have the personal strength and depth not only to cope with life, but to be proactive in building up their family, their society and their world, so everybody can contribute towards making the world a better place for all of the 6.2 billion citizens who inhabit the globe – not an impossible dream!!

Pat Lynch
10-12-05.