

# EVIL SYLLABUS, POISONED MINDS

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2009



The New National Curriculum is set to poison the nation's children with ignorance. Behind the curriculum, introduced progressively since 2007, is a clearly announced plan to stop children in New Zealand schools learning. The final stage comes on the first day of school 2010 when the traditional way of knowing facts and truth will be illegal in state schools.<sup>1</sup>

Back in 2003 the *New Zealand Council for Educational Research* set out the foundations for this syllabus in ignorance. Here is how Jane Gilbert, Chief researcher for the Council, explained learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:<sup>2</sup>

“The traditional idea of knowledge as something that is linked to ‘truth’, to ‘the facts’ and so on ... is being replaced by what Lyotard<sup>3</sup> refers to (sic) knowledge’s ‘performativity’. ... By this, he means that knowledge is important now, not because it is *true*, but for what it can *do*, for its *usefulness*.”

Truth is banned. Facts are banned. The only thing that matters is the made-up idea of “performativity”. In plain language, the process of classroom activity replaces learning and knowing.

This is spelt out even more clearly in Gilbert’s list of “key features of knowledge”:

- “Knowledge is a *process*, not a thing”
- It “happens in *teams*, not in individuals”
- It “*does* things, rather than just ‘being’”
- It is “developed to be *used*, *modified*, and quickly *replaced* and destroyed”
- It “develops *as and when it is needed*”

This explains why so much group work happens in schools: no child is expected to learn anything as an individual. Only groups can learn.

When a child’s school report tells parents the child has achieved some level of learning it lies. What the school *really* means is that the child’s group has learnt something and there can be no evaluation made of the individual’s learning because *individuals can’t learn*. But even more important, the “learning” the group has experienced is no more than a *shared process*. So what the school report really means is that the child who is said to have learnt something has done nothing more than *share in a group activity*.

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<sup>1</sup> State schools, and Integrated Schools (including Integrated Christian Schools) must by law teach the National Curriculum from the beginning of 2010

<sup>2</sup> Jane Gilbert “New” *Knowledges and “New” Ways of Knowing: Implications and Opportunities* in “Educating for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” NZCER Wellington 2003 p5 (quotes from pp24f)

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, French postmodern philosopher died 1998

Already 50% or more of the content of primary school reports openly cover such things as participation, contributing to the group, working together and sharing. As the new curriculum is introduced, the subject parts of reports cover the group things in the disguise of traditional knowing and mastery marks. The headings are the same as in the past but now they refer to what a child's group has done not what an individual child has learnt. They report on learning, by which they mean participation in group stuff. They give marks for mastery, but the marks score what the group has done.

At the secondary school level, it means NCEA credits are increasingly available through internal assessment instead of exams. Internal assessments are based primarily on group activities. Even when individual children must complete some form of documentation or project, they are completed in a group environment with coaching to ensure successful participation. Any "individual" work produced is in fact the product of the group. In any case the product is irrelevant as a testimony to what is known (because nothing can be known by the individual); at best, the product may be an indicator of taking part in the process, and it is taking part in that process that is graded.

There is no escaping the fact that exams measure an individual's knowledge, and that person's ability to apply knowledge at a particular point in time. Since the new curriculum is based on the idea that knowledge cannot be measured, it cannot be found in an individual, and as an individual acting independently of a group is a meaningless non-entity, exams will continue to be replaced by assessment of group activities. It is increasingly easy to gain credits from internal assessments based on group activity. NZQA have announced another reduction in exams to follow their systematic discrediting of the exam idea. It will not be long before individuals who achieve at cost to group activities will be stigmatised.

According to this warped thinking, no knowledge can be gained, it can only be created. Such creation is done by the group; it is never an individual thing. As Gilbert explains above, "it is developed". She makes it clearer when explaining how knowledge is gained:

"Learning ... is generating knowledge, working it out for yourself, not storing knowledge developed by other people."

It might appear that by referring to "yourself" Gilbert is allowing for an individual working things out and generating knowledge, but the "yourself" here refers, as always, to the group. An individual has no meaning outside of a group.

An exclusive focus on generating knowledge means children must not be given the accumulated wisdom of the past. There is no heritage of facts and information from pervious generations.

Not even a teacher can instruct because a teacher has nothing of value to transmit to the group. In reality, this *is* probably true of many younger teachers who are trying to put this idiocy into practice, because as the first generation who have been educated in this framework, many have neither a pool of knowledge to pass on to children, nor a means of accessing the pool of knowledge of the past generations, let alone a foundation of knowledge and skill with which to explore the unknown.

There is no truth older than the group's present experience:

“Learning is primarily a *group* activity, not something that happens in individuals.”

In this framework it becomes an evil for an individual to use knowledge outside of the group. Professor of Teacher Education at Massey University John O'Neill claims<sup>4</sup> that individual use of a group's knowledge is reprehensible “private exploitation” of what is owned by the group. O'Neill's “group” is in fact “the public”. Here is one of the country's leading teacher-trainers claiming private use of knowledge perpetrates an evil against the public. This is Orwellian in both its audacity and its demand for subjugation to the group. Conform, cooperate or be vilified.

John McAleese, Principal of Howick Intermediate School, says that National curriculum means that “schools now can focus more on the process and less on subject matter content.”<sup>5</sup> McAleese argues that this process must involve handing over to children the decisions about what to learn, how to learn and how fast to learn. What the group perceives as its current “needs” determines the process they will engage in. For him too “learning” is defined as going through the process of making these choices: there is no content to be mastered. In this schooling for fools, teachers cannot teach. Instead “teachers spend less time preoccupied with ‘subjects’ as they ... work in partnership with students as guides, advisors and facilitators of (choice making).”

There is a final reason why, according to this child-abuse outlined by Gilbert, there can be no prescription of a body of knowledge children need to master:

“Learning is something that you do *when you need it*”

If a child, or more precisely, if a child's *group*, can see no immediate need for something, they cannot be expected to do it (always, “do”, never “learn”). Such a need is exclusively a *perceived* need. No outsider such as a parent or teacher can impose on the group because the group's needs and knowledge are vested exclusively in the group.

Education adviser Bruce Hammond<sup>6</sup> explains why there can be no planned curriculum. Since learning, he says, “is a process of students creating their own ‘knowledge’ ... led by the interests, questions queries and concerns of the learner,” a curriculum cannot plan what students will learn.

The new National Curriculum contains no prescription of knowledge to be taught. According to the foundations described by Gilbert it can't because knowledge cannot be transmitted, much less prescribed. The only permissible prescription is what a group decides it needs at the moment. This results in inordinate time being spent by teachers (now called “facilitators”) manipulating the group of children they are “teaching” to motivate them to want what the teacher wants. To do this, teachers must of course become part of the group: everything is now done from the perspective of “we” and “us” with the facilitator learning (that is, going through a process) along with the children. What futility!

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<sup>4</sup> *Education Review* Wellington 6 February 2009.

<sup>5</sup> *Middle Schooling Review* #3 April 2007 p1

<sup>6</sup> “A Unified Pedagogy” in *Good Teacher Magazine* Term One 2007 p10

It is not only the teachers who are demeaned by this group process in place of learning from others. As the individual has no meaning apart from the group, the dignity of each child as an individual person is stolen. Children now have dignity only as group members. There are no people left, only groups.

The impact this has on morality is totalitarian. Just as there is no knowledge apart from the present activity of the group, and there is no truth apart from the present experience of the group, there is no morality apart from the present choice of the group. *Lord of the Flies* and *Tale of Two Cities* rerun: the mob rules.

The significance of this for the new National Curriculum cannot be underestimated. While there is no prescribed knowledge in the Curriculum, there is a very specifically defined morality. It comes in the form of seven so called “values”. Yet each of those values must be determined, not by reference to any absolute standard or even an historical-cultural point of reference, but to the present passing whim of the group.

In its guidelines, the Ministry of Education itself says that although the Curriculum has this list of values, “Values cannot be routinely mandated ... Instead they need to be discovered or forged as a consequence of everyone learning, problem solving, striving to reach a higher moral level of operation and finding sense and meaning ...”<sup>7</sup> But even if the mandated list (and it is mandated by being published as the core to the Curriculum, despite the denial of the guidelines) is adhered to, the meaning given to each value is what each particular group means by the term at an particular time.

Truthfulness is of course excluded from the official list of values because, as Gilbert has already pointed out, there can be no truth in the curriculum. But “community and participation for the common good” is included, as befits a curriculum prescribing group participation without knowledge. Who determines what is “the common good?” As there can be no outside absolutes, no standards from the past, only the group’s concept of common good at the moment (its “needs”) can prevail.

This finds expression in the “teaching” methods used in shaping children’s morality. There is never an appeal to a transcendent standard of right and wrong. In its place is an unremitting appeal to how an individual’s or group’s actions will impact on others in the group. There can be no objection to considering the impact of actions on others: actions have social consequences, and children should consider these. But the Curriculum makes absolute the group’s perception of what is to its immediate benefit. It is hardly surprising that loyalty to the group (or gang) is what shapes the morality and activities of contemporary youth: it’s what they are being taught in school.

The immoral direction of this finds its final expression in Gilbert’s rule for learning without rules:

Learners “need to be rule-breakers, not rule followers.”

On such sinking sands of evil is the National Curriculum founded.

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<sup>7</sup> Preparing to Lead Curriculum Change—Vision, Principles and Values undated p7

