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THE LANGUAGE
OF THE MOTTO S
OF NEW ZEALAND
SECONDARY SCHOOLS

a study submitted by

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in fulfilment of
requirements for
of

The Degree of Master of Philosophy,
Massey University,
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June, 1979.

S Y N O P S I S

Because of the great interest in and response to the Motto Survey I have been able to compile comprehensive listings of the mottos in current use by New Zealand secondary and Intermediate schools.

From foundation dates supplied it has been possible to trace something of the changing themes of the mottos from colonial days until the present.

The various motto preferences of North and South Island schools have been indicated as well as those of the four secondary school Districts and the ten Intermediate school Education Board Areas.

81% of all New Zealand secondary and Intermediate schools currently employ a motto. Principals of private secondary schools concur in affirming the usefulness and relevance of their school mottos, but only 71% of State school Principals do likewise.

A great many of the mottos in current use derive directly from British family mottos in Latin, or from the mottos of religious Orders. Other large numbers of mottos have classical or Biblical origin. Nearly all have been selected by senior male school administrators.

Mottos which, before 1900, were almost entirely in Latin, are still 50% of all secondary and Intermediate school mottos in current use, although Latin is today taught in only a small percentage of our schools. The introduction of mottos in English and in Maori has been traced, as also the trend, beginning in the 1950s, away from school mottos.

Some 368 different mottos specify over fifty variant abstract behavioural goals for this country's young people. Secondary school mottos tend to be addressed to students in more impersonal and authoritarian manner than do the mottos of Intermediate schools.

Most mottos, whether expressed in Latin, French, English or Maori, are derived from the value system of New Zealand's European cultural heritage. Private school mottos make public acknowledgement of its Christian character.

There is a moral earnestness about most of the mottos, suggesting that there is little enjoyment in learning. Any values which might, traditionally, be thought of as "feminine" are restricted to the mottos of private girls' secondary schools.

It is the mottos in Maori which are uniquely New Zealand's, but there are difficulties in relating European and Maori value-systems to each other. It is urged that further study of these matters be undertaken by scholars of the Maori language.

This Motto Study began for me with the root questions in my mind: "If a school motto declares what a school is trying to "do" or is trying to have its students "be", might changes in the educational philosophy, traditions and policies of a secondary school be assisted by changing a school motto? Is a school motto itself sometimes a decisive factor inhibiting progress or change of educational attitude?"

At the conclusion of my researches I acknowledge that school tradition ensures that mottos, once established, are either retained or never adopted. School mottos change, if at all, only when a school is re-formed or secures fresh status. Principals of large, modern, co-educational, multi-cultural secondary schools who find it difficult to select a motto geared to the needs of all their students tend to allow an "unworkable" motto to lapse, rather than to alter it.

It would please me considerably if the findings of this Motto Survey should prove a useful contribution to the search within New Zealand for fresh and invigorating educational aims and values suited to the new needs of the second century of our nation's schooling systems.

Lincoln A. Gribble

P R E F A C E

The information and dates on which this study are based were obtained by questionnaire from the Principals of New Zealand State and private secondary schools during July-August, 1976, and from the Principals of New Zealand Intermediate schools during April-May, 1977.

Information about secondary schools has been arranged and presented according to Inspectorial District, while information about Intermediate schools has been arranged and presented according to Education Board Area.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my warm thanks to the following people for help, encouragement and guidance with this study:

Dr J. Dunmore, Professor of Modern Languages and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Massey University

Dr D. H. Bray, Senior Lecturer in Education, Massey University

Mrs Ani Allen of the staff of Dannevirke High School for assisting me to understand many matters pertaining to Maoridom.

Principals and members of staff of New Zealand secondary and Intermediate schools who so generously replied to the Motto Questionnaires.

Officials of the Department of Education, Wellington, and of the Education Boards of New Zealand, for assistance with access to secondary and Intermediate school Principals.

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