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Where does it fit?
The Place of “Essential Learning About New Zealand Society”
in the Social Studies Curriculum

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1	Rationale for this study	1
1.2	Views of the Researcher	3
1.3	Research Objectives	4
1.4	Summary	6

Chapter 2- Literature Review: Essential Learning about New Zealand Society

2.1	The Importance of ELANZS in Developing Identity and Belonging	7
2.2	Implementation of “Essential Learning about New Zealand Society”	9
2.3	Barriers to Implementation of ELANZS	11
2.4	Social Constructivist Views of Learning - Implications for ELANZS	13
2.5	Summary	15

Chapter 3 - Methodology and Methods

3.1	Historical Methodology	16
3.2	Case Study: Methodology	16
3.3	Case Study: Justification For Use in this Study	18
3.4	Case Study: Possible Limitations	19
3.5	Data Collection and Methods	21
3.6	Data Analysis	24
3.7	Ethical Considerations	26
3.8	Research Design	29
3.9	Summary	30

Chapter 4 – An Historical View of the Social Studies Curriculum

4.1	Contextual Influences	31
4.2	Traditional Academic Disciplines Versus Social Studies	34
4.3	The Place of New Zealand in Social Studies	36

4.4	Controversy and Debate	40
4.5	Curriculum Diffusion	42
4.6	Summary	43
Chapter 5 – The Trouble with ELANZS		
5.1	A Lack of Knowledge about New Zealand Society	45
5.2	The Importance of Studying about New Zealand	47
5.3	The Teaching of ELANZS	48
5.4	Barriers to Implementing ELANZS	55
5.5	Summary	57
Chapter 6 – Discussion		
6.1	Developing a Knowledge Base about New Zealand Society	59
6.2	Valuing Learning about New Zealand	63
6.3	Supporting the Teaching of ELANZS	64
6.4	Constraining Factors for Implementing ELANZS	69
6.5	Summary	72
Chapter 7 - Providing a Place for ELANZS		
7.1	A Planning Model	73
7.2	Main Ideas Underpinning the ELANZS Statements	75
7.3	Possible Contexts	78
7.4	Summary	82
Chapter 8 - Conclusion and Recommendations		
8.1	Key Findings and Conclusions	83
8.2	Future Research	86
8.4	Conclusion	87

List of Illustrations

Fig 4.1	Social Studies Curricula - A timeline	34
Table 5.1	Coverage of ELANZS	52
Table 7.1	ELANZS Planning Model	76
Table 7.2	Main Ideas	77
Table 7.3	Possible Contexts for ELANZS Statements	80

Appendices

Appendix 1	Learning about New Zealand	90
Appendix 2	Summary of Essential Learning about New Zealand Society	91
Appendix 3	Information Letter for Teacher Participants	92
Appendix 4	Information Letter for Child Participants	93
Appendix 5	Interview Transcript from Teacher Interview	95
Appendix 6	Interview Transcript from Child Interview	102

References

105

Chapter One

Introduction

While working with *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum (SSNZC)* (Ministry of Education, 1997), the researcher questioned the Essential Learning about New Zealand Society (ELANZS) component of Social Studies. A brief inquiry into why these components were chosen and how they were to be used revealed little supportive research. However, there is evidence this area of the Social Studies curriculum is of concern to teachers (Aitken, 2001; Hunter, 1999; Learning Enhancement Associates, 1999). This chapter will firstly consider the rationale for this investigation into ELANZS. Secondly, it will give an outline of the viewpoints of the researcher and thirdly, it will conclude with the objectives for this study.

1.1 Rationale for this study

Previous studies have shown that New Zealand children have limited knowledge about New Zealand society (Keen, 1977; Low-Bear, 1986; Simon, 1992). In 1997, the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) found a substantial proportion of Year Eight students had major gaps in their knowledge about New Zealand society (Flockton & Crooks, 1998). In 2001, the NEMP again found aspects of children's ELANZS knowledge to be lacking. NEMP reported that children at both Year Four and Year Eight showed quite limited knowledge and understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi and early New Zealand history which are clearly aspects of the ELANZS learning which has been set out in *SSNZC* (Flockton & Crooks, 2002). The need for and extent to which children should possess knowledge about New Zealand society is contested today and has been contested throughout the development of various Social Studies curricula in New Zealand. However, under *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 1993a) knowledge about New Zealand society is designated as a key component of Social Studies education.

The view expressed in the Social Studies curriculum statement states that learning about New Zealand is "essential" (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 23). The rationale expressed for studying New Zealand through the curriculum statement is multi-faceted. The document tells us that learning about New Zealand is important for children's

development of a sense of belonging when it says; “It is important that all New Zealand students understand their own society and environment and develop a sense of belonging to their community and their nation” (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 20). Included in this rationale is the conviction that children should develop a sense of their national identity through building their “knowledge of their history, their land, and their society” (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 5). The need for students to have “knowledge about events, places and people of significance to New Zealand” (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 20) is emphasised as is the need to learn about New Zealand through studying both contemporary and historical New Zealand topics.

The aim of Social Studies education is to enable “young people to take their place in today’s complex world as informed, competent and responsible citizens” (Barr, Graham, Hunter, Keown & McGee, 1997, p. 2). This aim implies that children will have an understanding of their own country as well as the wider world. In order for children to participate in their country they will need to have an understanding of the organisation and heritage of their society. Barr et. al. (1997) state that “a knowledge of the history of our nation is an essential foundation for citizenship” (p. 51). Historical knowledge of the nation is not unique to New Zealand Social Studies. It is common for Social Studies curricula to identify in some way the importance of learning about the student’s country of residence. In Australia, the Victoria Studies of Society and Environment Curriculum (Australia’s equivalent to Social Studies in New Zealand) states that “studies of society and environment provide a framework for developing student knowledge of Australian society past and present” (Board of Studies, 2000, p. 5). This document also names knowledge of “Australia and all its peoples” as one of six areas of conceptual knowledge which are pursued through Studies of Society and Environment.

Despite curriculum writers specifically including a list of ‘essential’ learning to ensure the teaching and learning of New Zealand knowledge and understandings, the ELANZS component has been criticised as poorly implemented in schools (Hunter, 1999). The ELANZS statements are included in the Social Studies curriculum in a way that has been problematic for teachers. The ELANZS requirement is excluded from a list in *SSNZC* which outlines the “general considerations for programme planning” (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 26). This exclusion makes the ELANZS statements likely to be

overlooked by schools and teachers who see the statements as an 'extra' rather than a 'requirement' despite the learning being labelled as "essential". Aitken (2001) concludes that the intention of the ELANZS statement was possibly as a point of reference and guide for teachers and students. However, the New Zealand topics or units teachers choose to teach are more likely to be guided by the achievement objectives and available resources rather than the ELANZS statements due to a number of factors, not least of all being the confused structure in which ELANZS is listed.

The ELANZS statements may be seen as secondary in importance to the more prescriptive achievement objectives and the contexts listed in school schemes. Hunter (1999) suggests that the placement of ELANZS statements outside of the achievement objectives invites interpretation difficulties. The ELANZS requirements are listed in such a way that they are not prescriptive or level specific, which may mean they will be overlooked by those who are not confident or skilful in the teaching of Social Studies. A research project undertaken by Learning Enhancement Associates (1999), however, found that all aspects of the ELANZS statements could be taught at any achievement level.

The problematic nature of the ELANZS statements has led to other research and professional development opportunities being conducted. In 2002, the Wellington Area Social Studies Association held a half day programme for teachers based around the ELANZS statements and their implementation. This day was an attempt to provide direction for teachers' use of the ELANZS component. A Ministry of Education professional development contract initiative is also in progress on the inclusion of ELANZS statements in Social Studies programmes. These current initiatives highlight the relevance and timely contribution of the present research to a wider field of research within the field of New Zealand Social Studies.

1.2 Views of the Researcher

I have selected this topic for research as I believe that learning about New Zealand is an important aspect for a balanced education of New Zealand children. I believe that learning about New Zealand contributes to a student's sense of belonging and identity. Learning about our shared past also helps students understand contemporary issues and

those which may arise in the future. I agree with the writers of *SSNZC* that the delivery of the ELANZS statements is “essential” learning as the only way for New Zealand citizens to understand their society is to be educated about their common and diverse heritage.

I had limited experience studying New Zealand society in my schooling until I chose to take up the subject of History at Year 13 level. My teacher had chosen the New Zealand stream, and the year was spent looking at various aspects of New Zealand society including early contact, race relations, political change and economic change. This experience whet my appetite for studying about New Zealand society and I enjoyed extending my personal knowledge base in this area. I followed this area of interest by incorporating optional Social Studies papers into my Bachelor of Education degree.

Through my experience as a student teacher I observed that learning about New Zealand was an area often neglected by teachers. As a tutor of Social Studies at Massey University College of Education, I found the curriculum structure confusing in that the ELANZS statements stand alone from prescriptive objectives. This disjointed nature led student teachers to ignore this component in their planning and teaching. In schools, I have observed ELANZS statements being check-listed in the planning process rather than being used to inform the planning or teaching in any way. In my role as a designer of units for Social Studies Online, I have personally found it difficult to integrate the ELANZS component of the curriculum when planning for Social Studies. These experiences have combined to motivate this research into understanding the role of the ELANZS statements. Such research is a foundation to improve the inclusion of the ELANZS component.

1.3 Research Objectives

The aim of this research is to investigate, firstly, how and why a focus on New Zealand within the Social Studies curriculum has been developed through previous Social Studies curricula leading up to *SSNZC*. Secondly, this research aims to investigate the extent to which a focus on New Zealand is put into practice in the Social Studies programme of a New Zealand Intermediate School. Finally, strategies are suggested to

support teachers to effectively implement ELANZS in their Social Studies programmes. This objective highlights the investigation of the following questions:

Phase One: Historical Research

- In what ways has New Zealand content been included in past Social Studies curricula?
- How has the inclusion of New Zealand contents been problematic?
How has the nature of knowledge about New Zealand changed?
How has the social, economic and political context influenced how New Zealand content is included in curriculum documents?

Phase Two: Case Study Research

- How is New Zealand content, within Social Studies, currently included in practice in an intermediate school setting?
What do teachers know about the ELANZS component of the Social Studies curriculum?
How do teachers incorporate the ELANZS requirement into their Social Studies teaching?
How important do teachers and students perceive studies about New Zealand, within Social Studies, to be?
What are students' perceptions of New Zealand studies included into their school programme?
- What are the barriers to teaching New Zealand content within Social Studies?
What barriers do teachers identify for including ELANZS within their Social Studies programme?
- How can the teaching of ELANZS in New Zealand schools be improved?

The researcher will examine the place of ELANZS in teachers' planning by undertaking a case study in one school. The study will investigate specifically how teachers within this school are using the ELANZS component in their planning and how this carries through into their teaching. In addition it will examine student perceptions of learning about New Zealand society. This case study will identify the importance and place of ELANZS at the research site along with the tensions and difficulties found in its implementation. The evidence amassed from this study strongly suggest that there is a need to improve the teaching and learning of the ELANZS component. The conclusions drawn from the study will be presented for teachers and policy makers to consider. It is also envisaged this research will serve as a catalyst for further research in this field.

1.4 Summary

This introduction has outlined the key tensions found with the structure and place of the ELANZS statements in *SSNZC*. The need for research to ascertain the nature of these tensions and how they impact upon the implementation phase has been highlighted. The following chapter will give a literature review into ELANZS and the tensions found with this component.