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HISTORY THE YOUNG SHOULD LEARN?

To what extent did the teaching of History in New Zealand post-primary schools,
measured by examination questions, their content, and teacher activity,
reflect changes in New Zealand between 1945 and 1988?

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ABSTRACT

The study of History in New Zealand post-primary schools between 1945 and 1988 covers a period of changes in national life demographically, socially, politically, economically, and especially in regard to views on Maori/Pakeha relations. Whether those changes were reflected in the way History was taught and examined is considered through analysis of official and local syllabuses and examination questions.

In order to provide a setting for the analysis, reasons for teaching the subject are considered, together with any constraints placed upon that teaching by influences of politicians and parents outside the classroom. The way in which students absorb history from their parents, their peers, the media, and their community, as well as being taught it in the classroom, is considered in order to provide a benchmark for the relevance of History as a subject. In particular, as fresh interpretations of the past, together with developing controversies over Maori/Pakeha relations, the place of the Treaty of Waitangi, the role of women in society, and other community concerns appear, the question arises as to whether these became part of History as a subject.

Attention is given to the way in which the new subject, 'Social Studies' was accepted by teachers, parents, schools and politicians, and how it introduced students to History. External examinations provide a source for assessing their connection with societal changes and concerns. In particular how long did it take, if at all, for Maori/Pakeha relations as debated in society to be included in questions asked in the examinations?

Former teachers provide information as to teaching methods, the way changes were incorporated in local curriculum, and resources used. An assessment is made of student reaction to Social Studies and History as classroom subjects. Although the study concentrates on the period between 1945 and 1988, the exercise concludes with a brief review of the Social Studies/History curriculum since 1988 noting continuity or otherwise from the period studied.