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Spiritual Well-being / Taha Wairua

in

New Zealand State Schools

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Abstract

“Spirituality” is a relatively new concept in state education. This research sets out to help clarify what that term is taken to mean in the current educational context.

The *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (1993) appears to recognise spirituality as an inter-connected element of the whole person. The *Health and Physical Education Curriculum* (1999), in particular, defines spiritual well-being in an inclusive and internationally comparable way, covering such matters as attitudes and values, meaning and purpose, self-awareness/identity, while for some, retaining links with the transcendent.

“Spirituality” as a broad and flexible construct is shown to be evolving. Spirituality has traditionally been tied to religious concepts. Today, however, it has also expanded to the secular environment.

The inclusion of the spiritual dimension in state education is responded to in this research, (i) by examining the applicable New Zealand education history, (ii) by examining the evolution of the definition of spirituality, (iii) by analysing the relevant government documents to show where spirituality is situated, and, (iv) by making some recommendations about how to address spirituality in state schools, including a report on a trial unit.

The literature review reflects national curriculum documents which recognise the spiritual needs of students. The research suggests spiritual literacy will go some way to address the increasing pressures on young people and reduce dysfunctional responses to which many young people resort.

This research concludes that spirituality is being increasingly recognised at all levels of society. Such acknowledgment may drive education policy and practice to implement teaching and learning programmes which attend to the whole person.

It recommends a systematic approach to meet the spiritual needs of students and the wider school community. A broad framework is suggested, so as to make it easier for individual schools to address spirituality at all levels of their unique communities.

Overall, this research affirms spirituality as an essential dimension of well-being which must be considered at all levels of state education.

It is hoped that this research may be used as a practical tool or discussion document to assist in the development of school and community spiritual well-being.

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