EDUCATIONAL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES : THE CASE OF THE COOK ISLANDS

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This article discusses the aims and objectives of the education system of the Cook Islands as stated in the Cook Islands Education Policy Statement - a 16 page booklet published by the Cook Islands Education Department in 1975. These aims are:

- to provide and maintain a high quality education system which shall be appropriate to and in keeping with the needs, resources and environment of the Cook Islands for the purpose of meeting the education and manpower needs of our people;

- to cultivate all aspects of the life of our people either individually or as a whole, by propagating the culture of the Cook Islands, and by meeting the developmental needs of our country.

There are several sets of objectives listed in this Cook Islands Education Policy Statement booklet for all levels of education from Pre-school through to Tertiary. Three of the five objectives stated for secondary schools are discussed in detail in order to illustrate the nature of some of these objectives. These are:

- to provide an annual certification system for the assessment of individual students at the end of the 5th Form year and to establish that this certificate is the standard minimum qualification required by our secondary education system;

- to further promote and foster cultural activities and to instil in our children, pride in themselves as members of a race and people;

- to further promote and foster sports and the spirit of competition among our children.

(Cook Islands Education Department, 1975)
In the The Organization Goal, Etzioni describes how goals for some organizations are formally set by many, or a few people, but in practice goals of some organizations are formally set for many, by a few people (Etzioni, 1968). In practice, goals are often set in a complicated power play involving various individuals and groups within, and without, the organization. Etzioni goes on to say that organizational departments or divisions, personalities and environmental forces are factors that often play prominent roles in the process of determining goals for an organization.

I think that the aims and objectives of the Cook Islands education system have been formulated largely under the influence of the factors mentioned by Etzioni. Albert Henry, the leader of the ruling political party at the time, had a charismatic personality. It is likely that other members of his party - including the Minister of Education under whose guidance the 1975 education policy was produced - would have had strong tendencies to support his nationalistic ideas, such as the notion of local certification alongside the New Zealand School Certificate system, and the objectives associated with racial pride, etc. In the Etzionian sense, the articulated aims and objectives in the Cook Islands Education Policy Statement appear to have been the result of collaboration by various interest groups from within, as well as from without the education department, with the interest groups whose members belonged to the then ruling political party, being the more dominant ones.

Barry and Tye suggest that the aims of education should be the overall philosophy for an organisation and that the objectives should be the leading statements to operationalise the philosophy. They define 'Aims' as being the "strategic concepts and principles" and the objectives as being the "immediate tactical targets according to the varying circumstances". Furthermore, they state that "our objectives must be determined by resources, opportunities, circumstances and priorities" (Barry and Tye, 1975).

The aims proposed by the Cook Islands Education Department, appear to be in accordance with the general philosophy of the Cook Islands Party in their political party's manifesto. However, the objectives in the Cook Islands Education Policy Statement do not have accompanying aims stating the principles, or the philosophy, underlying such objectives. For example, take the objective "to further pride in themselves as members of a race and people". In the Cook Islands Education Policy
Statement, this should have been accompanied by an aim explaining why cultural activities and racial pride ought to be promoted. Even so on the first page of this policy statement, which was ‘government aims and philosophy’ written along the top, one cannot find one aim sufficiently precise or carefully worded. The wording of the existing objectives in the Cook Islands Education Policy Statement can be greatly improved to make better sense. In the objective quoted earlier, concerning cultural activities for example, the word “and” should be replaced by the words “in order to” so that the concepts are logically connected.

The process involved in formulating aims and objectives in any education system has its strengths, as well as weaknesses. One important aspect of this process is the selection of people to make decisions about the aims and objectives. According to Dr. J. Williams, the Minister of Health and Education at the time, the Cook Islands Education Policy Statement is the product of the deliberations of several teachers and members of the community over a period of three years (See the Foreword of the Cook Islands Education Policy Statement). However, the question one might ask of the process leading to the Statement is: “How representative are the proposed aims in terms of beliefs and hopes of the total population of the Cook Islands?”

In order to ensure wide acceptance of the philosophy to be formulated, it may not be wise to restrict members of the working team to those politicians or educational administrators in power. The people appointed and the ideas included in the aims, I suggest, should be as representative as possible of the country’s total population. This, I suggest is an important aspect of educational planning.

Another aspect in the formulation of educational aims is the exclusive use of the English language as the medium for expressing the aims and objectives. This is a pity as the majority of the adult population speak and/or read only Maori. The aims and objectives in the Cook Islands Education Policy Statement should have been translated into the vernacular language in order to extend the reading audience to the older members of the population, who can read Maori, but not English.

To summarise then, the process of the formulation of a philosophy of education, as contained in the 1975 Policy Statement, is too heavily influenced by a small, but dominant group of people such as the ruling political party, members of parliament and the so called ‘experts’ of
education. What is needed, therefore, is a comprehensive philosophical statement upon which the education aims of the Cook Islands can be based. Those who decide these matters need to form a representative body of the Cook Islands population for these aims must be sound educational goals and not just political gimmicks. If the Cook Islands Education Department can find a way of bringing this about, then the Cook Islands Education Policy Statement will prove to be beneficial for the majority of people in the Cook Islands, and not just another document formulated at the whims of some politicians in order to satisfy their own political ends.

REFERENCES


Cook Islands Education Department 1975) Cook Islands Education Policy Statement: Rarotonga