

# OPINION: Charmaine Pountney



*Charmaine Pountney continues to be a leading educator in this country. She has wide experience in schooling and education, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. She writes frequently and is often quoted in the national media.*

*“Curriculum specialists... will be the most prized of all educators...”*

The other day I was reading Hilda Taba's *Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice*, the sacred text for University courses for curriculum issues thirty years ago. It still could be the curriculum developer's bible, although it would need a decent additional dollop of critical theory to raise its respectability in some circles.

There has been enormous effort during those thirty years to develop New Zealand school curricula in ways which apply the principles developed by Hilda Taba and others, which reconcile the plurality of demands which New Zealand society places on schools.

Unfortunately, the very concept of a school curriculum is, I believe, fatally flawed. The whole idea of cooping up children of a similar age in groups of twenty or thirty, with only one or two adults helpers, is educationally absurd. No matter how student-centred a curriculum may claim to be, it is still usually a structure imposed on such an arbitrary cohort of students. The only curriculum which will genuinely help a child to become a passionate life-long learner is a personally chosen curriculum, relevant to immediate and acknowledged learning needs.

I'd like to see current school curricula replaced by student learning portfolios, with training sessions for parents and students together on choosing how to learn, and what, and where from. National curriculum statements will become national databases, readily updated, of current knowledge, skills and appropriate evaluation procedures, to which students, parents and teachers can have access at any time. Schools will become genuine multi-age community learning centres, rich in people as well as resources.

Curriculum specialists - those who truly understand how to evaluate and select knowledge, skills, learning processes, resources and assessment techniques - will be the most prized of all educators, employed by communities to help individuals and groups of all ages to choose and progress along their personal learning paths.

Actually, it isn't a question of whether these changes will take place, but how quickly. Our lives depend upon it.