



## Editorial – Who was New Zealand’s Most Prolific Writer of Progressive Education Literature, Now Unknown Today?

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*One of the key goals of a progressive school is to have a co-operative society for the school, pupils and staff, ‘where the development of such things as self-activity, the scientific attitude, the creative mind, and self-discipline have an infinitely greater chance of real success’, and then extend this ideal to the home, community, nation and the world.<sup>1</sup>*

There was one educator who was by far the most prolific New Zealand writer of progressive education literature – Reverend Dr William Morton Ryburn MA (Otago) DLitt (NZ) OBE (1895-1986).<sup>2</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, Ryburn is virtually unheard of in New Zealand (at least in the area of education) while his work is still cited and used in university and teacher training courses abroad today. His books published by Oxford University Press alone include *The Progressive School*, *The Principles of Teaching*, *The Organisation of Schools*, *Play Way Suggestions* and *Introduction to Educational Psychology*.

Morton [as he was generally called] Ryburn was born in Wellington in 1895. He attended the Presbyterian seminary (Theological Hall, Knox College, 1921-22) and the University of Otago, achieving academically with high distinction and this background cemented his future directions as a missionary. In 1921, Morton formally applied to become a missionary and he listed in his application that he had studied Latin, French, Greek and Persian languages and that he had read widely, including books on education, classics, history, philosophy, social questions, and theology. In August 1922, Morton was ordained and selected by the Auckland Presbytery for a position in the Punjab Mission of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. The following month he married Hilda May Tizard and in October, the Ryburns sailed for India.

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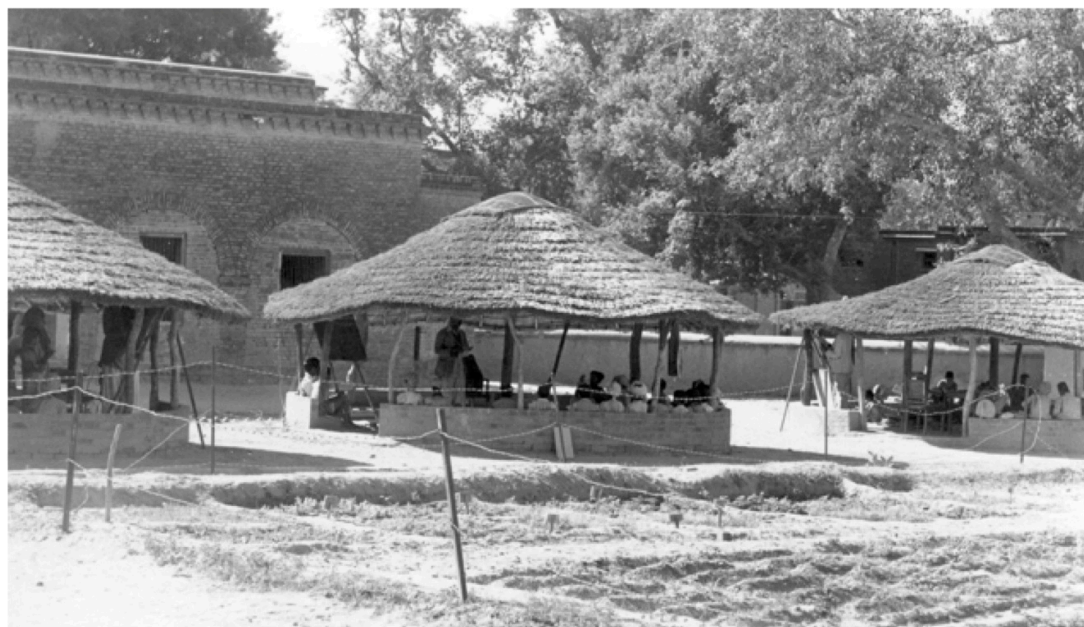
<sup>1</sup> Ryburn, W. M. (1938). *The progressive school: A Study in methods of education and teaching*. London: Oxford University Press; p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> The Ryburn name might sound familiar to some. Reverend Ryburn came from a large family that comprised several Presbyterian ministers and a number of cousins, most well-known being Rev. Hubert James Ryburn who was Master of Knox College, Dunedin (1941-1964), and later Chancellor of the University of Otago (1955-1970).



**Photograph 1.** Reverend William Morton and Hilda May Ryburn<sup>3</sup>

Morton was appointed Principal of the Kharar Christian Boy's High School (Punjab, India) in late 1923. Under Morton's leadership from 1923 until 1956, the school roll expanded from 270 boys to over 1,000 pupils, new school buildings were built (including hostels for boys and girls and an industrial wing), Indian teachers were trained and employed, he started a farm, progressive teaching approaches were introduced, and Morton gradually expanded the school's curriculum to include not only academic work but manual and practical training.



**Photograph 2.** Open Air Classrooms, Christian Boys' School, Kharar<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Photograph P-A13.1-2; Presbyterian Archives Research Centre, Knox College, Dunedin.

<sup>4</sup> Photograph P-A8.58-207; Presbyterian Archives Research Centre, Knox College, Dunedin.

Morton introduced an integrated curriculum that combined manual and practical training with academic work. He expanded the 'hands-on' aspects of the curriculum to include such areas as blacksmithing, book-binding, carpentry, clay modelling, farm work, leather work, motor mechanics, tailoring and weaving. In doing so, the Christian Boys' School became much more like a Technical High School where the pupils learnt more than just the academic skills to work in clerical administration and was reminiscent of the types of innovations being carried out in New Zealand at Rangiora High School by James Strachan and Feilding Agricultural High School by L G Wild. For example, a farm was established 'to acquaint the students, [the] majority of whose parents owned land, with scientific methods of agriculture, besides, creating in their hearts a love for agriculture'<sup>5</sup> Morton regarded many of these activities as being critically important, 'because they teach skill of hand, and equip a child for practical living, but also because they are creative, both intellectually and spiritually'.<sup>6</sup>



**Photograph 3.** Clay Modelling, Christian Boys' School, Kharar<sup>7</sup>

Morton also introduced progressive teaching approaches consistent with Christian values. He argued that children needed to learn to cooperate with one another, to be tolerant of others, to be truthful, to be self-reliant, independent, to show initiative and take action, and contribute to society. To achieve this, he put in place a range of progressive approaches including a modified Dalton Plan where pupils are required to work and think independently, the Project Method where

<sup>5</sup> Retirement tribute titled, 'My Teacher, Benefactor and Friend Retires' by A. M. Barnabus (a pupil of Morton's from early 1920s who then became a teacher at the school in 1935) dated 17 March 1959; PCARC, GAO154, Overseas Missions Committee, Folder 1959|08.

<sup>6</sup> McDiarmid, D. N., & Quartermain, L. B. (1960). *A tribute to Morton Ryburn*. Wellington: Bible Class Union of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.

<sup>7</sup> Photograph P-A13.34-122; Presbyterian Archives Research Centre, Knox College, Dunedin.

pupils work together to achieve a project, and group discussion in classes where 'the greatest freedom' was encouraged.

By 1929, Morton had also implemented school-wide self-government. This involved class and school meetings, the free election of pupil representatives, the development of a constitution by the pupils, and pupils were responsible for the organisation of games, cleanliness issues, aspects of discipline and facilitating school meetings and discussions. As one pupil later noted of Morton's experiments:

You introduced a new system of education ... Your experiments with new methods of teaching bore early fruit ... you started your experiment of Self-Govt. in the school, and it was through your inexhaustible patience and invincible determination that the system was a success ... It was a practical lesson to them [the boys] in democracy.<sup>8</sup>



**Photograph 4.** Self-government. Meeting of the Committee, Christian Boys' School, Kharar<sup>9</sup>

Morton Ryburn's writing and publishing over forty years reflected his evangelical aspirations and from the 1930s, his growing interest in progressive education in order to support these ends. He wrote continuously and published more than sixty books and booklets as well as numerous newspaper and magazine articles and pamphlets (and was the editor of several journals). In

<sup>8</sup> Kharar Christian High School Old Boys' Association (1989). *Rev. Dr. William Morton Ryburn, 1896-1986*. Kharar, India: Kharar Christian High School Old Boys' Association; p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Photograph P-A12.50-113; Presbyterian Archives Research Centre, Knox College, Dunedin.



addition, he established the Masha'l Press where pupils could be trained for the printing trade and where evangelical and educational material was reproduced cheaply for the local and wider community. Some of his writing is in Urdu and he also spoke the Hindustani language unflinchingly.<sup>10</sup>

A brief examination of one of his progressive books provides an indication of the breadth and fervency of his progressive views. *The Progressive School: A Study in Methods of Education and Teaching* was published by Oxford University Press in 1938 and is a 318 page theoretical and practical discussion of progressive education. The book includes chapters on Individual Work, The Project Method, The Play Way, Freedom in School, Developing the Creative Mind, as well as a broader liberal discussion of the place of the school in the home, community, nation and the world. It ends with a consideration of the importance of handicrafts for developing creativity and a critique of examinations. Morton based the book on his experiments at the school. He outlined that the key goals of a progressive school included:

- 1) to develop a creative and scientific mind (p. 4);
- 2) to produce prophets who are prepared to 'stand for the forces of spirit against the powers of materialism' (p. 4);
- 3) to produce honest sceptics who are able to challenge 'conformity and orthodoxy' (p. 6);
- 4) to give loyalty to the State, not blind loyalty but the loyalty of an enlightened conscience who can make decisions for themselves (p. 9);
- 5) to develop pupil's own ideals so that they can be forward-looking and forward-thinking and can display a 'divine discontent' (p. 10);
- 6) to give to a pupil 'an understand of the principles of social progress ... [so that they] can play a part in hastening the reconstruction of our world society' (p. 10);
- 7) to be child-centred, and not subject-centred, such that the whole individual is developed in body, mind and spirit; and,
- 8) to develop the creative mind through 'freedom for self-development and freedom for activity ... because life is creation and creation is essentially activity' (p. 23).<sup>11</sup>

Later in March 1936, Ryburn and his family left India for their second eighteen-month furlough since joining the Punjab Mission in 1923 and arrived in Auckland in April. Morton undertook a very demanding schedule of duties for the Church and also found time to give a number of radio broadcasts from Auckland on 1YA in 1936 and 1937, including live broadcasts as a preacher, and prepared talks on a range of topics. Dr C E Beeby (then, Director of NZCER) formally invited him to the New Education Fellowship (NEF) Conference 1937 that was being held in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Barely a month after attending the Conference, the Ryburn family left Auckland and returned to the Mission at Punjab.

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<sup>10</sup> Kharar Christian High School Old Boys' Association (1989). *Rev. Dr. William Morton Ryburn, 1896-1986*. Kharar, India: Kharar Christian High School Old Boys' Association; p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ryburn, W. M. (1938). *The progressive school: A Study in methods of education and teaching*. London: Oxford University Press; Preface.

After the NEF Conference, four of the world-renown speakers who attended embarked on a gruelling three-month trip around India to observe progressive education initiatives and to support the growth of the NEF in the country. Over the course of their tour, Laurin Zilliacus (the Chairman of the NEF), Ernest Salter Davies (the Director of Education for Kent), the renown Swiss educator Pierre Bovet (the Professor of Pedagogy at the University of Geneva, the Director of the J J Rousseau Institute for Educational Sciences), and G T Hankin (representative of the English Board of Education) travelled to all areas of India, and met with Nehru, Tagore and Gandhi (leaders of the Indian Nationalist Movement) and also visited Morton's Christian Boys' School in Kharar. Zilliacus wrote about Morton's school that,

I am grateful ... for having been given this contact with education in its best sense in the heart of the countryside. I have seen a happy school and an active school where education is in touch with everyday reality as well as being inspired by a vision above the ordinary.<sup>12</sup>

Some six years later in 1946, Morton published a second major progressive text – *Creative Education: A Study in Educating for Democracy in India* – this time through Longmans. This 384 page text built on Morton's progressive ideas outlined earlier in *The Progressive School* and was divided into the following main sections: The Meaning of Creative Education (including what is creative education and the democratic citizen), Education and Society, The School as a Community, The School and the Child, The Creative Teacher, Creative Organisation (including creative administration, the curriculum, examinations and experimenting), and Religion in Education. The book gained him a Doctor of Literature degree from the University of New Zealand in 1948.

Morton Ryburn wrote continuously and published more than sixty books and booklets as well as numerous newspaper and magazine articles and pamphlets (and was the editor of several journals). His writing was based on the progressive experiments that he was carrying out at the Christian Boys' School in Kharar. However, his contribution to education in New Zealand is hard to calculate though his contribution to education in India was significant and widely acknowledged. Now unknown (at least in educational circles), Reverend Ryburn was the most prolific New Zealand writer of progressive education texts, most of which are now unavailable in the main tertiary libraries of New Zealand.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the archives, library and staff of the Presbyterian Archives Research Centre, Knox College, Dunedin in the writing of this editorial.

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<sup>12</sup> *The Outlook*, 25 January 1939, p. 9.