

Contextualising *Te Reo Kori* in the Health and Physical Education curriculum

D. George Salter

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During the writing of the Draft Curriculum, pressures were brought to bear by groups representing particular health interests, and by the sport lobby. The subsequent foregrounding of *Education through Sport* and backgrounding of *Te Reo Kori* in the document has political and moral implications both for teachers and for the society we live in. This article provides some critical insights into the particular socio-political-cultural context within which physical education is situated.

The reform of New Zealand physical education

The recent release of the Draft Health and Physical Education Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1997), reflects a universal trend towards restructuring the education systems of Western societies. Like other countries, New Zealand has experienced sweeping economic and social changes in recent years, associated with the promotion of individual responsibility, reduction of state spending, reduction of labour costs, encouragement of competition and the promotion of increased productivity (Lauder, 1987). Implementation of the Draft Curriculum, especially the merging of two previously separate subject areas, has raised many issues for teachers and obliged them to re-examine the purposes, selection of content and focus of that content in physical education, and also the social contributions that both health and physical education might make within the total school curriculum.

These changes in the curriculum

itself, corresponding new assessment procedures and the implementation of Unit Standards at the senior secondary level, have meant that physical education teachers are experiencing increasing levels of anxiety and frustration. Many are confused over the “true” nature and purposes of the subject, and feel threatened rather than empowered by the new reforms. Whether physical education is justified by its contribution to health and well-being, or by its contribution to physical activity and sport, for example, is just one aspect of the debate which teachers are currently coming to terms with (Jefferies and Ussher, 1996; p. 26; Taggart,

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Alexander and Taggart, 1993; p. 21). Physical education itself is in the process of being redefined in New Zealand to accommodate changing constructions of sport, leisure and health in society, and teachers do not necessarily find it easy to understand the implications of these changes for their daily practices. Below, I explore some implications of the way some elements of the curriculum have been foregrounded, at the expense of others.

What shapes physical education in New Zealand?

In most Western societies there is likely to be general agreement about the goals of physical educa-



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tion, and the sorts of activities which should form the basis of the programme in schools. The daily physical education programme of Australia, for example, is more similar to than it is different from that of New Zealand. Content for lower primary levels in New Zealand has been predominantly individual, self-directed, exploratory and creative, with the intention that students learn basic skills and concepts which are subsequently built upon (Salter, 1995; p.208). The activities taught serve as a vehicle for achieving the broader aims of the physical education lesson, rather than as an end in themselves. Secondary students are provided with flexible curriculum offerings, and increased specialisation opportunities in their senior years.

While this description is likely to sit comfortably with most teachers, it should be recognised that what we understand and practise as physical education is socially constructed. Physical education is located within and is legitimated by a number of other practices which constitute society.

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Those practices are embedded, for example, in physical culture (Evans and Davies, 1988), in the physical fitness movement (Kirk and Colquhoun, 1989), in sport (Kirk, 1992), and in a new health consciousness (Tinning and Fitzclarence, 1992). Since society is dynamic rather than static in nature, what constitutes physical education is constantly being contested and re-ordered to reflect the dominant voices of interest groups, many of whom come from outside education (Goodson, 1983; Brooker and Macdonald, 1993).

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number of groups representing particular health interests, and not surprisingly, by the sport lobby. This phenomenon was also observed by Colquhoun (1994), in the Australian context. There has been pressure from many to include sport as a compulsory part of the curriculum in New Zealand schools, and certainly the inclusion of *Education through Sport* as one of the six “key areas of learning” of the Draft Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1997; p.32), foregrounds its importance. At the same time, *Te Reo Kori* (a Māori dimension of movement) was deleted as one of the “key areas of learning”, between the time of the curriculum writers presenting their final version to the Ministry, and the distribution of the document to schools. As Salter (1998; p.13) suggests:

The fact that te reo kori has been marginalised is a reflection of what forms of knowledge and culture are considered of value, and by whom, and who controls the processes of curriculum development in New Zealand.

I explore the importance of this marginalisation below.

Te reo kori and hauora

A unique feature of New Zealand society is our growing commitment to biculturalism, as we progress towards becoming a multicultural society. Certainly in education there has been real effort made to embrace *Taha Māori* (a Māori dimension considered appropriate for all students), and this was demonstrated by the

inclusion of *te reo kori* in the 1987 physical education syllabus (Ministry of Education, 1987). While games and dances of the Māori have featured in some physical education programmes for a number of years (Salter, 1995; p.204), physical education was the first curriculum area to successfully identify a Māori dimension in the promotion of cultural identity (Walker, 1995; p.19). This same commitment to biculturalism was also seen in the efforts made to integrate both Māori and Western perspectives of health in the construction of the Draft Curriculum.

To Māori, health is much more than just a physical dimension. *Te Taha Wairua* (the spiritual), *Te Taha Hinengaro* (intellectual and psychological) and *Te Taha Whānau* (the family) contribute equally with *Te Taha Tinana* (the physical) in creating the truly healthy person (Durie, 1994). This view is referred to as *ngā tapa whā* (the four cornerstones of health), and describes the four strands of learning that Māori aspire to in achieving *hauora* (total health and well-being). This understanding is a key concept underpinning the Draft Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1997; p.9).

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The place of *te reo kori* in physical education

The relegation of *te reo kori* from its position as a key area of learning in the Draft Curriculum has important implications for teachers and students. Schools are required to teach content from each of the key areas of learning, and its relegation is likely to result in many teachers affording it a low status, and possibly avoiding teaching it at all (Salter, 1998; p.#). The

foregrounding of sport and backgrounding of *te reo kori* in the Draft Curriculum causes concern about the way in which particular forms of culture are valued sufficiently to be transmitted through the New Zealand system of schooling. While Metge (1990; p.20) describes schools as institutions of enculturation, engaged in the transmission of selected aspects of a selected culture [my emphasis], Vercoe (1997; p.42) further suggests that there has been a progressive “watering down” of the vitality of Māori knowledge, under the weight of powerful hegemonic forces.

The marginalisation of *te reo kori* in the Draft Curriculum contradicts the expressed intentions of the document with regard to cultural equity, and disadvantages both Māori and non-Māori. *Te reo kori* has value for all students regardless of cultural origins, since as well as providing Māori students with opportunities to affirm identity, it is also the right of non-Māori students to access the knowledge base of the *tangata whenua* (indigenous people). Inclusion of *te reo kori* in the physical education curriculum has provided opportunities for schools to address their responsibilities in providing *Taha Māori*, as suggested by Walker (1995; p.21), and as clearly specified in the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993; p.7). That *te reo kori* could be so easily marginalised by educationists and policy-makers at the planning level is cause for concern, but it is equally clear that the same process might occur at the level of implementation, as I explore below.

Pedagogy for *te reo kori* in physical education

Sport and physically vigorous recreational activity have traditionally been valued in New Zealand as essential constructs of national identity, and this has defined and validated both content and pedagogy in school physical education (Salter, 1996; p.1). The prevailing pedagogy is clearly what Tinning (1991) describes as “performance pedagogy”, in which teachers are



concerned with technical efficiency, control, management, instructional clarity and the achievement of

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measurable (though not necessarily “worthwhile” from other pedagogical

cal perspectives) objectives. They are comfortable using direct instructional approaches, and transmitting information and skills of content areas in which they feel competent (Salter, 1991; p.124). In this approach, there is little concern paid to student voice, to social justice, or to notions of emancipation and empowerment, though these concerns are all highlighted in the Draft Curriculum.

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skills acquisition. Fundamental movement patterns and skills are the foundation of *te reo kori* in school physical education, rather than the attempted rigid duplication of traditional cultural performance. Walker (1995; p.22) suggests *te reo kori* is about:

....mastery of basic Māori movement, not about performance of treasured taonga. It is about helping and being helped, about whānau, where tuakana (elder, or more experienced) accept responsibility for teina (younger, or less experienced), where ownership of learning can be achieved by every student.

Although a great deal of research and our own physical education syllabus (Ministry of Education, 1987) encourage teachers to employ student-centred teaching and learning strategies, it is clear that many teachers are reluctant to move beyond the familiar and comfortable. Salter (1995; p.209) identified *te reo kori* as the content area teachers were least comfortable teaching, and Walker (1995; p.22) suggests that their confusion and discomfort derives from stereotypes of traditional Māori performing arts, and a fear of contravening cultural propriety. When teaching and learning in *te reo kori* are regarded as a process of "learn, create and share", rather than one of "teach, practise and perform", much teacher discomfort can be alleviated (Salter, 1998; p.#).

Conclusion

Physical education has long suffered from confusion about its nature, and its relationship with health, sport and recreation. New Zealand physical educators have traditionally concentrated on transmitting sport and movement skills by way of a performance pedagogy, and tended to ignore any critical analysis of the influences of the particular socio-political-cultural context within which learning is situated. This article has examined some of those influences which have resulted in

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the foregrounding of sport and backgrounding of *te reo kori* in the new Draft Curriculum, as an example of the way in which content does not just exist "out there" - it too is a site of contest and conflict. As we approach the third millennium, we as teachers of physical education must become aware of the political and moral implications of what we teach, and how we teach it. The new Draft Curriculum promotes a critical learning perspective for students, which Culpan (1997; p.217) suggests has been absent from other curriculum documents. It is clear that there is a real need for teachers also to engage in social critique of their subject.



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