

Drawing on indigenous knowledge as part of a critical pedagogy for precarity in health Physical Education in Aotearoa, New Zealand

Abstract

Critical pedagogy is a dynamic and transformative approach to education that must continue to adapt to the rapidly changing social and historical contexts in which education is situated. In this paper we argue that pedagogical practices based on indigenous knowledge and principles, enable a critical pedagogy for school Health and Physical Education (HPE) that challenges the effects of precarity. Drawing specifically on the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, we describe the principles of Kaupapa Māori, an indigenous perspective that expresses Māori aspirations and specific Māori values, and how these principles are articulated in HPE. We argue that HPE practices underpinned by Kaupapa Māori have the potential to reduce anger, anxiety and alienation through strengthening connections between students, between student and teachers, to land, and to emerging identities.

Keywords: Critical pedagogy; Precarity; Indigenous knowledge

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O conhecimento indígena como parte de uma pedagogia crítica contra a precariedade na Saúde e Educação Física em Aotearoa Nova Zelândia

Resumo

A pedagogia crítica é uma abordagem dinâmica e transformadora da educação que deve continuar a se adaptar aos contextos sociais e históricos em rápida mudança onde a educação está situada. Neste artigo, defendemos que práticas pedagógicas baseadas em saberes e princípios indígenas possibilitam uma pedagogia crítica para a Saúde e Educação Física que questione os efeitos da precariedade. Com base especificamente no contexto de Aotearoa Nova Zelândia, descrevemos os princípios de Kaupapa Māori, uma perspectiva indígena que expressa as aspirações Māori e os valores Māori específicos, e como esses princípios são articulados em Saúde e Educação Física. Argumentamos que as práticas de Saúde e Educação Física sustentadas por Kaupapa Māori têm o potencial de reduzir a raiva, a ansiedade e a alienação por meio do fortalecimento de conexões entre alunos, entre alunos e professores, com a terra e com identidades emergentes.

Palavras-chave: Pedagogia crítica; Precariedade; Conhecimento indígena

El conocimiento indígena como parte de una pedagogía crítica contra la precariedad en la Salud y Educación Física en Aotearoa Nueva Zelandia

Resumen

La pedagogía crítica es un abordaje dinámico y transformador de la educación que debe continuar a adaptándose a los contextos sociales e históricos en rápida transformación donde la educación está situada. En este artículo defendemos que prácticas pedagógicas basadas en saberes y principios indígenas possibilitan una pedagógica crítica para la Salud y Educación Física que cuestione los efectos de la precariedad. Con base específicamente en el contexto de Aotearoa Nueva Zelandia, describimos los principios de Kaupapa Māori, una perspectiva indígena que expresa las aspiraciones Māori y sus valores. Argumentamos que las prácticas de Salud y Educación Física sustentadas por Kaupapa Māori tienen el potencial de reducir la rabia, la ansiedad y la alienación por medio del fortalecimiento de conexiones entre los alumnos y profesores, con la tierra y con identidades emergentes.

Palabras-clave: Pedagogía crítica; Precariedad; Conocimiento indígena

INTRODUCTION

One of challenges we pose to the students in our degree programme is to consider whether Health and Physical Education (HPE) is still relevant in contemporary schools. Given that our modern world is awash with new technologies that allow young people to generate and source information on their health and wellbeing, the question becomes whether the subject area has become redundant. The challenge itself represents something about the precarity of the subject area in modern schooling (KIRK, 2018). However, it is the arguments of the students that are most revealing. At first glance, most answers appear to reflect the rationalities through which precarity operates. They highlight the growing anxiety, anomie, and insecurity around mental health, employment, relationships, equity, sexualities, and environmental sustainability, amongst others. But within their comments, they also reflect a sense of criticality and ability to problematise these issues. They not only question the messaging normalised within such issues, but problematise the way such issues emerge from the socio-political networks within which modern societies are situated and propose transformative actions needed to ensure HPE remains relevant in modern school curricula. In this sense the students reflect how the critical pedagogies enacted within our degree develop a sensibility and awareness towards precarity. Core to this is the value of drawing on indigenous knowledge and principles within such critical pedagogies.

The purpose of this paper is to argue that in Aotearoa New Zealand, pedagogical practices in HPE based on indigenous knowledge and principles, provide a means for enabling a critical pedagogy for school HPE and challenging the effects of precarity. We suggest a critical pedagogy needs to draw on alternative ways of thinking, being and rationalising the world because, in the words of Foucault (1991, p. 79), “practices don’t exist without a certain regime of rationality”. That is, throughout the history of modern capitalism, education and precarity have operated as forms of ‘governmental rationality’ that integrate conventional ideological perspectives and political solutions to inform socioeconomic policymaking in capitalist societies (BROWN, 2015; READ, 2009). As a socio-economic condition influenced by government policies and practices, precarity acts as a “theme-programme of a society [in capitalist orders] ... in which action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on the players” (FOUCAULT, 2008, p. 259–260). Interpreted under this conceptual lens, precarity serves as a governmental rationality, (re)configuring and ruling the world of work and education (Standing, 2016). In this process, HPE contributes to precarity through maintaining competitiveness, self-care, ableism, and individual responsibility, all attributes needed for sustaining the socioeconomic virtues of unfettered markets (LYNCH; WALTON-FISETTE; LUGUETTI, 2021; ROBINSON; RANDALL, 2016).

In order to challenge and transform such rationalities as the rules that govern HPE practices, we suggest critical pedagogy needs to draw on different cultural knowledges and world views in order to evoke, “...a complex array of dispositions, values, suspicions, and questions relating to power inequities and how they lead to privilege and marginalisation” (PHILPOT; OVENS; SMITH, 2019, p. 2). As we have argued elsewhere (PHILPOT; OVENS,

2019), doing this cannot be reduced to a teaching method that is learned through transmission and then enacted with no consideration of the teacher, learner, and context. Rather, it involves an embodied awareness to different world views, different rationalities and belief systems and cultural experiences. With this in mind, we outline in this paper a critical pedagogy for precarity in Aotearoa New Zealand that draws on the principles of Kaupapa Māori. The specific aim of the paper is to outline the principles of Kaupapa Māori and justify how PE and PETE in Aotearoa New Zealand is, can, and should continue to endeavour to apply these principles. The intention of the paper is to articulate how, in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, adopting principles of Kaupapa Māori can transform HPE into a school subject that is more inclusive for students of all body sizes and shapes, genders, races, levels of ability and sexual orientations, more equitable in regard to whose interests are served by the subject, and more focussed on problematising taken-for-granted assumptions about the body and physical culture.

What is Kaupapa Māori?

The concept of Kaupapa Māori¹ is used by Māori to refer to any particular plan of action developed by Māori, that expresses Māori aspirations and specific Māori values and principles (ROYAL, 2012). The concept has been valuable as it distinguishes Māori values, principles and plans for action from those held by non-Māori. The political idea of questioning the primacy of Western knowledge and allowing Māori knowledge, culture, and experience to ‘find voice’ in research is a crucial component of Kaupapa Māori. Kaupapa Māori as an alternative governmental rationality that combines Māori philosophy, principles and practice is employed by Māori to provide a rationale for activities and businesses that are begun and controlled by Māori (SMITH, 1997). Smith (1992, 1997) stated that Kaupapa Māori was not limited to any one sector but is relevant to all Māori projects that benefitted from the cycle of conscientisation, resistance and transformative praxis (BISHOP et al., 2012). Principles of Kaupapa Māori have been applied to research methodology (SMITH, 2015), in medicine (EGGLETON et al., 2018), higher education (TASSELL et al., 2010), post graduate supervision (EKLINGTON et al., 2016), economic development and entrepreneurship (AWATERE et al., 2017), sport coaching (HAPETA et al., 2021), and adventure therapy (PHILLIPS et al., 2022).

Kaupapa Māori principles are based on broader cultural values such as *whanaungatanga* (family and positive relationships built on mutual trust, respect, and reciprocity); *kaitiakitanga* (spiritual guardianship); *wairuatanga* (nurturing our spiritual aspects); *rangatiratanga* (self-determination, ability to unite people together for a common purpose); and *manaakitanga* (uplifting of mana²) (JACKSON et al., 2017). In addition to these values, the concept *ako* (mutual and reciprocal teaching and learning) is specifically utilised in the educational context.

¹ Māori are the tangata whenua (indigenous people) of Aotearoa New Zealand

² Mana is a word for which there is no concise English translation. It represents the idea of a personal, sacred force or spiritual essence.

The origins of Kaupapa Māori education can be traced back to the broader Māori cultural revitalization movements that emerged in Aotearoa New Zealand during the late 1960s and early 1970s. These movements aimed to address the dominance of Western education systems, historical marginalization and cultural assimilation of Māori resulting from colonization (BISHOP, 2012), and the dual crises of educational underachievement on the one hand and the loss of language, knowledge, and culture on the other (SMITH, 2000).

In 1982, following a large hui (meeting) of Māori elders, a total Māori language immersion preschool (Te Kohanga Reo) was established. In subsequent years a full range of alternative schooling innovations, including primary schools (Kura Kaupapa Māori), secondary schools (Whare Kura), and the tertiary level (Whare Wananga) were developed. These initiatives by ‘Māori for Māori’ have been based on Kaupapa Māori as an essential underpinning theory and practice of transformation (SMITH, 1990).

The key principles of Kaupapa Māori are; (1) self-determination or relative autonomy, (2) validating and legitimizing cultural aspirations and identity, (3) incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy, (4) mediating socioeconomic and home difficulties, (5) incorporating cultural structures that emphasize collectively rather than individuality, and (6) shared and collective vision and philosophy. In addition to serving as the underlying principles of Māori medium education, these principles have been shared in a large scale Aotearoa New Zealand Ministry of Education-funded professional learning development research and development programme called Te Kotahitanga.

Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand is a small bicultural country with an estimated population of 5 million people. The majority of the population is of European descent (70%) with Indigenous Māori the second largest ethnic group (16.5%), followed by Asian descent (15%) and Pasifika descent (9%). Aotearoa New Zealand is unique in the world as governance is underpinned a founding document, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (The Treaty of Waitangi), which was signed in 1840 by many Māori chiefs and the British Crown. The Treaty foregrounds partnerships between Māori and government at all levels of government and policy (Walker, 1990). Education in Aotearoa New Zealand is shaped by several key policy documents including the Education Act 2017, National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP) and the aforementioned *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*. National curricula include *Te Whāriki* (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2017), the early childhood education (ECE) curriculum framework, and the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2007), the national curriculum framework for students from Year 1-13. *Te Whāriki* (2107) represents a significant change from previous ECE curriculum due to its bilingual framing and its explicit commitment which “recognises Māori as tangata whenua, assumes a shared obligation for protecting Māori language and culture, and ensures that Māori are able to enjoy educational success as Māori” (MOE, 2017, p. 3). The NZC, which provides guidelines for teaching, learning, and assessment across various subject areas in primary and secondary schools is in the process of being ‘refreshed’ with a similar

focus on effecting Te Tiriti o Waitangi through drawing on ‘responsive pedagogies and Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, n.d.) The National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) is a qualification system that provides a framework for assessment in the final three years of secondary school. In parallel with an impending ‘refresh’ of the NZC, Mātauranga Māori is being integrated in the Assessment Standards that are being developed (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, n. d.).

The way Physical Education is conceptualised as a subject within the official New Zealand Curriculum (NZHPE) (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2007) has changed significantly over the past three decades. These changes reflect much about the rethinking of the subject within contemporary ideas about human movement culture and health (CASSIDY; OVENS, 2009). In its current iteration, the New Zealand curriculum includes Health and Physical Education (HPE) as one of eight specified learning areas contributing to the vision of creating “confident, connected, actively involved, life-long learners” (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2007, p. 7). As a learning area, HPE is framed and oriented by four underlying concepts (Hauora, Socio-ecological Perspective, Health Promotion and Attitudes & Values). However, as Bowes and Ovens (2014) argue, the way HPE emerges and takes form is unique to each school and is influenced by forces within a changing NZ society more generally. They argue that the discourses of health, criticality, biculturalism and digital technology both individually and collectively shape and give character to HPE in New Zealand.

Applying Kaupapa Māori to HPE

In the discussion that follows, we focus on how the principles of Kaupapa Māori are central to the discourse of biculturalism in HPE. We introduce the concept of Hauora, the place of outdoor education in HPE in the New Zealand Curriculum (NZHPE), and the growth of te ao kori, curricular content that focuses on indigenous Māori games. We argue that these concepts, contexts and content provide a starting point from which HPE teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers can further develop culturally responsive practices that focus on addressing the anger, anomie, anxiety and alienation that are symptomatic of precarity (STANDING, 2016).

Health and Physical Education Curriculum

The Māori concept of Hauora is given particular attention in HPE as it constituted one of four underlying concepts of the NZHPE (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2007). Hauora is a concept based on Māori health models (DURIE, 1985) that encompasses a holistic understanding of wellbeing. Hauora positions wellbeing beyond the absence of illness or disease, to encompass interconnected physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions that serve to support each other. Meier and Culpan (2021) argue that the inclusion of Hauora was one of the early attempts to integrate a key Māori concept into a curriculum. The pairing of a socioecological perspective and Hauora as two key underpinning concepts in the NZHPE draws

attention to the interconnected and relational nature of movement and health outcomes. Stevens et al. (2021, p. 133) suggest that as students learn to sustain their own well-being, “[...] they simultaneously acknowledge the reciprocal inter-determinant relationships with other people and society that impact this”. This foregrounds collective notions of wellbeing as foregrounded in Kaupapa Māori. Stevens et al. (2021, p. 484) suggest that healthy thinking in Māori terms, is integrative not analytical. “The individual whose first thoughts are for [themselves], [their] personal ambitions or [their] own body is considered unhealthy, even though [their] body may be the epitome of fitness”.

Hauora is visible in the subject rationale which states that “students will reflect on the nature of wellbeing and how to promote it” (MOE, 2007, p. 22) and in the learning outcomes of HPE which foreground “building relationships with other people” and a focus on “healthy communities and environments” (MOE, 2007, p. 23). Despite this, critique over the removal of the dimension of whenua (land) from the concept of Hauora in the final HPE curriculum document remains a contentious issue. Hokowhitu (2004, p. 77) stated that this omission meant a removal “of the ground upon which [the model] stood”.

Outdoor Education

Although the connection to land is not explicit in the concept of Hauora communicated in the NZHPE, there is potential to develop this connection through Outdoor Education, one of the key areas of learning in the NZHPE (MOE, 2007). Many secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand run outdoor education programmes and have outdoor education teachers. Outdoor education began as outdoor education-as-adventure focussing on risk based activities such as climbing, and kayaking, but more recently the outdoors is being positioned as a space for integrated learning (BOYES, 2012) and personal and social development that requires knowledge of human-nature relationships and cultural relationships with nature over time (MARTIN; MCCULLAGH, 2011). There is a strong link to Kaupapa Māori (customs and belief structure) in recent outdoor education programming. This can be seen in Adventure Based Learning which focuses on relationships, learning collectively (ako) and self-determination. and in ‘footprint projects’ where students are challenged to consider their role as Kaitiakitanga (guardianship), with a long-term focus on responsibilities in cultural, social and environmental sustainability (CAMPBELL-PRICE, 2012). Place responsive pedagogies (BROWN; WATTAHCOW, 2015) and bicultural outdoor education (LEGGE, 2012) promote reflective learning activities such as listening to trees and water to creating art from natural materials on beaches and in forests, connecting learners to the natural world through flax weaving, shelter building, and outdoor cooking, to more physically active activities such as waka-ama (traditional outrigger canoes).

Kaupapa Māori be seen in Wai Puna, a theory of Māori water safety and health that is centred on strengthening people’s connection to the water through whakapapa (understanding your spiritual, ancestral connection to water), mātauranga (learning the traditional knowledge of water) and tikanga (engaging in the water through practices and customs) (PHILLIPS, 2020).

Grounded in Te Ao Māori³, this model draws on the synergy of Māori and Western notions of water safety for the primary purpose of health and well-being in, on and around the water (Phillips, et al., 2022). Specifically, in regard to the value of outdoor education for Māori, Reti (2012) states that in a tangible way the subject reconnects Māori youth to their rightful path as tangata whenua (people of this land), connects with their wairua (spiritual) path, and centre them physically (taha tinana) where energy is exerted from taking on physical challenges of the outdoors. Reti (2012) argues that through outdoor education, Māori have been recapturing the past, healing oneself, and moving forward.

Indigenous Games

Increasingly through curriculum reforms and changes to national teaching standards, teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand are being challenged to recognise Māori content and culture in their classrooms (REIHANA-MORUNGA, 2022). The importance of drawing on local knowledge to provide local solutions can be seen in HPE units on indigenous games and activities that are collectively known as te ao kori (the world of Māori movement) (LEGGE, 2012; SALTER, 2003). Te ao kori privileges Māori language, Māori culture, and Māori history. Perhaps the best articulation of indigenous games in HPE in Aotearoa New Zealand is inspired by the writing and leader of Harko Brown, a Māori secondary school HPE teacher who has published books (BROWN, 2007, 2008, 2016; BROWN; TENNESSEE, 2017) and lead professional development workshops with both primary and secondary school HPE teachers. Inspired by a realisation that few HPE teachers had knowledge of Māori games, Brown has similarly spearheaded the introduction of Māori language, culture and movement and the resurgence of games and activities such as waka-ama, ki-o-rahi, tapu ae, poi toa. Although Brown (2008, p. 9) does not reference Kaupapa Māori in his work, he suggests that Māori Games “draw on spiritual beliefs and wairua”. Brown highlights the impact of colonisation on the absence of Māori sports and games from HPE and suggests that traditional Māori games are essential to revitalising Māori culture and a “potential force for reconciliation in race relations” (BROWN, 2008, p. 12).

Conclusions

Indigenous knowledge and values, such as those articulated in Kaupapa Māori, can serve as an alternative rationality governing the logic, principles and values of education systems in colonised countries such as Aotearoa New Zealand. Indigenous knowledge disrupts educational norms that serve some students better than others (BERRYMAN; EGAN; FORD, 2017) and should be part of enacting critical pedagogies in HPE. For example, the inclusion of Hauora as a fundamental concept that underpins the curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand provides a strong logic for moving away from a focus on competitiveness, self-care, ableism,

³ Te Ao Māori refers to the Māori World.

and individual responsibility (CASSIDY AND OVENS, 2009). It not only displays the willingness and commitment to address prior failures regarding the realisation of the Te Tiriti o Waitangi (STEVENS et al., 2021), but also provides of a means for diversifying the concept of ‘health’ away from traditional ideas focused on sickness and individual responsibility and more on collective health, sustainability and connections to others and the physical world. In our own experiences as former HPE teachers and teacher educators, we have seen how Hauora has become synonymous with health. Hauora not only features prominently in the curriculum, but also in national assessment standards and in government sponsored HPE teaching resources. Furthermore, resources for indigenous games and professional in-service learning opportunities through the national subject association provide spaces for HPE teachers to enable teachers to develop Māori knowledge. Many scholars have emphasised that culturally equitable pedagogy is advanced by the way knowledge is validated through the resources that are developed and used and the relationships between teachers and students (LADSON-BILLINGS, 2014; SLEETER, 2012). Speaking from an Australian context, Whatman et al. (2017) suggested that in addition to disrupting current practices in HPE, indigenous knowledges have the potential to foster new pedagogical relations in both HPE. Kaupapa Māori principles can serve to broadening what Penney (2013, p. 6) described as those “boundaries that operate to define what we know as physical education and shape what we do in its [HPE] name”.

We acknowledge that adopting pedagogical practices based on values and cultures we are less familiar with require educators to become self-reflexive about their positionality and privileges. We agree with Lynch et al. (2021) who suggests that unlike assimilationist teaching paradigms where the educator represents ‘the expert’ who enters marginalized communities to ‘help’ or ‘save’ a young person from oppressed groups, critical pedagogies that focus on culture must aim to co-create knowledge with young people. In writing this paper, we are aware of our positionality as Europeans, the colonisers in Aotearoa New Zealand. We are neither attempting to speak for Māori, nor do we do not claim to work on their behalf to help them rise up. Equally, we don’t want to claim biculturalism for political and ideological interests by “seizing a few words [such as Hauora, korowai, te ao Māori] from Māori informants” (HOKOWHITU, 2004, p. 78). For Pākehā⁴, effective engagement with Kaupapa Māori requires us to have a positive, reflexive sense of ourselves in our relationship with Māori.

We agree with Māori scholars (SMITH, 2000) who suggest that although the principles of Kaupapa Māori were developed by Māori and for Māori in the context in Aotearoa New Zealand, due to their focus on self-determination, cultural meaning, identity, and collectively they have a wide relevance in international indigenous contexts. We would further argue that in current times of precarity, many of these principles can and should underpin pedagogical practices in HPE. For example, a focus on te ao kori can be expanded to teaching units that focus on games from other cultures, therefore presenting opportunities for students of all cultures to showcase their own language and cultures. In many classrooms, teachers and students are collectively developing classroom rules through classroom korowai (or classroom contracts). Collectively these actions provide learning environments where all young people can feel respected and well-grounded in their identity and culture (LADSON-BILLINGS,

⁴ Pākehā is a colloquial name for New Zealanders of European descent.

2014). As such, Kaupapa Māori principles connect with calls for HPE to focus on building relationships and cohesion within society (e.g., Smith et al. 2021), for HPE to awaken a critical consciousness through naming inequities and endeavouring to dismantle the power that sustains them (LUGUETTI; KIRK; OLIVER, 2019), and for HPE to be more meaningful (FLETCHER et al., 2021).

In writing this article, we wish to highlight that the alignment between curriculum, resources, and professional learning opportunities in Aotearoa New Zealand presents fertile ground for making a tangible difference in the lives of young people through HPE. We argue that this ‘difference’ can be achieved through critical pedagogies in HPE that focus on building relationships, providing opportunities for student voice, foregrounding different knowledges beyond a steady diet of hegemonic white, male, major sports, and through engagements in the outdoors that focus on connections with the land and the water. We argue that pedagogical practices based on these foci have the potential to reduce anger, anxiety and alienation and strengthen connections to teachers, to other students, to land, and to emerging identities. As such, HPE practices underpinned by the principles of Kaupapa Māori may be the catalyst for local solutions to precarity in other places.

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