

# Te Ao Kori in the Health and Physical Education Curriculum

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*The Activities that comprise Te Ao Kori derive from traditional Māori cultural practices and incorporate traditional Māori cultural values and meanings.*

*This article traces the whakapapa (ancestry) of Te Ao Kori as a traditional Māori cultural practice, and explores its nature and purpose.*

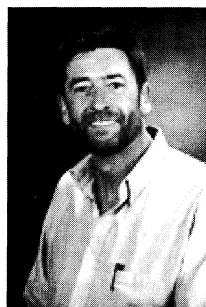
Te Ao Kori (literally, 'world of movement') is a comparatively new and unfamiliar term to physical educators. It includes all aspects of Te Reo Kori such as haka (posture dances) and waiata ā ringa (action songs) but also comprises a wide range of other physical activities such as recreational games and pastimes, music, medicine, art and movement (Stothart, 2002). All these activities derive from traditional Māori cultural practices and incorporate traditional Māori cultural values and meanings.

In this article I trace the whakapapa (ancestry) of Te Ao Kori as a traditional Māori cultural practice, and explore its nature and purposes. First, however, I want to 'write myself into the story', to acknowledge my own position as a Pākehā teacher educator writing about ideas and activities that clearly derive from traditional Māori practices and carry values and meanings that are inscribed in a Māori world. My account should be read as my own understandings of this Māori world - I am speaking for myself, rather than speaking for Māori. This caution is particularly important in light of what Rose Pere (1988) describes as the 'hermeneutic difficulty' of expressing the concepts of one culture in the language of another.

My own understandings of a lived Māori world derive from my marriage to a Māori woman of Ngāpuhi and Te Arawa decent, on-going interactions within her large whānau (extended family), and subsequent production and nurturing of two Māori children and two Māori mokopuna. Meanings and values ascribed to those relationships and their ongoing support, carry quite different values and necessitate quite different actions from the two cultural perspectives of the world(s) - Māori and Pākehā - that I inhabit. I have particular vested interests in exploring Te Ao Kori in this article, that serve quite distinct purposes in these two different worlds. First, from a Pākehā view my ruminations not only help me clarify my own values and beliefs, but might also help teachers think differently about teaching inclusively in their physical education programmes. Second, from a Māori view I am concerned with *making a difference* for my own mokopuna - and for a whole generation of Māori children in mainstream education. Perhaps Te Ao Kori might offer opportunities to make a difference from both cultural perspectives. I want to begin by providing a context within which to consider three fundamental questions - Where does Te Ao Kori come from? What is Te Ao Kori? What purpose might Te Ao Kori serve?

## **A context: Education, biculturalism and nation-building**

New Zealand is generally regarded as a society that has successfully embraced biculturalism (Salter, 2000a; Vasil, 2000). There is no doubt that we are currently engaged in bicultural nation-building, a notion firmly embodied in the Treaty of



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Waitangi, and that education has featured prominently in this endeavour. *A Review of the Core Curriculum for Schools* (Department of Education, 1984), for example, identified the significance of education in Taha Māori (literally, 'Māori side') for the construction of a sense of national identity. This document proposed three grounds for giving priority to a Māori dimension in schools:

first; Māori culture is unique to New Zealand and will retain its vitality only if fostered in this country; secondly; it is a distinctive characteristic of the New Zealand identity; and thirdly, it is a model and spring board for the study of other cultures (p.31).

The role of education in foregrounding a Māori dimension was identified also by Scott (1986), who suggested:

Māori perspectives and perceptions of life a vital part of the fabric of this country and its people. Our schools are a part of our nation's growth [and] can no longer ignore the challenge of introducing concepts and practices which derive from our Māori heritage (p.8).

Through Taha Māori, distinctive Māori ways of understanding, interpreting the world and doing things were to be recognised as equally valid to those of the dominant culture, but also different in ways that Howe (1985) identified as including:

... attitudes to land and land ownership, to the sea, rivers and water, to plants, trees and birds, to wealth and material goods, to sharing, to children and their education, to the past, to traditions and customs, to language and family, to young and old, to self and our bodies, to others, to meeting and greeting people, to rules, to punishment, to song and art, to religion and the spiritual world, to food, to the future, to dying and death (p.5).

### The rise of a Māori dimension of physical education

Taha Māori dimensions began to appear in all New Zealand curriculum documents during the 1980s, and encompassed a range of cultural experiences that were regarded as appropriate for all students, both Māori and non-Māori (Salter, 2000a). Physical education in New Zealand has long had a close association with Māori games and activities, and it is hardly surprising that the 1987 physical education syllabus (Department of Education, 1987a) foregrounded Te Reo Kori (literally, 'language of movement') as its commitment to Taha Māori and bi-culturalism. The syllabus asserted that "the culture of Māori, the tangata whenua, has a central role" (p. 10), and the companion teachers' handbook *A Guide for Success* (Department of Education, 1987b) identified Te Reo Kori as one of eight content themes to comprise the physical education curriculum in schools. Te Reo Kori was intended to be both accessible to the many Māori students in mainstream education, and also to provide a window for non-Māori into a Māori cultural world (Salter, 2000b).

Official sanctioning of a Māori dimension in educational documents in this way should be understood for its importance in bi-cultural nation-building, though a number of critics (for example, Bishop and Glynn, 1999; Walker, 1985) have argued that non-Māori rather than Māori had initially defined what was considered 'appropriate', and that Māori knowledge had been used to promote majority culture objectives rather than address learning difficulties of Māori students. Where Māori initiatives have flourished, they have tended to resonate with the widespread resurgence of interest by Māori people in the promotion of te reo Māori (Māori language), and in identifying and reclaiming traditional values, decision-making processes, human relationships and, indeed, notions of cultural identity itself.

*Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1999) too advocates that New Zealand's

bicultural heritage is unique and is important to all New Zealanders. It states that teachers need to:

- Recognise that te reo Māori (Māori language) and ngā tikanga Māori (Māori cultural values and practices) are taonga (treasures) and have an important place within the in health and physical education curriculum;
- Develop health education and physical education concepts within Māori and other cultural contexts that are relevant to students, *for example, in the context of te reo kori* (my emphasis). (p. 50).

Continued support for a Māori dimension of movement in physical education owes much to the professional development initiatives of Physical Education New Zealand (PENZ). Te Reo Kori has now been enjoyed by a generation of teachers and students, and has been valuable in promoting cultural responsiveness. Because it originated in the Taha Māori movement as part of a dominant culture agenda, however, Te Reo Kori could never claim to fully represent Māori culture at a deep level. Leading Māori educationalist Rose Pere (1994) listed a much wider range of traditional children's games, that she regarded as important because they made use of Māori language and were inscribed with traditional Māori values and beliefs (cited in Salter, 2000b). These games included rehia ringa (hand games), ti rakau (stick games), rehia whai (string games), retireti (tobogganing), potaka (top spinning), kōruru (Jack stones), purerehua (making



and using bull roarers), manu aute (making and flying kites), and mu torere (a form of draughts).

Pere (1994) clearly saw the value of these activities not in replicating their 'pure' form, but in enabling children to develop their skills of "dexterity, physical muscular co-ordination, rhythmic movement, balance, poise, mathematical concepts, hand and eye co-ordination, quick reflexes, endurance, stamina, vocal competence and the power of believing and listening" (p.70). Such activities and their outcomes are consistent with the stated intent of the health and physical education curriculum, yet clearly lie beyond the scope of Te Reo Kori as we have known it.

Pere (personal communication, 2000) later advocated replacement of the term Te Reo Kori with Te Ao Kori, since Te Reo Kori did not fully reflect the breadth and richness of activities that were embedded in Māori cultural life. This view is consistent with the philosophies of Apirana Ngata (1940), who identified the importance of traditional elements of culture for Māori, including tribal histories and the expressive elements such as language, poetry, arts and crafts, as well as cultural movement (cited in Salter, 1998). Seen in this light Te Ao Kori has a distinctly Māori whakapapa (ancestry), and could be argued to be a taonga (cultural treasure – see Salter, 2000b) in that it has been identified and foregrounded by Māori, particularly (though not exclusively) to meet Māori needs and aspirations in mainstream education.

Below I want to explore Te Ao Kori more fully.



## What is Te Ao Kori?

Te Ao Kori can be described as the world of movement, from a Māori perspective. It incorporates, but is not confined to, the Te Reo Kori activities that many teachers are familiar with (see Salter, 1998), but also incorporates a wide range of other traditional games and pastimes, such as:

<i>poutoti</i> - stilt walking	<i>tarere</i> - swing
<i>moari</i> - giant stride	<i>piu</i> - skipping
<i>potaka</i> - top spinning	<i>pirori</i> - hoop spinning
<i>mu torere</i> - draughts	<i>pu tangitangi</i> - musical instruments
<i>mahi kemu ā ringa</i> - hand games	<i>waka hoehoe</i> - canoe hurdling
<i>whakaeke rakau</i> - tree climbing	<i>niti and teka</i> - dart throwing
<i>manu tukutuku</i> - kite flying	<i>koruru</i> - knuckle bones
<i>mokihi</i> - rafts	<i>whatoto</i> - wrestling
<i>karetao</i> - jumping jack	<i>retireti</i> - tobogganing
<i>whaka hekeheke</i> - surf riding	<i>rehia ringa</i> - hand games
<i>rehia whai</i> - string games	<i>purerehua</i> - making / using bull roarers

This list is not exhaustive, but serves to illustrate the diversity and extent of activities, games and pastimes derived from traditional Māori culture that were important features of traditional Māori life. Both games playing and participation in sports and competitions held a significant place in festivals and community gatherings, and participation in games and other skill-related activities also served the function of preparing young people for adult responsibilities. As Reed (1970) suggests:

The games of skill by which the Māori youth developed his [sic] strength and trained his hand and eye were of value in later life. Similarly, the young women gained grace, and their limbs became supple as they practised games and dances ... the games that were played were an important feature of Māori life and custom (p.77).

Val Irwin (cited in Craig, 2001), facilitator of Physical Education New Zealand's teacher development workshops in Te Ao Kori, identified the holistic nature of Te Ao Kori when he suggested that it might range:

... from map making and nets, from raupo darts to peruperu and manu tukutuku, from button toys to patere, from wading to surfing, from breath test to manual dexterity ... Te Ao Kori is not just physical movement (kori tinana) but includes kori hinengaro (mind), kori wairua (spiritual) and kori pukupukutia (gut feeling) (p.7).

While Te Ao Kori has a foundation in the physical dimension, wairua (spirituality), sound, song and voice cannot be divorced easily from Te Ao Kori activity in either traditional or contemporary contexts. In the school curriculum, Te Ao Kori has obvious links to dance (for example, haka waiata), to outdoor education (for example, in waka hoehoe / canoe hurdling and whakaeke rakau / tree climbing), to science and technology (for example, in collecting materials to make and colour manu tukutuku / kites), and in applying principles of care of the environment, (for example, respecting kawa (Māori protocols) when gathering and using natural materials to make Te Ao Kori equipment).

The activities comprising Te Ao Kori may appear straightforward to non-Māori, though the concepts that underpin them may be more complex. This notion is well illustrated in Armstrong and Ngata's (1960) description of the action song:

... the action song is an art form which is, in effect, a summing up of the music and poetry that is the very soul of the race, and above all, it is a very vigorous expression of the hopes and aspirations of the future ... of the Māori people today (p.5).

The haka, arguably the most identifiable icon of New Zealand's national identity, is recognised and understood by most non-Māori people as a war dance. It has been glorified – and perhaps immortalised - throughout the world through the vigorous and aggressive performance of one particular haka (Ka mate!) by sports teams such as the All Blacks. While haka may be used in this sense there are several different types (Gardiner, 2001) that serve different purposes, all of which have an important part to play in the ritual of encounter in Māori settings. Armstrong (1964) captures the rather more complex essence of haka, as:

... a composition played by many instruments. Hands, feet, legs, body, voice, tongue and eyes all play their part in blending together to convey in their fullness the challenge, welcome, exultation or contempt of the words (p.3).

### What purpose might Te Ao Kori serve?

From a teaching and learning perspective, Te Ao Kori might enable students to explore from a Māori perspective the skills, knowledge and attitudes embedded in four particular curriculum statements: *Nga Toi i roto i te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum*, *Hauora o roto i te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, and *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum* (all Ministry of Education documents, 1999-2001). Each focuses on learning that develops a sense of self worth, personal and interpersonal skills, and knowledge and understanding of the significance of cultural practices in the lives of individual and communities. Te Ao Kori can provide opportunities to embrace these learning goals in a holistic manner.

There are also common values identified in these curriculum statements, particularly with regard to recognition that New Zealand's bicultural heritage is unique and is important to all New Zealanders, and that physical activity embraces that heritage. I suggested above that, though Te Ao Kori is rooted in physical activity, it pays attention to both use of Māori language and a range of traditional knowledge. Physical activity held great significance for Māori people, described by Westra and Ritchie (1967) as a people that:

... valued the active over the contemplative life, in which the mastery of physical skills ... contributed to a man's [sic] mana. This was a culture in which corporeal images and symbols repeatedly patterned speech ... Māori delight in physical activity and the expression in the love for food and feasting, in the activity of warfare, in the admiration of physical beauty, in the graceful yet ecstatic dances of

war and victory, in the jousting of young men in hand-to-hand encounter, or of old men in verbal combat (pp. 14-15).

Westra and Ritchie suggested that in a Māori world, the distinction between the physical and the spiritual was not exclusive. In my earlier work (Salter 1998), I too explored the interaction of physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual aspects that were considered important in a Māori world. I suggested that a Māori dimension of physical activity in physical education might provide particular opportunities for affirming identity and self-worth for Māori students, since

from a cosmological perspective, dance, waiata, weaving, art, carving and other expressive forms, are experienced as manifestations of mauri (life-force) in harmony. The performing of fundamental Māori movement ... can be a way for Māori students to



access the tikanga (traditional values) directly, and a way of helping to create and restore balance and harmony for the individual (p.20).

Te Ao Kori can be a vital and dynamic part of physical education programmes in New Zealand schools, and I believe there are several compelling reasons for its inclusion. These include affirming and legitimating the culture of the tangata whenua (consistent with the notions of partnership inscribed in the Treaty of Waitangi), meeting personal and cultural identity needs of Māori students in mainstream schooling, providing opportunities for non-Māori students to experience, understand and appreciate the language, values and beliefs of the Māori culture, and foregrounding traditional elements of Māori culture as a “living reality, rather than as a dead exhibit in a museum” (Ngata, 1940, p.146-7).

### Some concluding comments

In this article I have explored the origins and content of Te Ao Kori, and identified what I believe to be its potential value. I applaud it as a distinctly New Zealand initiative that has huge importance for defining the nature and purposes of physical education in this country. Te Ao Kori reflects and supports the renaissance in pride and interest in Māori culture evident in contemporary society, and its rise to prominence has been described by Stothart (2002) as “a revolution around the teaching of Māori movement and games in a traditional ‘play way’ manner” (p.1). The term ‘Te Ao Kori’ might be new, but its content and underpinning philosophies have been cornerstones of Māori life for centuries.

From a bicultural perspective, Māori cultural aspirations are viewed as valid and authentic, and the construction and dissemination of Māori cultural knowledge valued equally with that of the dominant culture. Te Ao Kori reflects these ideas, and this exciting new/ancient innovation can provide students with many opportunities, through play and games that are based on traditional iwi (tribe) and hapu (sub-tribe, extended family) practices. These opportunities include developing skills and knowledge in Māori movement, exploring the effects of technology and the environment on Māori movement,

experiencing and appreciating Māori cultural values *through* Māori movement, and using and practising te reo Māori *in, through* and *about* Māori movement.

*Kei te raumati ka kitea ai e koe*

*te tupu*

You might discover where it is  
when it grows shoots in the summer

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