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A sociocultural perspective as a curriculum change in health and physical education

Kenneth P. Cliff
cliff@uow.edu.au

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**A Sociocultural Perspective as a Curriculum Change in Health and
Physical Education**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

University of Wollongong

by

Ken Cliff

B.Ed (Physical and Health Education) Honours, University of Wollongong

The Faculty of Education

2007

Certification

I, Ken Cliff, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for the qualification at any other academic institution.

Signed.

Ken Cliff

Date:

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ABSTRACT

This thesis used a poststructural approach to examine the introduction of a sociocultural perspective as a curriculum change in Health and Physical Education (HPE). A sociocultural perspective is now widely seen to underpin syllabus documents in Australia and New Zealand, though the form and foregrounding of the concept varies considerably across syllabus documents. While there is little research that has inquired into a sociocultural perspective as a curriculum change, critical literature from the previous two decades suggests that it is likely to exist in a tenuous relationship with the medico-scientific, biophysical and psychological discursive foundations that are frequently seen to underpin both past and present HPE curriculum. Given this situation, the study sought to respond to the question ‘What happens when you introduce a unit of work planned with the aim of developing a sociocultural perspective into the HPE classroom?’

The research took place in two classrooms in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW), where the re-writing of the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) syllabus for years 7 – 10 in 2003 was expected to result in a sociocultural perspective being incorporated into the document for the first time. A combination of a modified action research design and qualitative data collection methods was used as a means of examining a sociocultural perspective as a curriculum change. The researcher collaborated with two teachers to design and implement units of work that focused on the study of food.

An analysis of data from teacher and student interviews, the planning process and the lessons depicted a range of discursive and material constraints impacting on the introduction of a sociocultural perspective. For example, the prominence of medico-scientific knowledge as a discursive resource taken up by the teachers and students contributed to social and cultural influences largely being interpreted as ‘social determinants’. Such an understanding limited the possibilities for a sociocultural perspective to be employed as a critical lens through which to examine health and physical activity issues. Opportunities to develop a sociocultural perspective were also constrained by the organisation of the schools and schooling itself, and through the prominence of a notion of knowledge that presented it as fixed and certain. Though HPE syllabus documents have in many cases begun to reflect a sociocultural perspective, evidence from this research suggests that a sociocultural perspective as a practised curriculum change is likely to remain a highly challenging exercise for many teachers.

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