

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**The Shaping of Aquatics Education in New Zealand Schools:  
An Historical Study of Curriculum Policy and Practice**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Education  
in Education at  
Massey University

Full name: Kevin Moran

Year: 1999

## Abstract

The teaching of aquatic activities has traditionally held a prominent position in the curriculum of New Zealand schools. In particular, the promotion of swimming and water safety skills and knowledge have long been valued as a community good. Given the geographical disposition of an island nation with its extensive coastline, fast-flowing rivers and large tracts of inland water, as well as the propensity of its citizens to associate with water-related activities both at work and play, such promotion seems entirely justified. In the context of today's society, the aquatic environment has been identified as the second most important location for public leisure and recreation with over half of New Zealand's population identifying water-related activity as being significant in their lifestyle (LINZ Survey, 1991).

However, even though the prophylactic and pragmatic values of aquatic competency were recognized at an early date, little is known about what historical influences have helped shape current practice in the promotion of such values, nor indeed to what extent aquatics education has been reflective of, or reactive to, changes in societal values, attitudes and practices throughout its development.

This thesis examines the historical development of aquatics education using historical research. In particular, the historical research concentrates upon the relationship between aquatics education and the social context in which its development has taken place. Such a concentration is considered particularly relevant in a study of aquatics education because of the high public profile that swimming and water safety have had throughout New Zealand's brief history - a profile that is best reflected in the frequently expressed public and private concerns regarding the high levels of death by drowning as well as the high incidence of water-related rescues.

Finally, rather than view the development of aquatics education as part of a progressive, liberal educational enterprise so often reflected in official documents, this study presents evidence supporting the view that aquatics education, as part of curriculum practice, is a site of contestation that is socially constructed and which presents itself as a discursive legacy reflecting the dynamic interaction of numerous socio-cultural forces operating at an instance in time.

## **Preface and acknowledgements**

The idea of this thesis was first conceived during the completion of a review of related literature for a longitudinal study on aquatics education in New Zealand secondary schools first initiated in 1987 and completed in 1996 after a decade of curriculum practice that included substantial changes in the way schools operate. More recently, enrolment in a course entitled Education and Historical Analysis, conducted by Roger Openshaw, provided both the catalyst and inspiration for historical research into the area.

In affording the writer the opportunity to indulge in an in-depth study of an activity that has long held a professional and personal interest, this study has been a labour of love as much as a labour of material end. As in all such work, many people have facilitated its completion at both a personal and professional level. On the personal level, I am appreciative of the tolerance and patience shown by my wife, Sian, and children, Damian and Bethan, who have had to endure endless hours of the ramblings of an enthusiastic, but neophyte, historical researcher.

On a professional level, I am indebted to my supervisors, Roger Openshaw, for re-kindling an enthusiasm in me for things historical and Pat Nolan, for his curriculum expertise. I am indebted to both for their advice, patience and constant support. I am also grateful for the advice and support of my 'critical friends' including Bruce Ross, Murray Britt, Alan Ovens, Wayne Smith, Maureen Legge and Chris Tennet at the Auckland College of Education.

## Table of Contents

	Page no.
Title page	i
Abstract	ii
Preface and acknowledgements	iii
Table of contents	iv-v
List of figures and tables	vi
List of illustrations	vii
<b>Chapter One - Introduction</b>	
1.1 Introduction	8-10
1.2 Purpose of the study	11
1.3 Research questions	11
1.4 Theoretical perspective	12-18
1.5 Biography	18-20
1.6 Method	20-23
1.7 Definition of terms	23-25
1.8 Delimitations and limitations of the study	25-26
1.9 Significance of the study	26-27
<b>Chapter Two - The Past: An historical study of Aquatics Education</b>	
2.1 Of kau whakataetae and kopapa - Pre-European Maori aquatic activity	28-37
2.2 'The New Zealand Death' - Early European colonisation	38-44
2.3 Leisure and bathing: An emerging Victorian sub-culture	45-53
2.4 Schooling, swimming and "pandering to childhood cravings for activity"	54-62
2.5 Early twentieth century developments and "a suitable swimming bath to every school"	63-75
2.6 Swimming and the "physically defective child"	76-84
2.7 Swimming as sport "of peculiar but powerful strokes"	85-92
2.8 'The bathing nuisance': The beach as a site of public contestation	93-104
2.9 The inter-war years - ". . . keeping our heads above water metaphorically rather than literally"	105-131

2.10 Post-war optimism, aquatics education and “ . . . nearly every child can swim”	132-160
2.11 Beaches, baches, barbeques and boats: Lifestyle aquatics in the latter twentieth century	161-183
<b>Chapter Three - Conclusion</b>	
3.1 Summary: New Zealand’s aquatics education heritage	184-193
3.2 Conclusions	194-199
<b>Bibliography</b>	
Primary sources	200-201
Secondary source	202-217

### List of tables and figures

Table 1	Distribution of drowning incidences in New Zealand rivers, 1840-1870.	p.39
Table 2	Auckland Normal School, 1912 - Swimming capacity of pupils	p.71
Table 3	Comparative analysis of physical defects, 1913-1927	p.106
Table 4	Distribution of drowning accidents in New Zealand, 1921-1926	p.112
Table 5	Number of proficient and learner swimmers, Wellington Region, 1947	p.138
Table 6	Facilities used by primary schools for swimming instruction, Wellington region, 1947	p.139
Table 7	Facilities used by primary schools for swimming instruction, Auckland region, 1949-50	p.140
Table 8	Swimming facilities used by primary schools for swimming instruction, Otago region, 1949	p.141
Table 9	Swimming proficiency of pupils in three Dunedin schools, 1949	p.141
Table 10	Deaths by drowning in age groups, 1957-1961	p.147
Table 11	Maori School list - Kaitaia Area, 1958	p.158
Table 12	Swimming abilities of Auckland primary pupils, 1958	p.159
Table 13	Swimming pools in New Zealand schools, 1963	p.162
Table 14	National swimming survey, 1970	p.169
Table 15	Aquatic activity, Life in New Zealand Survey, 1991	p.180
Table 16	Secondary schools with/without aquatics education, 1987-1996	p.183
Figure 1	Deaths by river drowning, 1869-1878	p.40
Figure 2	Deaths by river drowning, 1879-1888	p.42
Figure 3	Shipwrecks/fatalities in New Zealand, 1882-1891	p.42
Figure 4	Deaths by drowning, 1898-1907	p.44
Figure 5	School capitation claims for teaching swimming and lifesaving, 1902-1913	p.68
Figure 6	Secondary school capitation claims for teaching swimming and lifesaving by type of school, 1908-1913	p.70
Figure 7	Deaths by drowning and vehicle accidents, 1921-1930	p.113
Figure 8	Deaths by drowning, 1952-1962	p.146

**List of Illustrations**

Illustration 1	Maori aquatic activity – surfing	p.31
Illustration 2	Salt water baths, Auckland, c.1870	p.50
Illustration 3	Rotorua’s original swimming baths, 1885	p.53
Illustration 4	Auckland Teachers College, 1908	p.72
Illustration 5	1910 National Swimming Championships, Auckland	p.86
Illustration 6	1912 Olympic gold medallist, Malcolm Champion	p.89
Illustration 7	Harbour race winners, Auckland, 1936	p.92
Illustration 8	Cheltenham Beach, Auckland	p.98
Illustration 9	Auckland Training College pool opening, 1931	p.122
Illustration 10	Learners’ pool at Waitakere School, c.1953	p.150
Illustration 11	Secondary school pool, c.1966	p.174