

NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION
TE HUNGA RANGAHAU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA



The Sutton-Smith Award 2010

Katie Fitzpatrick

Katie Fitzpatrick is the recipient of the 2010 Sutton-Smith Award for excellence in a doctoral thesis in education.

The scope of this thesis is encapsulated in its title: 'Stop playing up: A critical ethnography of health, physical education and (sub)urban schooling.' A former teacher of health and physical education, Katie engaged in months of ethnographic fieldwork in the (sub) urban school in which she had previously worked as a senior teacher of health and physical education. Critical ethnography is rare in educational research in New Zealand and, while engaging in depth with previous local and international precedents in this genre, Katie evolved methodological and ethical processes specific to the complex cultural circumstances of the school and its predominantly Pasifika and low-income community. This required informed and willing participation in the project by Year 13 students who had chosen Health and Physical Education as a Level 3 NCEA subject. Writing reflexively, Katie explored ethical and methodological implications and limitations of her own positioning as a Pākehā/ Palangi academic woman in recording and comprehending the curricular experience of Pasifika and other working-class girls and boys. Her data included transcribed conversations with groups of students. Katie gave regular feedback to the students about the project, her interpretation of their stories and maintained contact with them after the research was finished.

Katie engaged thoroughly with previous work in the Health and PE field and brought to it a complex and original analytical tool-kit assembled from a wide range of writers across disciplines: Bourdieu, Foucault, post-colonial theory, feminism, Māori and Pasifika writers and geographical theory. This enabled her to uncover contradictions within the HPE curriculum itself and in the student's experiences with it: between mind and body, academic and practical/ physical, masculine and feminine and racialised and class-based stereotypes of the brown/physical and white/academic body. Katie does not make pessimistic arguments that this results in 'reproduction' of social inequality, but by means of a case study of one teacher's critical pedagogy, she traces the possibilities of student success in education and in employment.

The contribution of this work to the field is usefully encapsulated in the following comments from the examiners. The local examiner wrote: 'This thesis delivers all that was promised in the abstract and more: an exploration of the place of health and physical education in the lives of Otago youth in New Zealand through a critical ethnography, which engages in the context of the young people's lives.' The overseas examiner commented: 'Fitzpatrick is a gifted researcher and writer. Her familiarity with the literature(s) of health and physical education, critical ethnography and reproduction theory is most impressive. Her ability to integrate social theory with critical ethnography and lives reflects her talents as a researcher and a writer.'

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