

# INTRODUCING LOTTO SWIMSAFE: AN AREA SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE

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***Abstract** This paper reports on the introduction of the LOTTO Swimsafe programme at Raglan Area School / Te Kura A Rohe O Whaingaroa. Data were obtained from 8 senior students, who trained as swimsafe instructors, and 13 teachers. A constructivist approach to analysing responses was developed and this provided insights into the worth of introducing the programme into the school. The programme was positively received by teachers, instructors and learners. It is possible that the structure of an area school aided the introduction of this programme. However, it is concluded that the multiple level learning experience created by the programme recommends itself to other schools.*

## INTRODUCTION

Curriculum reform, implementation and development at the national level has long been a feature of New Zealand education. Ever since the *Education Act* (1877) was passed by Parliament schools were supplied with guiding, often prescriptive, curriculum documents. The nineteen eighties and nineties saw New Zealand embarking on a raft of educational reforms and administrative changes. The result was a major restructuring of educational institutions and a redefinition of the curriculum they would offer. At a local level Boards of Trustees, elected by and responsible to the local community, were introduced as a means to more readily assess and adapt educational initiatives to meet local aspirations. Using the umbrella document *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (1993), and associated curriculum statements as a guide, schools were challenged to create learning opportunities that were meaningful and relevant for their students and communities. In designing a programme that followed these underlying concepts the Physical Education department of Raglan Area School / Te Kura A Rohe O Whaingaroa introduced LOTTO Swimsafe. A notable feature of the programme, which was particularly attractive, was the training of senior students as Swimsafe Instructors. The following article is a review of the programme introduced.

## THE LOTTO SWIMSAFE PROGRAMME

The LOTTO Swimsafe programme was jointly developed by Swimming Education New Zealand, New Zealand Water Safety Council and the Royal Life Saving Society of New Zealand (1996). It is funded by the New Zealand Lotteries Commission which has a tradition of funding learn to swim and personal survival programmes. The programme responds to New Zealand's elongated island setting and the close proximity of substantial bodies of water to all the major towns and cities. It recognises that these physical settings provide opportunities

for a range of aquatic activities, but also recognises that water creates a hazard which people must be able to recognise and deal with to fully enjoy. The programme is founded on four aims.

1. To promote swimming and personal survival skills through a national aquatic programme.
2. To encourage New Zealanders to recognise swimming and personal survival skills as the basis for all aquatic recreation.
3. To educate and provide teachers, coaches and school parent-helpers with logical progressions and methods.
4. To improve the standard of instructing swimming and personal survival skills in New Zealand.

The programme incorporates swimming stroke technique with personal survival skills. It is based on the assumption that all New Zealanders should learn necessary aquatic fundamentals before they reach secondary school. The programme has been divided into five sequential levels. At each level there are identified tasks in which students must display competency before an award, a brightly coloured challenge certificate, is issued. For example at level one students should be able to:

- 1.1 Enter the water safely, confidently and unaided
- 1.2 Move in the water confidently
- 1.3 Leave the water safely, confidently and unaided
- 1.4 Submerge body completely, breath out underwater to create bubbles
- 1.5 Retrieve objects underwater with eyes open for observation, orientation and confidence

Students participating in the programme are assisted, monitored and evaluated by a qualified instructor. LOTTO Swimsafe instructors undergo training that involves course work and practical aspects. To be fully qualified, instructors must attend a classroom based 'Swimsafe Instructor Course' and complete 20 hours of practical poolside instruction.

The programme began at Raglan Area School / Te Kura A Rohe O Whaingaroa with the training of senior students as instructors. The majority of these students (10/12) were enrolled in the sixth form physical education class. A classroom, situated close to the pool, was the base for the introductory course. During this time students were given, a manual of instruction, access to a video demonstrating competencies they would be evaluating, they took part in practical sessions to familiarise themselves with these competencies and they prepared a plan to minimise 'risk'. When the introductory session was completed members of staff, who had previously expressed a willingness to be associated with the programme, were allocated instructors. The allocation was designed to allow each student the opportunity to complete the practical requirements in the first term of the 1998 school year.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In my experience the evaluation of learning experiences delivered by schools is often done at staff gatherings, formal and informal, or from anecdotal evidence. Formal evaluations, when they are undertaken, are usually confined to those who have delivered a programme. Since students are an integral part of the learning experiences offered it is surprising that their views are not more consistently canvassed. In recent research in physical education (Pope & Grant, 1996) there has been a conscious effort to ascertain student views on learning experiences offered. Bruce (1997) argued convincingly that quantitative research based on the scientific method, dominant in physical education for the last three decades, has failed to consider the "social, political and cultural contexts in which those involved in physical education make sense of their experiences" (p. 69).

She regards qualitative research, grounded in constructivism, as a valid approach to the study of physical activities. Using a constructivist perspective this research would elicit teacher and student reactions to the LOTTO Swimsafe programme that operated in the school during term one 1998.

Questionnaires are a relatively easy way to gather information. In this project it was thought that questionnaires would be easily understood, be relatively quick to complete, fit with respondents timetables with little disruption and allow for individual clarification from the researcher if necessary. The researcher also benefited from the use of this instrument. Data obtained could be collated and analysed without disrupting normal school procedures.

Two questionnaires were developed, one was to be completed by students and the second was to be completed by staff. Both questionnaires were structured in a similar manner. Initially background information was obtained to assist in stratifying the sample if necessary. The questionnaire was then developed to seek attitudes and opinions of the programme. A five point ordinal scale, labelled at each end with the terms 'poor' and 'excellent', was the main instrument used. While this rating scale was closed-ended respondents were often asked "Why do you say this?" The responses contained here would give the researcher an indication of the meanings the respondents had given to the rating scale labels employed.

The research targeted a number of key areas for illumination. These were:

1. What elements in the LOTTO Swimsafe programme fully engaged senior students?
2. Were there elements in the LOTTO Swimsafe programme students found frustrating?
3. Was the LOTTO Swimsafe programme valued by the school community? In particular:
  - were the physical resources of the school used more effectively?
  - were instructors regarded as a valuable human resource?
4. How could the LOTTO Swimsafe programme be improved?

## THE SAMPLE, THE SITE AND THE SCRIBE

I have lived and worked in Raglan/Whaingaroa for the last fourteen years and have been employed at Raglan Area School / Te Kura A Rohe O Whaingaroa for all of that period. My personal involvement in numerous school and community activities such as the Whaingaroa Waka Regatta, School Sports Days and involvement in many local sporting organisations has provided me with local knowledge and many personal contacts. The following descriptions are based on my personal observations, and discussion with other members of the local community, the Raglan Area School / Te Kura A Rohe O Whaingaroa *Prospectus* and the Waikato District Councils *Draft Strategic Plan*.

The Raglan / Whaingaroa township is situated on the West Coast of the North Island of New Zealand. A fifty kilometre drive East on State Highway 23, approximately forty minutes in time, delivers one to the outer suburbs of Hamilton city. Mount Karioi dominates the landscape and the dwellings of the town spread themselves around the southern shores of the harbour. The coastline is world famous for the left hand point break at Manu Bay and many local and international surf competitions are held here annually. The Town is administered by the Waikato District Council and the population has risen from 1500 in 1985 to an estimated 3000 in 1998. There are two maraes one is situated in Raglan West, Poihakena, and the other, Te Ao Marama, is located at Ocean Beach.

In May 1976 Raglan Primary and District High schools amalgamated to form Raglan Area School. The establishment roll of 368 has risen to approximately 500 at the present date. The school employs 25 full time teaching staff. An Area School provides continuous education from year 1 to year 13 and as such can be regarded as a primary, intermediate and secondary school rolled into one. However, the divisions between sections of the school are not rigid and distinct. For example, a common timetable operates throughout the school day and staff and pupils informally mix during break periods, whole school assemblies are regularly held and student achievements at all levels are recognised, major resources such as the hall, swimming pool and computer lab are shared. The nature and structure of the school would therefore suit the introduction of a programme that would foster the development of ties between junior and senior pupils.

## THE ANALYTIC JOURNEY

All replies were collated into student and teacher categories and were coded and entered on spreadsheets. In analysing the data an approach that would account for my close involvement was sought. Since I would infer, from my existing perceptions, a logical explanation from the data available, a constructivist approach was used. This particular constructivist approach involved two phases of analysis.

- Phase one:       experience, reference, and construct
- Phase two:       react and state.

Phase one of the analytic journey saw me reading the replies and entering the replies on a spread sheet. During the 'experience' period of reading and entering, I 'referenced' my existing views and 'constructed' conceptions on which there appeared to be a consensus. Phase two of the journey began with me 'reacting' to the conceptions that had been constructed. I then reflected on these constructed conceptions, the positive and negative aspects of the LOTTO Swimsafe programme, and a personal interpretation in the form of a 'statement' was given.

## **CODING AND REPORTING**

Constructivist research involves collaboration. There is collaboration between myself and past research, between myself and the researched and me and the reader. It is appropriate then that this collaboration be acknowledged, valued and encouraged. Collaboration between myself and past research is achieved by the recognition in the text and references sections of the source, or foundation, of my position. Collaboration between myself and the researched can be partially achieved by ensuring that statements of both are woven into the text (Bell, 1993). Collaboration between myself and the reader is a more difficult undertaking.

Moss (1996) was aware the researcher could arbitrarily manipulate data to create a coherent interpretation. Begg (1993) argued that a researcher with a different theoretical perspective may interpret the data in a different way, or researchers with the same theoretical perspective may draw alternative conclusions from the same data. To ensure that the research area is adequately and accurately described and to ensure that the data is presented in a way that allows readers to interpret the data from their own perspective, I have presented the findings in a specific way. It is therefore regarded as important that the coding and reporting process are explained in some detail.

All respondents were allocated an identification code. Student responses were issued the letter S and teachers were allocated the letter T. Numbers were allocated, on data entry, sequentially from one.

In reporting the results a set pattern was followed. The number of respondents from each category who indicated a particular response was indicated first, followed by the total number of responses for that particular question [example (S5/8) indicates 5 students out of 8 gave a particular response to a particular item]. Not all participants fully answered all sections therefore, at times, the total number of responses to a particular question may not match with the total sample.

A conscious effort has been made to highlight, where possible, particular findings with participants' comments. Participants' comments will be italicised followed by the identification code of the respondent [example: '*Italic*' (S8) indicates that a comment was made on that particular item from student participant number 8].

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

The responses to the two questionnaires showed a marked difference. Eight students responded to their questionnaire from a potential sample of twelve (response rate 75%), while 13 teachers responded to their questionnaire from a

total number of 25 (response rate 52%). Although it may have been possible to elicit further responses by approaching individuals on a personal level, I felt that sufficient prompting had been given and further approaches could be viewed negatively. Consideration was also given to the view that both teachers and students should be allowed to withdraw from the project at any stage.

The low response rate for teachers could have been influenced by firstly, the timing of the issuing of the questionnaires, last week of term one, and secondly, because not all staff were actively involved in the Swimsafe programme. The involvement of senior students in an Area School's sports training camp on the last three days of term could have been a mitigating factor in the number of replies received from students.

However, an initial overview of the data available made it clear that the LOTTO Swimsafe programme had made an impact on the students, teachers and the swimming programme offered at the school. It was appropriate that this impact be studied and commented upon. The results of this analysis and interpretation are outlined below.

### **Student and teacher awareness of the LOTTO Swimsafe programme**

As mentioned previously 8 students and 13 teachers responded to the questionnaires. While it may have been possible to stratify the samples according to age, gender, experience or seniority the benefits of any such analysis would have been minimal and was therefore not deemed pertinent.

As to be expected, student and teacher knowledge of the Swimsafe programme at the beginning was poor. The completion of the course brought greater understanding with all students and a large majority of teachers (T10/13) indicating they were aware of the aims, objectives and principles of the programme by this stage.

### **What elements in the LOTTO Swimsafe programme fully engaged senior students?**

A significant number of students (S7/8) clearly identified the practical aspects of the course as the most rewarding and engaging. Instructors enjoyed: *playing games and just teaching* (S6) or *teaching the kids* (S1). Students were confident they had adequately modelled the appropriate technical skills and most (S6/8) felt they had managed their environment safely during these sessions.

During the practical component instructors often interacted with classroom teachers, other instructors and learners. It is significant then that no respondent commented on the interactions that occurred with teachers or other instructors. Students gauged their success on learner reactions: *Because they did what I said and they were having fun* (S3) or *Listened pretty well after awhile responded real well. They never got bored* (S10). Instructors appeared to be conscious that learners who were attentive and participated in activities they enjoyed made progress.

The engaging practical component of the programme can be seen to be providing instructors with an awareness of how their learning can contribute significantly to the school community. Students were active, they processed the information presented into practical lessons, they became aware of how learning

takes place and the need to create a positive environment for learners. It has been suggested that students will retain understanding and knowledge acquired in this manner because 'deep' learning has taken place (Benson, 1997).

### **Were there elements in the LOTTO Swimsafe programme students found frustrating?**

Only half of the students felt they had satisfactorily prepared lesson plans at the end of the training sessions and at the beginning of the practical component students were apprehensive. As these initial fears were overcome students' expectations were raised and they became frustrated by individual learners who failed to respond appropriately. For example, it seemed pointless: *teaching a girl to get into the water and when she did it was time to get out (S3)*. or to be: *Teaching kids that don't have a clue what they're doing (S5)*.

The frustrations encountered created an unstable environment that required resolution. Instructors had to reflect on their performance, consider the particular difficulties that arose and find solutions. Educationalists have been challenged to create alternative assessment tasks that give students the opportunity to display their understanding and demonstrate that they have grasped fundamental ideas (Eisner, 1993). The monitoring of the practical component of the instructors, by experienced teachers, allows alternative assessment strategies for senior physical education students to be explored.

### **Was the LOTTO Swimsafe programme valued by the school community?**

Teachers identified two aspects of the programme with which they were particularly satisfied with. Firstly, learners benefited because: *Programmes are more balanced - focusing on all aspects of swimming - not only skills (T10)*. With clearly identified stages of development: *The children are able to understand their goals and all children are able to achieve in appropriate level. Fun (T4)*. Secondly, senior students benefited because: *it honed skills as instructors and gave senior students confidence - not to mention experience - in the teaching field (T2)*. It was: *Very empowering for the tutors as well as providing a balanced survival programme for the learners (T7)*.

Instructors were satisfied with the personal development opportunities the programme provided. They saw: *The programme is a great experience for people (S6)* and commented: *I think it is an excellent course and more people should go through it (S4)*.

In an age of self managing schools resources are often allocated during end of the year strategic planning sessions. During these sessions curriculum teams, or leaders, promote their programmes trying hard to place programmes they feel beneficial high on the priority list (Rzoska & Rzoska, 1993). The positive response, by teachers and instructors, to the swimsafe programme offered in 1998, should place the programme high on the priority list. This high ranking should ensure that necessary resources, physical and human, will be made available in subsequent years.

### **Were the physical resources of the school used more effectively?**

A majority of teachers (T8/10) believed school aquatic resources were more efficiently utilised. As well as dive rings, hoops and flotation aids being used more effectively teachers: *could use the pool - 4 instructors working with 2 classes - for the full 50 minutes (T5).*

Other resources were also utilised, for example, the majority of instructors (S7/8) showed their groups a video demonstrating the competencies they would be evaluating at each level. I witnessed one class build upon this concept. The instructors (2) and guiding teacher videoed student performance and compared this with the original tape.

Because of the safety requirements during swimming lessons small groups of learners were instructed while others waited outside the pool for their 'turn'. Occasionally learners were allocated 'free time' which involved no clear swimming plan. Aquatic resources available were used for short periods of time with small groups of learners. Because instructors provided more supervision during swimming periods, individual learners benefited by more 'water time' that was carefully planned. Consequently their confidence and competencies in and around water increased. Aquatic resources were able to be used for longer periods by more learners. When resources are used more effectively and efficiently, they provide 'more value for money'.

### **Were instructors regarded as a valuable human resource?**

The majority of teachers (T8/10) regarded the swimsafe instructors as a valuable resource. They realised instructors provided: *more hands on deck - more 1 to 1 teaching (T8)* and that: *They made activities fun and enjoyable. They ensured equipment was readily available they regrouped according to student needs and were very adaptable (T6).* Because of the instructors: *modelling, patience and repetition of activities (T13)* learners benefited greatly from the programme.

In teaching skills in Physical Education we can be seen to be looking for a permanent change in behaviour that is reflected in a change in performance. To be certain that learning has occurred we should observe this change over an extended period (Davis, Kimmet, & Auty, 1986). As stated previously, the pupil/teacher ratio associated with swimming lessons often means lessons are restricted to a small group with a great number of other learners not being physically involved. The need to teach, then observe and test means that the development of skills is often restricted. The presence of instructors, the lowering of the teacher/pupil ratio, meant more groups were able to physically participate, more learners could be taught and observed in the same time period. Therefore, it could be argued that there was a greater possibility of skill development by individuals as they participated in the Swimsafe programme.

### **How could the LOTTO Swimsafe programme be improved?**

The programme relied on: *Students knowing when they are meant to be instructing and turning up on time (T12).* Tardiness frustrated teachers who: *had to chase up instructors frequently. When they were they were usually good (T9).* Teachers were



also concerned with instructors technical capabilities: *I think it needs greater focus on how to correctly teach the stroke (that is giving the instructors more time on this aspect) (T5), or management style: Instructors were teaching individuals and when teaching only one child others were fooling around (T9).*

These concerns could be solved by: *Better communication ... needed between instructors and class teachers (T9).* In future years it is envisaged that as part of the introductory course students and teachers will meet to establish clear guidelines they can work within.

## COMMENTARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The LOTTO Swimsafe programme that was introduced to Raglan Area School / Te Kura A Rohe O Whaingaroa was positively received by staff, instructors and learners. If we accept that curriculum time and more importantly school resources will be allocated to physical educational programmes that prove their worth, it follows that programmes which firstly, actively engage all types of students in experiences they perceive as relevant and meaningful, secondly, allow them to become involved on multiple levels and thirdly are valued by the wider school community, will be well resourced, be allocated the necessary curriculum time and will be educationally beneficial.

Instructors particularly enjoyed the practical components of the course and felt confident in their abilities to manage practical lessons. Teachers felt that this enthusiasm enhanced the swimming programmes within the school, and because teachers were confident in the instructors' abilities to conduct lessons safely they gave them full responsibility for learning groups. This empowerment of instructors meant that junior students benefited from a more individualised learning programme. The higher degree of 1:1 teaching eased the burden on staff and more efficiently utilised existing school resources.

Many of the difficulties associated with the programme centred on the relationships between instructors and guiding teachers. In the future it is proposed that during the introductory sessions a 'get together' period will be timetabled for all participants. During this session instructors and guiding teachers will be given the opportunity to establish guidelines they can work within.

While this research indicates that the programme introduced proved successful this may have been influenced by the nature of the school. As the school caters for children from 5 years to 18 years teachers, instructors and learners had already shared social experiences. This possibly made this programme more readily acceptable. Since all participants shared the same physical environment, problems that could have been created by travel and unfamiliarity were avoided. It also meant that administrative complications were an in-school problem and could be quickly resolved. They were not inter-school problems that could have been more difficult to resolve.

Although my aim was to include 'learners' in the research this was only partially achieved. In retrospect it would have been profitable to also seek reactions from those junior school learners who interacted with instructors. This would have given the research a more balanced view.

However, in summary, the LOTTO Swimsafe programme that was introduced to Raglan Area School / Te Kura A Rohe O Whaingaroa created a multiple level learning experience. Classroom teachers and instructors interacted as colleagues, students became teachers, teachers became learners and learners were exposed to more individualised teaching. Boundaries of learning experiences such as these are fluid, they crystallise and dissolve with regularity. It is this feature of the LOTTO Swimsafe programme that is most appealing and recommends itself to be implemented by other schools.

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