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## Culturally responsive pedagogy for sustainable quality education in the Cook Islands setting

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### Abstract

*The provision of a culturally responsive pedagogy is considered to be an important part of delivering a quality education that is ongoing and able to be sustained over time in Pacific developing nations. A quality sustainable education is considered to encourage cultural inclusivity, policy and curriculum practices in schools. By ensuring an inclusive and quality education, education can serve as a powerful vehicle for wider sustainable economic development in the Pacific region. To meet this end, United Nations Pacific signatories pledged support for the educational goal, endorsing an inclusive and equitable quality education for all that promotes relevant learning.*

*The implementation of culturally relevant teaching and learning environments have long remained a challenge for Pacific nations. In order to realise a sustainable quality education, the question that needs to be asked is: what does sustainable education look like in Pacific regions? This paper explores how the tivaevae as a culturally responsive pedagogy model creates opportunities for a sustainable education and curriculum in the Pacific region and, in turn, contributes to an inclusive and quality education.*

### Keywords

Culturally inclusive education; quality education; Tivaevae model; sustainable education; indigenous education; culturally responsive pedagogy; curriculum.

### Introduction

In recent years, the global context of sustainable education has brought a new focus to education and practice (O’Flaherty & Liddy, 2018). Sustainable education highlights that education is durable, healthy, viable, tenable and supportive for learners, communities and the ecosystem it operates within (Graham et al., 2015). From this perspective, culturally responsive pedagogy can be viewed as a way of encouraging sustainable education in the Cook Islands setting.

Sustainable education, however, has been identified as problematic in the South Pacific region including the Cook Islands. Jenkins and Jenkins (2005) for example, identify historical issues that impact on land tenure and resource ownership which may have set the stage for unsustainable practices



in the Pacific region. Issues of colonial rule-making and regulation has had adverse effects on cultural and social relations and, in turn, has presented clear challenges for education (Lee & Efird, 2014; Thaman, 2009).

While sustainable education attempts to redress the imbalance by focusing on preserving the future generations and planning ways forward by providing culturally inclusive education for the future of Pacific communities, nations, and regions (Te Ava & Page, 2018), the question we wish to pose is: what does sustainable education look like in Pacific regions? This paper, therefore, begins with a statement of the problem currently put forward as a global concern. Further, the paper addresses possibilities for sustainable education to become realised in the Pacific region. Then the paper highlights sustainable education through a sociological understanding of cultural values, pedagogy and culturally responsive pedagogy and, finally, explores how the *tivaevae* as a Cook Islands framework, underpinned by a culturally responsive pedagogy (Te Ava & Page, 2018), contributes to an inclusive, quality and sustainable education.

### Statement of the problem

Education for Sustainable Development is an international scheme with a vision to facilitate positive societal transformation that will allow people to lead fulfilled lives through access to education (UNESCO, 2004). All 17 Sustainable Development Goals have been translated in the Pacific context and the Pacific Islands Forum (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2017) have adopted a roadmap to guide sustainable practices.

Sustainable Development Goal Four is titled ‘Quality Education’ and speaks of ensuring an inclusive and equitable quality education that promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. This goal also stipulates the importance of a relevant education (Pacific Data Hub, n.d.)2018 which is reinforced by the Pacific Regional Education Framework, Moving Towards Education 2030 (Pacific Regional Education Framework, 2018) again, prioritising quality and relevance for student learning.

Sustainable education advocates that all learners need to have the knowledge and skills required to promote sustainable development such as skills of analysis and understanding, empathy and efficacy as well as the promotion of justice, in order to combat the inequalities of the world (O’Flaherty & Liddy, 2018). In recent years, the global context of education has brought a new focus to education policy and practice. This global character or contemporary education has become evident in educational policy and discourse, as well as in the practice of teaching development education, and education for sustainable development. These reforms within education and public spending demand increased transparency regarding accountability, efficiency and measurement (O’Flaherty & Liddy, 2018). Reform is reflected in the proliferation of standardised testing programmes such as the International Student Assessment (PISA, UNESCO) and the adoption of international literacy and numeracy testing initiatives. While global education reform is eager to instil ethical decision-making and erect “incentives” of performance (Ball, 2003, p. 218), the issue of transparency, primarily with a focus on measurement of student outcome, fails to speak of responsive pedagogy in order to achieve the goal of sustainable education. As Reich (2012) points out, there is, additionally, a distinct lack of supportive literature that gives direction for educational development and sustainability. While there are various education sustainability policies and curricula in schools that address the significance of quality education and culturally inclusive education, this does not translate into the interpretation of a culturally responsive pedagogy or of how a sustainable education might be manifested (Crocombe & Crocombe, 2003).

In order to achieve the goals of educational sustainability, we argue for culturally inclusive practices that incorporate local and indigenous knowledge and processes (Thaman, 2002). The goals of sustainable development must be context specific and localised; therefore, in different Pacific nations, sustainability requires different applications of its concept.

This paper aims to explore how culturally responsive pedagogy in the Pacific nation of the Cook Islands addresses the cultural gap in education provision which has, in the past, imported educational models and paradigms brought in from other countries that reflect different educational values, assumptions and goals (Thaman, 2002).

The pedagogy introduced here outlines a way forward for sustainable education for students with an opportunity to engage in their culture by working together with their teachers and community to make education a lifelong learning experience. This paper also investigates how cultural values employed in culturally responsive pedagogy are implemented to provide a sustainable development education in the Cook Islands setting. This is achieved by drawing on evidence from a multi-faceted research study into culturally responsive pedagogy (Te Ava, 2011). Broadly viewed, the research seeks to further understand sustainable education and the conversion of educational theory into practices that support positive futures for Cook Islands students.

## 'Pedagogy'

The term pedagogy is a western concept, from Greek origins, that draws attention to the process of teaching. Although there is no Cook Island term for 'pedagogy', there are forms of pedagogy in the Pacific education curriculum. For example, in the Cook Islands these might be described as the singular constructs of *api'i* (teaching and learning) and *tu ako* (to teach and listen). Such constructs are expressed in a range of contexts, including classroom practices and curriculum, and in wider society through cultural practices such as *imene tuki* (singing of hymns); *raranga* (weaving); *rutu pau* (playing drums); *ura* (dance); arts and crafts; and food gathering of different kinds of vegetables, fishing and hunting. These methods are important socially, culturally, historically and economically (Borofsky, 2000). Through these, children learn not only what is in the official curriculum, but also the values underpinning Cook Islands society. Teaching and learning through culture becomes the site for students' learning about contemporary society (Howard & Borofsky, 1989). The need to find a balance between western and Cook Islands understandings of pedagogy, national curriculum and culture remains of critical importance if sustainability is to be achieved. Pedagogy presents itself as a powerful way of conceptualising a relationship between teaching and values in educational settings.

Pedagogy also includes a consideration of the intentionality of teaching. When a teacher, coach or parent engages practically in particular knowledge transmissions, they have a pedagogical intent (Tinning, 2010). Framed in this way, pedagogy can be used to understand specific cultural practices in Cook Islands society. For example, Buck (1930) observed how Cook Islands chiefs taught young Cook Islanders fishing skills in Aitutaki. They originally trained their subjects to dive for fish until they ultimately mastered these skills. In this interaction process, the chiefs communicated values related to the structure of society, learning about fishing and the teaching of it, as well as respect for the marine environment, spiritual dimensions and service in communities.

Intentionality means that students' outcomes may be expressed and assessed through value-based collective activities, such as teamwork, *angaanga pakari* (work hard) and *tu akangateitei* (respect) and achievements. Similarly, teachers may develop planning processes that integrate effective learning skills. This may include student leadership and abilities in planning curriculum-related activities. Thereby, in Cook Island terms, a collective ethic and practice within the society generates *angaanga pakari* in achieving specific objectives. Intentionality in such a context is about more than a single lesson and teaching approach. Intentional pedagogy from a Cook Islands perspective will link values and curriculum outcomes.

While the concept of pedagogy draws attention to the process of knowledge production and the intentionality of the teaching act, the importance of values is frequently overlooked. To not consider values is to risk marginalising indigenous knowledge and its continuation, and to limit children's learning to western practices and curriculum (Meyers, 2003). The question remains: how might we understand values in order to understand culturally responsive pedagogy?

## Values

Henry (1992) posits:

Cultural values in the Cook Islands are a sustainable part of education. Cook Islanders should not abandon their cultural value in favour of the western education. Since the natives are aware of their loss, they owe it to their children to gain what they did not. It does not mean that Cook Islanders should cling to the glories of the past, instead should seek balance between cultural identity and pride. Every generation and every nation must look to new glories. (p. 12)

Henry (1992) recommended that Cook Islanders should acknowledge and grow from traditional cultural values in order to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Cultural values shape Indigenous peoples in their ways of knowing and being, and represent the elements of a society that are valued for creating and a sustainable community (Merriam & Mohamad, 2000). It has been suggested that cultural values are foundational to teaching and learning in Cook Islands communities (Jonassen, 2003). Eight interconnected values in Cook Islands Maori culture have been identified in teaching: *kitepakari* (wisdom), *irinaki* (faith), *akakoromaki* (patience), *ora* (life), *rota'i'anga* (unity), *akaaka* (humility), *noa* (freedom) and *aroa* (love) (Jonassen, 2003). Culturally responsive pedagogy will integrate such cultural values which are also enacted by the community.

Te Ava and Page (2018) has suggested that values in physical education (PE) are important not only for traditional links but also for contemporary considerations about the lives and cultures of peoples living in diverse societies. This suggests an expanded understanding of PE, beyond that of physical activity and gaming, to one in which cultural traditions and multiculturalism like the Cook Islands within PE play an important role in helping students from various backgrounds to express their thinking to other students and to become culturally engaged in each other's learning practices (Nieto, 2004). How then might culturally responsive pedagogy be conceptualised in ways that attend to values, learning and contemporary life in the Cook Islands?

## Culturally responsive pedagogy

### What is 'culturally responsive pedagogy'?

Culturally responsive pedagogy is multidimensional in that it encompasses curriculum content, learning, context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques and performance assessments (Gay, 2000). This is appropriate for sustainable education in that curriculum content meets the needs of contemporary Cook Islands students by being responsive, relevant and sensitive to their location (Lee & Efird, 2014). As such, while mindful of these dimensions, culturally responsive pedagogy is broadly defined as teaching in purposeful ways that integrate the values and culture in a sustainable community (Gay, 2000). In this sense, culturally responsive pedagogy is about the individual and the collective, and how this links to sustainable education of culturally inclusive and quality practices in education.

New Zealand education researchers have found that culturally responsive pedagogy is vital to learning by Pasifika school children. From a Pasifika perspective, it is important to establish an understanding of culturally appropriate pedagogies, particularly given that Thaman (2009) claims that most formal institutions in Pacific Islands nations fail to take into account the way Pacific people think, learn and communicate. This may require defining what pedagogy means in a learning institution (Coxon et al., 2002). Some have argued that for pedagogy for Pasifika students to be correctly defined, it should reflect the cultural values of Pasifika peoples and be inclusive and attuned to context (Samu, 2006; Mara 2006; Nabobo-Baba, 2006). There is a need to develop classroom instruction that is culturally orientated, has quality instruction and is responsive to Pasifika students (Airini et al., 2007).

In other Pacific regions, a number of initiatives to embed relevant pedagogical approaches that foregrounds culture have been realised, such as Tonga and the Solomon Islands (Crossley & Sprague, 2014). Parallel curricula have yet to be undertaken in the Cook Islands. This paper seeks to address this



gap to enable teachers to become inclusive and quality practitioners to improve education outcomes through attention to the cultural attributes of the student.

### **Tivaevae as a model for conceptualising culturally responsive pedagogy for sustainable education**

The metaphor of a Cook Islands *tivaevae* is proposed as a possible model for conceptualising culturally responsive pedagogy in sustainable education. *Tivaevae* was proposed by Maua-Hodges (2000) as a model for underpinning education, although it did not highlight the significance of culturally inclusive education and quality education. In this paper, the application of the *tivaevae* metaphor locates culturally responsive pedagogy and sustainability within the Cook Islands curriculum. It pays attention to the values that are important for incorporating into Cook Islands' pedagogy. The *tivaevae* model comprises five key values: *taokotai* (collaboration), *tu akangateitei* (respect), *uriuri kite* (reciprocity), *tu inangaro* (relationships) and *akairi kite* (shared vision). In this section, there is a description of how *tivaevae* is made along with the concepts of the *tivaevae*. The *tivaevae* model suggests a holistic approach to a Cook Islands sustainable education.

The *tivaevae* is a large canvas decorated with other pieces of cloth of different designs and patterns with the aim of making a picture or telling a story. The designs and colours are evocative of the Cook Islands environment—flowers, leaves, emblems, landscapes, ocean and sky. The stitching is part of the canvas. It sits on top of the fabric pieces where each stitch can be seen, and provides a reminder of the women's hands crafting the *tivaevae*. Rongokea (2001) illustrated two methods of sewing a *tivaevae*: patchwork, or piecework and appliqué. Further, there are four different styles: *tivaevae taorei* (piecework/patchwork), *tivaevae manu* (appliqué), *tivaevae tataura* (appliqué and embroidery) and *tivaevae tuitui tataura* (embroidered squares of fabric joined together with either crocheting or lace borders).

*Taokotai* (collaboration) plays an important role in making the *tivaevae*, bringing together a shared passion and love for *tuitui* (sewing). Collaboration has an important practical dimension:

I don't think I can make a *tivaevae* by myself; it's much quicker when you work with a group because when women get together, they come up with different interpretive realities. Our group has worked on a number of *tivaevae* together. Sometimes we've worked on it until four in the morning to try and get it right, and we've worked on a *tivaevae taorei* that took four years to complete. (Mareta Matamu cited in Rongokea, 2001, p. 63)

*Taokotai* is important when learning within a community group. Not only is striving to achieve shared objectives important, but so too is patiently practising *tivaevae*-making. The sewing of the *tivaevae* involves both time and inspiration as the pattern fitting gradually evolves. The need to negotiate designs and space, and to be patient in this process, adds to personal learning and development.

*Tu akangateitei* (respect) is fundamental in the production of *tivaevae*. Hence, Cook Islands women's patching expertise derives from experience, and mutual respect is revealed throughout the stages of the creation of the *tivaevae*. According to Rongokea (2001), the making of *tivaevae* suggests learning is a form of respecting the knowledge of others. In this sense, the *tivaevae* becomes a useful metaphor for explaining, structuring and acknowledging the culture. The ultimate process of designing a *tivaevae* is to blend traditional cultural values with an artistic piece of work.

According to Maua-Hodges (2000), reciprocal practice to which both the teacher and the learner contribute is vital. Likewise, the Cook Islands women develop reciprocity abilities (*uriuri kite*) that produce a *tivaevae*. They represent the shared ideas about discrete roles teachers, *pa metua* and students play in both assisted and supported learning environments. The concepts of *tivaevae* are intertwined with each rather than singly separated; therefore, learning experiences are viewed as similarly structured.

*Tu inangaro* (relationship) is valued in the making of *tivaevae*. This relationship initially starts in the family then grows out to the community. It is particularly depicted in *tivaevae* about history and

genealogy (Maua-Hodges, 2003). A process of relationship-making occurs over a period of time; time that is spent on spiritual matters, observation, demonstration, listening, practising, analysing, experimenting and reviewing the task of producing a tivaevae. Practical scaffolding has a significant role in this learning process (Maua-Hodges, 2003). Once an adroitness in handling a tivaevae has been reached, tivaevae students share their arts with the community.

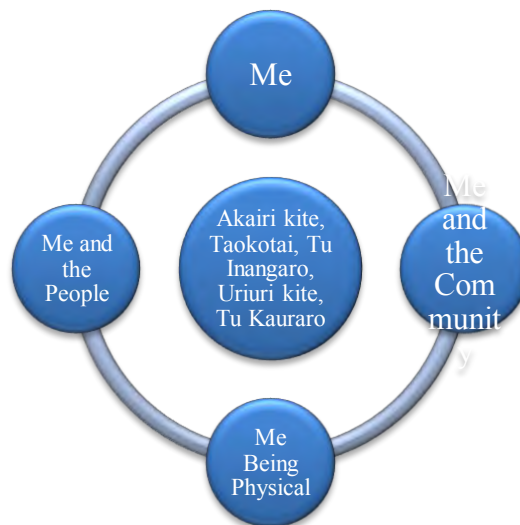
Akairi kite (shared vision) is highly respected among Cook Islands women making the tivaevae. When the women come together, they have a shared vision of how the tivaevae is going to turn out. Rongokea (2001) stated that shared vision of tivaevae is based on constructing knowledge incrementally, complementing personal growth and development. According to Rongokea (2001), shared vision is culturally responsive because it represents the values of tu akangateitei (respect), tu akakoromaki (patience) and tu kauraro (humility).

When knowledge is shared, whether right or wrong, it remains unamended. Appreciating each other in shared vision portrays gratitude which enables teacher and student to discuss the outcome of any knowledge gained. The tivaevae has a shared vision with sparks of godliness which every Cook Islander should be proud of—respected and cared for. The tivaevae is a validation of cultural knowledge that is respected in the Cook Islands communities. The challenge is to understand how the tivaevae model could be used in the context of education in the Cook Islands. The next section conceptualises its application to Cook Islands secondary PE.

### **Tivaevae model for a sustainable curriculum**

In 2004, the Health and PE curriculum (HPEC) adopted the *tivaevae* conceptual model in classroom teaching. The application of the model within the HPEC curriculum allowed an illustration of how the model can facilitate sustainable culturally inclusive education and practices. An elaboration is provided below.

Four general aims provide direction for learning in health and PE and become strands for academic achievement: ‘me’, ‘me being physical’, ‘me with other people’, and ‘me in the community’ (Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2004). The *tivaevae* model is helpful for understanding practices associated with the Cook Islands curriculum of Health and PE (HPE) programme in secondary schools. The *tivaevae* model contextualises the aims of the HPE curriculum within Cook Islands values. As shown below (Figure 1), each aim, when interpreted through the model, becomes the nation, the people and the language history. As a metaphor, the completion of the shared task of the *tivaevae* can also be the shared responsibility for providing teaching and learning to enable all Cook Islands children to reach their potential.



**Figure 1. The Tivaevae Model—a sustainable curriculum for Cook Islands health and physical education.**

When making the *tivaevae*, collaboration is fundamental (Amira in Rongokea, 2001). One person may be sewing one part of the design, and others may provide cooked food to support workers. Subsequently, agreement about the design to be crafted and respected by those taking part (including leaders) reveals the shared project vision. Similarly, when a student is learning through HPEC in the Cook Islands, the *tivaevae* model suggests education should be based on values of collaboration, respect, reciprocity, relationships and shared vision between teachers, students and community.

### Tivaevae as a culturally responsive model for sustainable education in the Cook Islands

The metaphor of the *tivaevae* has been suggested as a ‘holistic’ conceptualisation framework for sustainable education. It conveys an idea of cultural responsiveness and pedagogy in response to the question: What constitutes culturally responsive pedagogy for Cook Islands schooling?

The *tivaevae* model is organised in various flowers with distinct designs and patterns, as illustrated in Figure 2. The flowers depict concepts of *te reo Maori Kuki Airani* (Cook Islands Maori language), *peu ui tupuna* (cultural traditions), *peu inangaro* (cultural beliefs), *tu inangaro* (relationships), *peu puapinga* (cultural values), *akaputupu tu taokotai* (collaboration), *peu angaanga* (cultural activity) and *peu oire tangata* (cultural community).



Figure 2. Tivaevae model for sustainable education in the Cook Islands.

The concept of *te reo Maori Kuki Airani* suggests the following values: *apiianga metaporo*, *korero*, oratory, and *te aka matautauanga o te reo Maori Kuki Airani*. These values encourage success and that *te reo Maori Kuki Airani* maintains students’ language as the essence of their cultural heritage. Kauraka



(1983) indicated that, when protected, *te reo Maori Kuki Airani* generates Cook Islands students' ability to maintain their values in the classroom and in the community.

One flower pattern of the *tivaevae* represents the value of *peu ui tupuna*. This encompasses traditional practices that are influential to the lifestyle and cultural essence of the Cook Islands. It is therefore integral to culturally responsive pedagogy. For example, games such as *putoto taura* (tug-o-war) and *utiuti rima* (pulling interlocking fingers) are subject to cultural rites such as *peu taito* (legends and chants), *akataoanga ariki* (title investitures), *ura tamataora* (Cook Islands traditional dance), *pe'e* (chants), *pe'e tuketuke* (different kinds of chants) and *akairo* (signs) are all representations of the social, cultural, emotional and spiritual components which keep Cook Islands cultural practices alive. If teachers were to teach the *peu ui tupuna* in schools, they would provide opportunities to build a new horizon that would enable students to grow and to develop their thinking skills.

The flower pattern *peu inangaro* reflects the abstract idea of a culturally responsive pedagogy inclusive of Cook Islands lifestyle. *Peu inangaro* implies *ura* (traditional Cook Islands dancing), *imene* (singing), and playing traditional games and activities. Similarly, it involves *taporoporo* (preserving food and crops), *papaanga* (genealogy), *enua tumanako*, *arapo* (nights of the moon), *ra'ui* (customary sacred prohibitions) and *anau tamariki* (traditional way of giving birth). Literally, the *peu inangaro* teaches students a variety of practices that enable them to value their past and to make their future better. According to Tai'a (2003) *peu inangaro* is a motivational factor that helps students learn to acquire the skills necessary to improve their learning in school.

*Tu ingangaro* suggests trust and academic achievements. Teachers develop the value of *tu ingangaro* with students by using strategies such as *pirianga ngakau maru* (humility), *pirianga tamataora e te imene* (social interaction), *pirianga puapii kite tamariki* or *akairi to ratou tu inangaro* (relationships), *pirianga manako meitaki* (developing healthy habits), *pirianga manako maru* (learning with the heart), *pirianga tu ingangaro te tamariki kite puapii* (students' relationships with teachers), *rota'i'anga* (unity), *tiratiratu* (honesty) and *tu ako* (to listen or to teach). Developing the *tu ingangaro* is one of the many keys in Pasifika education where knowledge between teacher and student is gradually constructed (Samu et al., 2008).

*Peu puapinga* is another pattern that acknowledges values identified by the *pa metua*: *tāueue* (participation), *angaanga taokotai* (cooperation), *akatano* (discipline), *akakoromaki* (patience), *ngakau akaaka* (humility), *kauraro* (respect), *angaanga oire kapiti* (community involvement), *te reo Maori Kuki Airani* (Cook Islands Maori language) and *auora* (physical and spiritual wellbeing). Ama (2003) believed that Cook Islands *peu puapinga* are essential for the development of a healthy society and an enriching environment that prepares a challenging pathway for Cook Islands youth to achieve goals and objectives in schooling. These values are all reflected in the thoughts of the *pa metua* (Te Ava, 2011) as important to schooling and wider social practices.

The flower *akaputuputuanga taokotai* is representative of the value of learning from each other. It has been suggested that students' confidence increases as they work together with their teachers' talents through *vaerua ora* (spirit). Jonassen (2003) argued that *akaputuputuanga taokotai* is an element of *tu tangata* (personality and culture). According to him, *tu tangata* is *kite pakari* (wisdom) and *aroa* (love), and these are significant to the student learning environment. Therefore, having teachers as the main source of delivery encourages and inspires students to become versed in their *peu oraanga* (cultural identity). The involvement of parents and communities in this learning process also contributes to *akaputuputuanga taokotai*. Generations together have opportunities to mentor each other.

*Peu angaanga* values game-playing as a form of culturally responsive pedagogy. These might include *putoto taura* (tug-o-war) and *utiuti rima* (pulling interlocking fingers). *Peu angaanga* also includes *tamataora* (performing arts), *umauma* (arm wrestling), *oe vaka* (canoe paddling), *akarere manu* (flying kites), *opara'para vaevae* (foot pushing/cycling), *tataki toka* (stones for lifting and throwing), *ta'iri kaka* (skipping), *ura Kuki Airani* (traditional dance), *papa'oro'oro ngauru* (surfing with a board), *ko akari* (coconut husking), *piki tumunu* (coconut tree climbing), *pokopoko* (traditional wrestling), *pe'pei poro* (ball tossing) *pe'ipua* (disc throwing or rolling for accuracy or for distance), *ta rore* (stilt walking) and *pei teka* or *pei kakao* (dart throwing) (Te Ava, 2001). Kautai et al. (1984) suggest that *peu angaanga* are exciting activities that encourage participation, particularly if used in a caring and responsive way.

Finally, *peu oire tangata* also provides key values associated with *kauraro* (respect), *tu inangaro* (reciprocity), *ngutuare tangata* or *anau* (family), *vaka tangata oire* (community experts), *putuputuanga vaine tini e te tane tini* (women and men's community projects), *taokotai* (cooperation) and *kopu tangata* (community workers). It is suggested that schools who value *peu oire tangata*, have the potential to be culturally responsive to student learning and therefore more connected to student engagement and learning outcomes (Vai'imene, 2003).

## Conclusion

Culturally responsive pedagogy aligns with the principle of 'sustainable education' that focuses on the way that the education system can prepare and sustain young people to become custodians of their future (Van den Branden, 2012). The proposed *tivaevae* conceptualisation model seeks to support responsive pedagogical practices by embedding culturally inclusive approaches in the Cook Islands. A culturally inclusive approach addresses Sustainable Development Goal Four which outlines the need for a 'Quality Education' that ensures an inclusive and equitable education for all (UNESCO, 2004). The goal also highlights the importance of a relevant education (Pacific Data Hub, n.d.) The intention of the current paper is to show how a sustainable education can be realised by using a culturally inclusive model that is able to fulfil of the curriculum statement through being attentive to the social and cultural needs of all students. This model is intended to assist teachers to approach the dual task of providing time and space for students to be socially and culturally engaged, while also ensuring learning activities enhance students' academic achievement. Just as the making of *tivaevae* is collaborative, so too does the educational endeavour in schools involve many people (teachers, principals, cultural experts, government officials from the Ministry of Education, community *pa metua*, Cook Islands language advisors, academics, policy makers, communities, parents and students). It is suggested that, in this way, the education becomes more than qualifications alone. Rather, the curriculum is how our children come to understand the value and essence of culture and being. Culturally responsive pedagogy, when viewed as values-based and context oriented, suggests our work in education supports the whole person (socially, culturally, emotionally and spiritually). In context, culturally inclusive pedagogy is a sustainable, culturally innovative, creative and dynamic way of tapping into the learning potential of Cook Islands students. This paper has sought to recast the familiar account of *tivaevae* in new ways. It remains, however, that more is needed to be known about how to enable teachers to make meaning of curriculum through culturally responsive pedagogy and how to use this understanding in Cook Islands schools for the best sustainable education outcomes.

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