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## Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Creating Opportunities for Teacher Professional Development in the Cook Islands



## Pedagogy

Aue Te Ava and Yogeeta Devi  
The University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji

### Introduction

Culturally responsive pedagogy provides Cook Islands teachers an opportunity to overcome challenges and therefore create opportunities for teachers' professional development. This plays a significant role in providing teacher training as a lifelong professional experience. This entry investigates how culturally responsive pedagogy could be used in overcoming the challenges and generating opportunities for teachers' professional development in Cook Islands schools, which is central to this argument.

This entry also draws on evidence from a multifaceted research study into culturally responsive pedagogy (Airini et al. 2007). Broadly viewed, the research seeks further understandings of indigenous education and the conversion of educational theory into practices that support positive futures for indigenous peoples. More precisely, the research explores culturally responsive pedagogy in a specific context, that of the Cook Islands.

The term "pedagogy" is a western concept, of Greek origin, that draws attention to the process of teaching. Although the Cook Islands had no term for "pedagogy," the Cook Islands education curriculum did contain forms of pedagogy. These might be described as the unique constructs of *api'i* (teaching and learning) and *tu ako* (to teach and listen). These constructs were expressed in a range of contexts, including classroom practices and curriculum, and in the 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 were important socially, culturally, historically, and economically (Thompson et al. 2009). Through these, teachers would learn not only what was in the official education curriculum but also what were the values underpinning Cook Islands society. Teaching and learning through culture became the means of teachers' learning about contemporary society with cultural awareness (Te Ava and Page 2018). The need to find a balance between western and Cook Islands understandings of pedagogy, teacher practices, national curriculum, and culture remains of critical importance. Pedagogy presents itself as a powerful way of conceptualizing a relationship between teacher professional development and values in educational settings.

## Values

Cultural values shape indigenous peoples like in the Cook Islands in their ways of knowing and being and represent the elements of a society that were valued for creating and sustaining community (Te Ava and Page 2018). It has been suggested that cultural values were foundational to teacher professional development in Cook Islands communities; however this investigation is being continually updated. Te Ava and Page (2018, p. 3) posit that:

Cultural values in the Cook Islands are an important 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. Cook Island people instead, should seek balance between cultural identity and pride. Every generation and every nation must look to new glories.

In this predicament, Te Ava and Page (2018) suggest that Cook Islanders should make it a matter of urgency to invigorate their teacher professional development by returning to the cultural values of the past, not as a step back, but rather as a way to overcome the challenges of and construct opportunities for the present and future. This entry seeks to contribute to that dynamic of how culturally responsive pedagogy could be used by teachers' professional development in Cook Islands schools to lead and inspire the younger generation.

Perso (2012) also suggests that cultural values 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 the need for an expanded understanding of teacher practices, in which cultural traditions and multiculturalism play an important role in helping teachers understand diverse backgrounds and express their thinking on how to become culturally engaged in each other's teaching practices in a professional manner (Perso 2012). How then might teacher professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy be conceptualized in ways that attend

to values, learning, and contemporary life in the Cook Islands education system?

## Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

### Defining "Culturally Responsive Pedagogy"

Culturally responsive pedagogy is multi-dimensional in that it encompasses curriculum content, learning, context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, teacher professional developments, instructional techniques, and performance assessments (Perso 2012). As such, while being mindful of these dimensions, culturally responsive pedagogy is broadly defined as teaching in purposeful ways that integrate the values and culture in the community (Thompson et al. 2009). In this sense, culturally responsive pedagogy is about the individual and the collective. To this end, this entry presents the *Tivaevae* model as a theoretical construct underpinning culturally responsive pedagogy.

New Zealand education researchers have found that culturally responsive pedagogy was vital to learning by Pasifika teachers. From a Pasifika perspective, it was important to establish an understanding of culturally appropriate pedagogies (Airini et al. 2007). This may require defining what pedagogy means in a learning institution. Some have argued that, for pedagogy for Pasifika students to be correctly defined, it should reflect the cultural values of Pasifika peoples and be attuned to context. There was a need to develop classroom instruction that was both culturally oriented and responsive to Pasifika students (Airini et al. 2007). However, at that time investigations of teacher professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy were yet to be initiated in the Cook Islands. Therefore, to address this gap and to enable teacher professional development to adjust its practices in order to improve education outcomes, attention to cultural attributes needed to be considered.

### "Tivaevae" as a Model for Conceptualizing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The *Tivaevae* was proposed as a possible model for conceptualizing culturally responsive

pedagogy. The application of the *Tivaevae* model locates culturally responsive pedagogy within the Cook Islands curriculum. It pays attention to the significance of values incorporated into culturally responsive pedagogy.

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 are evocative of the Cook Islands environment – flowers, leaves, and emblems. The colors are those of the Pacific Islands – its landscapes, flora, ocean, and sky. The stitching is part of the canvas and is on top of the fabric pieces, where each stitch can be seen, and thereby provides a reminder of the women’s hands that crafted it. Rongokea (2001) illustrated two basic methods of sewing a *Tivaevae*: patchwork or piecework and appliqué. Further, there were 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).

The *Tivaevae* model comprises five key values: *taokotai* (collaboration), *tu akangateitei* (respect), *uriuri kite* (reciprocity), *tu inangaro* (relationships), and *akairi kite* (shared vision). Such a description of the *Tivaevae* suggests a holistic approach with specific alignment to teachers’ professional development.

*Taokotai* (collaboration) plays an important role in making the *Tivaevae*. To illustrate how traditional practices in the Cook Islands are valued, I highlighted the following examples of women making a *Tivaevae*. My deceased mother had a passion and love for tuitui (sewing) *Tivaevae*; she described the process of collaboration and professional experience as climbing up stairways to reach a landing. Like the *Tivaevae*, she said that listening to other people’s views was one of many other ways to learn tuitui skills. Moreover, other women highlighted ways to value the making of the *Tivaevae*. Mareta Matamua explains:

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. (Cited in Rongokea 2001, p. 63)

*Taokotai* was important when learning within a community group. Not only was striving to achieve successful collaborative objectives significant, but learning to patiently practice *Tivaevae*-making was crucial. The sewing of the *Tivaevae* depicts both time-consuming activity and inspiration, as patterns fitted gradually displayed symmetrical designs. Although this dexterity in patching was a frustrating and negotiable task, it subsequently enhanced incremental collaboration and generated personal growth. Rangi Moekaa said:

I was twenty years old when I first tried to make my own *Tivaevae*. In those days we learned by watching other women. I belonged to a *Tivaevae* (women’s group); my mother-in-law was the president. I watched my mother-in-law and the other women making their own *Tivaevae* then I’d come back home and make my own; that is how I learned to sew. (Cited in Rongokea 2001, p. 33)

*Tu akangateitei* (respect) was fundamental in the production of *Tivaevae*. Because the Cook Islands women’s patching expertise derives from experience, mutual respect was revealed throughout the stages of the creation of the *Tivaevae*. According to Rongokea (2001), the making of the *Tivaevae* identifies learning as a form of respecting the knowledge of others. Te Ava and Page (2018) indicate that knowledge construction occurs through dexterity in patching skills. In this sense, the *Tivaevae* becomes a useful model for explaining, structuring, and acknowledging the culture which was essential for teacher professional development. The ultimate process of designing a *Tivaevae* was to blend traditional cultural values with practices and an artistic piece of work. The *Tivaevae* conveys the meaning of culturally responsive pedagogy within Cook Islands society. It illustrates the past, present, and future of the culture which was integral to the social, cultural, historical, and spiritual aspects of society.

As illustrated above, social *uriuri kite* (reciprocity) was involved. According to Te Ava

and Page (2018), reciprocal practice to which both the teacher and the learner contribute was vital. Likewise, the Cook Islands women develop reciprocity abilities which produce a *Tivaevae*. They represent the shared ideas about discrete roles teachers play in both assisted and supported learning environments. The concepts of *Tivaevae* were intertwined with each other rather than separated, and learning experiences can be viewed as similarly structured. These were the techniques that Te Ava and Page (2018) used to develop a research framework model for Cook Islanders.

*Tu inangaro* (relationship) is another significant concept Cook Islands women value in making *Tivaevae*. This relationship initially starts in the family and then grows out into the community. It is particularly well depicted in the *Tivaevae* from which Cook Islanders learned about their history and genealogy. Te Ava and Page (2018) report that a strong relationship is built between the women while making *Tivaevae* together in community activities. This means the *vaine* (women) in this strengthening relationship acquire knowledge from each other.

The relationship-building process occurs over a period of time, time that was spent on spiritual intervention, observation, demonstration, listening, practicing, analyzing, experimenting, and reviewing the task of producing a *Tivaevae*. Practical capability has a significant role in this learning progress (Te Ava and Page 2018). Once they become adroit in handling a *Tivaevae* and gain knowledgeable agility, *Tivaevae* students share their arts with the community.

*Akairi kite* (shared vision) was highly respected among Cook Islands women making the *Tivaevae*. When the women come together, they have a shared vision of their knowledge in how the *Tivaevae* is going to turn out. Rongokea (2001) states that the shared vision of the *Tivaevae* was based on constructing knowledge incrementally. It was a crucial aspect of personal growth and development. According to Rongokea (2001), shared vision was culturally responsive because it represents the values of *tu akangateitei* (respect), *tu akakoromaki* (patience), and *tu kauraro* (obedience). This is an integral part of respecting the knowledge of others.

More importantly, when knowledge is shared, whether right or wrong, it remained uncorrected. Appreciating each other's shared vision precisely shows gratitude that enables teacher and student to discuss the outcome of any knowledge gained (Te Ava and Page 2018). The *Tivaevae* shares vision with sparks of godliness which every Cook Islander should be proud of, respect, and care for. Through communal learning, Cook Islanders were able to explore, discover, and assess the outside world. Collectively, teachers were culturally responsive to the *Tivaevae* because it was a validation of cultural knowledge that was respected in Cook Islands communities.

### **"Tivaevae": A Culturally Responsive Model for Teacher Professional Development in the Cook Islands**

The *Tivaevae* model suggests a "holistic" conceptualization framework for teachers' professional development (Te Ava and Page 2018). It conveys an idea of cultural responsiveness and pedagogy in response to the question: What constitutes culturally responsive pedagogy for teachers' professional development in the Cook Islands? In answering the question, the *Tivaevae* model was organized in various flowers with distinct designs and patterns, as illustrated in Fig. 1. 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 taokotai* (collaboration), *peu angaanga* (cultural activity), and *peu oire tangata* (cultural community). These concepts and values were essential for teacher professional development and provide teachers with the ability and confidence to engage in Cook Islands culture. It also offers teachers the capacity to become competent by learning the cultural traditions of the Cook Islands and develop relationships with the community. It is envisaged in this study that the *Tivaevae* model would absolutely bring out the best of teacher professional development and give teachers the potential to become culturally responsive practitioners.





Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Creating Opportunities for Teacher Professional Development in the Cook Islands, Fig. 1 A Tivaevae model for teachers' professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy

## Conclusion

The proposed *Tivaevae* conceptualization model seeks to support culturally responsive pedagogy in teacher professional development practices in the Cook Islands. The intention is to enable teachers to overcome the challenges and offer opportunities in teacher professional development. This fulfillment of teacher professional development would enable teachers to be attentive to the social and cultural needs of teacher practices. The *Tivaevae* model is intended to assist teachers to approach the dual task of providing time and space to be socially and culturally engaged while also ensuring learning activities enhance teachers' ability to gain professional knowledge. Just as the making of *Tivaevae* was collaborative, the educational endeavor in schools involves many people (classroom teachers, principals, cultural experts, government officials from the Ministry of Education, community pa metua, language teachers, advisers, academics, policymakers, communities, parents, and students). 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 responsive pedagogy is a culturally innovative, creative, and

dynamic way of tapping into the learning potential of teacher professional development. It remains, however, that more is needed to be known about how to enable teachers to make meaning of culturally responsive pedagogy and how to use this understanding to teacher professional development in Cook Islands secondary schools and beyond.

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