

Initiating a Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Historical Shifts in Health and Physical Education in the Cook Islands

Aue Te Ava

School of Education, Faculty of Law, Education, Business & Arts, Charles Darwin University, Darwin, NT, Australia

Abstract

The Cook Islands curriculum of health and physical education is essentially developing. The aims of the paper are threefold: first, to investigate the historical shifts of Cook Islands health and physical education; second, to examine Cook Islands culturally responsive pedagogy approach in health and physical education and what constitutes a culturally responsive pedagogy in health and physical education; and third, to explore the *tivaevae* model, which conceptualises culturally responsive pedagogy and how this plays an important part in the Cook Islands curriculum of health and physical education. The findings of this paper indicate how important it is for health and physical education research to be initiated within the context of Cook Islands cultural values and culturally responsive pedagogy and how these could benefit curriculum and policy development in education and pedagogy.

Key words: education policy and curriculum, culturally responsive pedagogy, health and physical education, cultural value

Background: Historical shifts of Cook Islands Health and Physical Education

The paper reports the historical evolution of educational practices in the Cook Islands, with an interest in how the health and physical education curriculum has been positioned within that time. Much of the discussion centres on key discursive shifts in Cook Islands education broadly, which has had a relative lack of emphasis on research in the areas of health and physical education. Although the literature has limited discussions of health and physical education, it is known that the missionaries took an active role in teaching life skills to the locals (Gilson, 1980). These skills ranged from carpentry (e.g., constructing new school buildings and meetings houses) and sewing for women. An important concept to discuss was how life skills are linked to healthy bodies – this was related to health and physical education and sport occupied in England explained how organised sport into public boy's schools of England with intent to discipline boys into particularly types of healthy body and citizens. In contrast, health and physical education for girls oriented around calisthenics promoting of personal and social development, team spirit and leadership, and physical wellbeing amongst participating members (Tinning, McCuaig, & Hunter, 2006). The missionaries were aware that healthy bodies lead to better learning. This somehow encourages Cook Islanders to become literate by educating citizens to develop sustainability and leadership acquiring that healthy citizens who were self-regulating, informed, critically reflective, and capable of constructing their own healthy lifestyle and minimising risky behaviours. As discussed earlier, health and physical education was seen to play a huge part (Tinning, McCuaig, & Hunter, 2006). However, it was also the time that the emphasis of education was geared towards cultural practices. Language, arts, carving, weaving, song and music, dance and the dramatization of myths and legends were popular (Vai'imene 2003). The integration of cultural practices in sports and games was extremely prevalent with students and teachers in the schools. This became the highlight of the school and cultural festivals even health and physical education that included cultural activities such as *ura Kuki Airani* (dance), *ta rore* (fighting walking stilt), *patarave* (playing marbles), and *pei teka* (dart games) became the highlight of the schools' events.

Cumulatively to these changes, influenced by an education system in a significantly different context, meant that Cook Islanders have not progressed in developing a system that truly reflects the cultural background of the Cook Islands' younger generation. After more than a century of New Zealand influence, questions remain, should education for the Cook Islands be based on a New Zealand system? What would health and physical education look like for Cook Islanders? Should it be multicultural or inclusive education? Provided there was limited research in health and physical education, this paper argues for a culturally responsive pedagogy in health and physical education is a positive approach that would encourage Cook Island students to engage further in schooling and participation in physical education and hopefully overcome health outcomes (Te Ava, 2013; Laddison-Billings, 2005; Chepator-Thompson, 1994) is described next.

Towards a culturally responsive pedagogy approach for Health and Physical Education

Culture is at the core of Cook Islands life and is demonstrated in community festivals. It is practised in everyday aspects such as dance, music, arts and crafts, weaving, and drumming. These practices constitute an important part of students learning to be a 'Cook Islander' (Mason & Williams, 2003). However, culture extends beyond identity to additionally connect to pedagogical practice. The following section investigates how culturally responsive pedagogy and cultural values can be initiated within the context of Cook Islands. The discussion of the *tivaevae* model underpins culturally responsive pedagogy and values for Cook Islands for health and physical education.

What constitutes a culturally responsive pedagogy in Health and Physical Education for Cook Islands Schools?

Culturally responsive pedagogy values Cook Islands traditional learning. Culturally responsive pedagogy is an important part of the teacher's and student's learning (Chepyator-Thomson, You, & Russell, 2000). From a Cook Islands perspective, a culturally responsive pedagogy is built on

principles such as spirituality, respect, patience, affection and oral tradition (Mokoroa, 2003). These cultural perspectives are valued in the teaching and learning of Cook Islands cultural practice (Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2004; Howard & Borofsky, 2000; Morton, 1996). This paper demonstrates how a culturally responsive pedagogy can be employed in the teaching of physical education. It also examines why it is important for Cook Islands teachers to use a culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms.

A culturally responsive pedagogy values the knowledge of Cook Islands elders. A Cook Islands cultural value such as *tu akangateitei* (respect) underpins culturally responsive pedagogy in the Cook Islands (Borofsky, 2000). Respect is honouring and paying tribute to superiors such as ancestors, elders, parents, co-workers, teachers, and students (Borofsky, 2000) and therefore is a moral value. In pre-European times in the Cook Islands, respect was required in communal situations. Buck (1927) stated that in the Cook Islands during warfare in pre-European times, warriors were taught to respect their chiefs and elders. Although the teaching by, and learning requirements of, the elders, was very demanding, warriors were taught to cope with it and to be patient, whether they liked it or not. When the *pa metua* (elders) taught a skill of war or a physical movement, the warriors were expected to learn quickly and to show respect.

In contemporary society, respect is probably the most difficult value to acquire in the classroom (Nabobo-Baba, 2005). If a lack of respect emerges in a teacher–student relationship, learning may eventually fade away. For example, Meyers (2003) observed that some Hawaiian teachers had lost confidence in their students; this created an atmosphere where students rebelled and generated learning limitations. In Fiji, Nabobo-Baba (2005) said that teachers’ behaviour requires integrity, honesty, and humility as part of an ethical professional act.

Oral tradition is another concept that is integral to a culturally responsive pedagogy that is applied in a cultural context. For Cook Islands students, the use of the oral tradition in a culturally responsive program enables them to learn their identity and encourages language fluency. Unfortunately, the oral tradition has been deprioritised due to teachers’ inability to deliver it (Tai’a, 2003).

If a culturally responsive pedagogy can improve health and physical education pedagogy in the Cook Islands’ education system, the question remains how it can be implemented. Te Ava (2011) suggests that because health and physical education teachers in the Cook Islands do not come from the Cook Islands — rather they have been employed from overseas. Although they may have tried to teach Cook Islands cultural values to students, they lack the knowledge and understanding of these cultural values. They are confronted with difficulties in teaching a culturally responsive practice (Te Ava, 2011). It is a better health and physical education pedagogy for Cook Island’s schooling than previous practices because it is multidimensional and culturally inclusive in that it encompasses curriculum content, diversity, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, and performance assessments (Laddison-Billings, 2005; Te Ava, 2013). Yet it is this same characteristic that makes this pedagogy so challenging for non-Cook Islanders teachers. The *Tivaevae* model for conceptualising culturally responsive pedagogy is broadly defined as teaching in purposeful ways that integrate the values and culture in the community (Te Ava, 2011). In this sense, a culturally responsive pedagogy is about the individual and the collective; and the reciprocity and responsiveness in a range of dimensions in the community and schooling (Te Ava, 2013). A culturally responsive pedagogy reflects a cultural ethnicity and the Cook Islands values. This can be an effective framework for the health and physical education curriculum.

***Tivaevae* as a model for conceptualising culturally responsive pedagogy**

The *tivaevae* model comprises five key concepts. In this section I illustrate these concepts holistically. These are *taokotai* (collaboration), *tu akangateitei* (respect), *uriuri kite* (reciprocity), *tu inangaro* (relationships), and *akairi kite* (shared vision). These themes represent how a culturally responsive pedagogy is interconnected with the *tivaevae* model. An explanation of how the *tivaevae* is made is described next.

In figure 2 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 colours are of a Pacific Island – its

landscapes, flora, ocean, and sky. The stitching, which is part of the canvas, sits on top of the fabric pieces and each stitch can be seen, thereby providing a reminder of the women's hands that have crafted the *tivaevae*. Rongokea (2001) illustrated two basic 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*. My mother has a passion and love for *tuitui* (sewing) *tivaevae*; she describes the process of collaboration as climbing up stairways to reach a landing. Like the *tivaevae*, she says that listening to other people's views is one of many other ways to learn *tuitui* skills. Moreover, other women highlight 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. (Quoted in Rongokea, 2001, p. 63)

Another Cook Islands informant, Napier Mitaera recalled:

My mother belongs to a *vaine-tini* group; it was like a working bee. You buy your material and then all the women get together to cut it out and sew it. Then you take your piece home to sew it together. (Quoted in Rongokea, 2001, p. 68)

Tauraarenga Mouauri stated:

On the islands of Mauke, I first started sewing when I was at school. I was about sixteen years old. *Taorei* was sewn and taught by the old mama's [sic] in groups; *tivaevae manu* was introduced to the island much later. In 1960 two women from Rarotonga came over and taught sewing to the ladies here on Mauke Tapaeru Opo-Tapaeru Tereora. They taught us about sewing; that was the time when I first started to learn to sew *tivaevae*. (Quoted in Rongokea, 2001, p. 71)

Taokotai is important when learning within a community group. Not only is striving to achieve successful collaborative objectives significant, but so also is learning to patiently practise *tivaevae*-making crucial. The sewing of the *tivaevae* depicts both a time-consuming activity and inspiration, as pattern fitting gradually displays symmetrical designs. Although this dexterity in patching is a frustrating and negotiable task, it subsequently enhances incremental collaboration and generates personal growth. Amira Davey explained:

I grew up on the islands of Aitutaki and I am part Hawaiian, Tahitian, English and Aitutakian, I learned patchwork when I was twelve years old and I used to watch my mother sewing and she would give me the small squares of her *tivaevae* to tack together. (Quoted in Rongokea, 2001, p. 29)

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. (Quoted in Rongokea, 2001, p. 33)

Tu akangateitei (respect) is fundamental in the process of *tivaevae*. Hence, the Cook Islands women's patching expertise derives from experience; mutual respect is 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. Women construct learning by developing dexterity in

patching skills. 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 practices. The *tivaevae* conveys the meaning of a culturally responsive pedagogy within Cook Islands society. It illustrates the past, present, and future of the culture, which is integral to the social, cultural, historical, and spiritual aspects of society.

As illustrated above, *uriuri kite* (reciprocity) is socially involved. According to Maua-Hodges (2001), reciprocity, to which both the teacher and the learner contribute, is vital. Likewise, the Cook Islands women develop reciprocity abilities that produce a *tivaevae*. They represent the shared ideas about the discrete roles teachers (*pa metua*) and students play in both assisted and supported learning environments. The concepts of *tivaevae* are intertwined with each other rather than singly separated; therefore, learning experiences are viewed as similarly structured.

Tu inangaro (relationship) is another substantial concept the Cook Islands women value in the making of the *tivaevae*. This relationship initially starts in the family; then grows out into the community. Moreover, it is particularly depicted in the *tivaevae* from which Cook Islanders learn about their history and genealogy. Maua-Hodges (2001) reported that relationship in making *tivaevae* occurs in community involvements. This means the *vaine* (women) relationship engages in knowledge acquisition, since all the respondents learnt the craft from a significant female relative.

The relationship process occurs over a period of time; time that is spent on spiritual intervention, observation, demonstration, listening, practising, analysing, experimenting and reviewing the task of producing a *tivaevae*. Practical scaffolding has a significant role in this learning progress (Maua-Hodges 2001). Once the adroitness in handling a *tivaevae* has been reached, and knowledgeable agility acquired, *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 their knowledge of how the *tivaevae* is going to turn out. Rongokea (2001) stated that the shared vision of the *tivaevae* is based on constructing knowledge incrementally. It is a crucial aspect of personal growth and development. According to Rongokea, shared vision is culturally responsive because it represents the values of *tu akangateitei* (respect), *tu akakoromaki* (patience), and *tu kauraro* (obedience or obey). This is an integral part of respecting the knowledge of others.

More importantly, whether right or wrong, when knowledge is shared it remains unamended. Appreciating each other in a shared vision portrays gratitude, which enables teacher and student to discuss the outcome of any knowledge gained (Te Ava, 2011). The *tivaevae* is a shared vision that every Cook Islander should be proud of, and respected and cared for. Through communal learning, Cook Islanders are able to explore, discover and assess the outside world. Collectively, students are culturally responsive to the *tivaevae* because it is a validation of cultural knowledge that is respected in Cook Islands communities (Te Ava, 2001).

A *tivaevae* approach to Cook Islands curriculum of Health and Physical Education

Before discussing the *tivaevae* model and how this may be used in the curriculum of health and physical education, an understanding of the Cook Islands health and physical education curriculum is discussed. It explores ways in which the *tivaevae* model is helpful in both understanding and enhancing practices associated with the Cook Islands health and physical education curriculum.

In 2004, the Health and Physical Education Curriculum (HPEC) was drafted by the curriculum developers of the Cook Islands Ministry of Education. In accordance with the objectives articulated in the policy statement, the curriculum outlines the importance of health and physical wellbeing and how this can be nurtured in classroom teaching. The HPEC adopted a holistic concept in classroom teaching that involves social, spiritual, mental and emotional, and physical dimensions. Discussions concerning attitudes and values that are formed through exposure to different thoughts, ideas, experiences, and practices take place among the teachers. The translation of health and physical education into Cook Islands Maori, called *oraanga e te tupuanga meitaki*, aims to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and the motivation to make effective decisions that contribute to general wellbeing. Both the implementation of learning styles and teaching methods can assist students with their learning. Unfortunately, these concepts have not been implemented in the Cook Islands curriculum.

While the curriculum reflects the teachers' competencies in some important concepts, health promotion reflects the dominant understanding in a society of what counts as health, the abstract idea of *pitoenua* (wellbeing). These were duplicated documents that originally occurred in the New Zealand curriculum. In Figure 1 the four aims show establish the direction for learning in health and physical education; these become strands for academic achievements: 'me', 'me being physical', 'me with other people', and 'me in the community'. These four aims are aligned to the *tivaevae* values as discussed earlier: *taokotai* (collaboration), *tu akangateitei* (respect), *uriuri kite* (reciprocity), *tu inangaro* (relationship), and *akairi kite* (shared vision). In order to develop learning skills, students must understand their physical wellbeing as perceived within the community realm (Cook Islands Ministry of Education, 2004).

The curriculum emphasises not only the need for health and physical wellbeing, but also the necessity for growth and learning in physical education; regardless, the curriculum is limited to teaching methods in classrooms in terms of instruction, content, teaching relationships, learning styles and contexts in favour of a culturally responsive pedagogy.

In accordance with the curriculum framework for health and physical education, physical education teachers organise lesson plans that align with the progress of their students. Unfortunately, these teachers may lack information about the principle philosophy of the curriculum document. Although the significance of culture in the curriculum is stated, actual teaching and learning practices that are to be involved in the delivery of the curriculum and the ways these are used in a culturally responsive pedagogy are not clearly defined.

The *tivaevae* model is helpful to enhance understanding of practices associated with the Cook Islands curriculum of Health and Physical Education (HPE) program in secondary schools. The *tivaevae* model contextualises the aims of the Health and Physical Education curriculum within Cook Islands values. As shown in Figure 1, each aim, when interpreted through these values, becomes the nation, the people, and the language history, after the completion of the shared task of the *tivaevae*. If the *tivaevae* model used in culturally responsive pedagogy enables students to gain a better understanding of their cultural values and tradition, then classroom learning will make a significant contribution to their success. To achieve this, as Lusted (1986) indicated, the knowledge of both the students and teachers should be valued and respected.

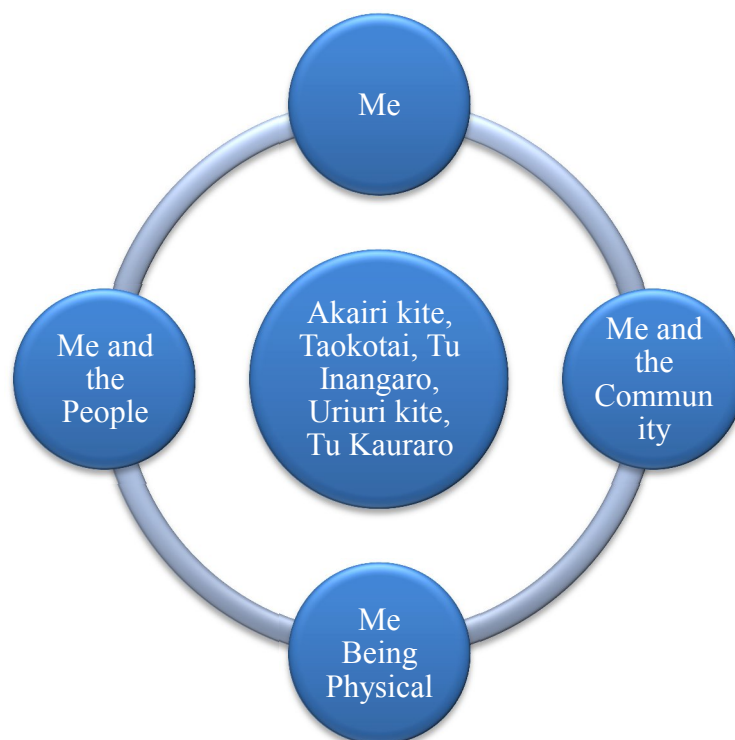


Figure 1: The *tivaevae* model of the Cook Islands Health and Physical Education aims.

The *tivaevae* model illuminates how the efforts of students enable them to relate not only to themselves, but also to others. As Amira (as cited in Rongokea, 2001) and others commented, when making the *tivaevae*, collaboration is fundamental: one person may be sewing one part of the design, and others, like men, may provide cooked food to support the workers. Subsequently, agreement about the design to be crafted and respected for those taking part (including leaders) — eventually a sense of giving back to others — perhaps through sharing knowledge, and conceivably through the cloth itself, reveals the shared vision that participants collectively agree with. Similarly, when a student is learning Health and Physical Education in the Cook Islands, the *tivaevae* model suggests that involvement in the learning process should be based on values of collaboration, respect, reciprocity, relationships and shared vision. However, the challenge is to understand how the application of this model is shown through culturally responsive pedagogy.

Conclusion

Since the arrival of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the 1800s, the Cook Islands lifestyle began to change. Throughout the ensuing historical shifts in Cook Islands education, discussions around health and physical education and culture were avoided. This paper highlights the significance of a culturally responsive pedagogy in teaching health and physical education, and what a culturally responsive pedagogy model is for Cook Islands students. In this respect, the paper pinpoints the need to undertake further research into the complexity of culturally responsive pedagogies, and more particularly, into how the *tivaevae* model conceptualises culturally responsive pedagogy in health and physical education for Cook Islands secondary schools. The emphasis has been on cultural curricular development. Many researchers continue to ignore the significance of cultural issues in education and physical education, and instead concentrate on the teacher's viewpoint. This emphasis limits the ability to present a balanced perspective on this complex context. It is only through further research of cultural responsiveness in health and physical education that we gain a better understanding of physical education teacher practice as well as of student learning. Thus, informing the teachers in their quest to further develop a culturally responsive model could be useful to improve the achievement of Cook Islands secondary school students.

References

- Borofsky, R. (2000). *Remembrance of Pacific past: An invitation to remake history*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Buck, P. T. H. (1927). *The material culture of the Cook Islands in Aitutaki*. Wellington: New Zealand Board of Maori Ethnological Research.
- Chepyator-Thomson, J. R. (1994). Multicultural education: Culturally responsive. *Journal of Physical Education Recreation and Dance*, 62-68.
- Cook Islands Ministry of Education (2004). *Oraanga e te Tupuanga Meitaki: Health and physical wellbeing curriculum* Rarotonga: Cook Islands Ministry of Education. Accessed 23 May, 2006 from www.education.gov.ck/docs/curriculumHealth&PE
- Gilson, R. (1980). *The Cook Islands history*. Wellington: Victoria University Press.
- Maua-Hodges, T. (2001). Unpublished paper, Victoria University, Wellington.
- Laddison-Billings, G. (2005). Is the team all right? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 56(3), 229–234.
- Lusted, D. (1986). Why pedagogy? *Screen*, 27, 2–14.
- Mason, T. J., & Williams, S. (2003). Tamataora: The performing arts. In R. Crocombe & M. Crocombe (Eds.), *Akano'anga Maori: Cook Islands Culture*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
- Meyers, M. A. (2003). *Ho'oulu: Our time of becoming-Hawaiian epistemology and early writings* (1st ed.). Hawai'i: Hawai'i Native Books Inc.
- Mokoroa, P. (2003). Tamataora Taito: Traditional games, sports and pastimes in Ngaputoru. In R. Crocombe & M. Crocombe (Eds.), *Akano'anga Maori: Cook Islands Culture*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific
- Nabobo-Baba, U. (1996). *A century of higher education in Fiji: An examination of establishment and development trends in 1885-1995*. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, The University of the South Pacific, Suva.
- Rongokea, L. (2001). *The art of Tivaevae: Traditional Cook Islands quilting*. Auckland: Godwit.
- Ross, A. (1969). *New Zealand's Record in the Pacific Islands in the twentieth century*. New Zealand: Longman Paul Ltd for the Institute of Internal Affairs.
- Scott, D. (1991). *Years of Pooh-Bah: A Cook Islands history*. Auckland: Cook Islands Trading Corporation Ltd in association with Hodder and Stoughton Ltd.
- Tai'a, M. R. (2003). Tai'anga: Cultural change in akatokamanava. In R. Crocombe & M. Crocombe (Eds.), *Akano'anga Maori: Cook Islands culture*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
- Te Ava, A. (2011). *Mou Piriia Te Kōrero 'Ā To 'Ui Tūpuna, Akaoraoraia: Culturally responsive pedagogy for Cook Islands secondary schools PE* (Unpublished PhD thesis). The University of Auckland, New Zealand.
- Te Ava, A., Airini, A., & Rubie-Davies, C. (2011). Akarakara Akaouanga i te Kite Pakari O Te Kuki Airani: Culturally responsive pedagogy. *Journal of Pacific-Asia Education*, 23(2), 117–128.
- Te Ava, A., Rubie-Davis, C., Airini., & Ovens, A. (2013). Akaoraoraia te Peu 'A To 'Ui Tupuna: Implementing Cook Islands core values in culturally responsive pedagogy in Cook Islands physical education classrooms. *Australia Indigenous Research Education Journal*. 42(1), 32–43.
- Te Ava, A. (2001). *The role of physical education in preserving traditional sports and games in the Cook Islands: Units of instructions* (Unpublished Master's thesis). Department of Kinesiology and Leisure Science at the College of Education, University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

Tinning, R., McCuaig, & Hunter, L. (2006). *Teaching health and physical education in Australian schools*. Frenchs Forest, N.S.W: Prentice Hall.

Vai'imene, G. (2003). *Api'i: Culture in education*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.



Figure 2: Based on Rongokea's (2001) book, the author created a *tivaevae* model as a conceptualised theoretical framework for a culturally responsive pedagogy in Cook Islands physical education (Te Ava, 2011).