

## TAANGAANGA TE PEU RAROTONGA—INVESTIGATING RAROTONGAN CORE VALUES

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This study explored Rarotongan core values that elders in Rarotonga considered might be important for inclusion in a physical education program. To date, there has been no study on Rarotongan core values in physical education. The study of Rarotongan core values will benefit Rarotongan schools in the area of physical education. This will revive some of the cultural traditional practices that have been discouraged. Rarotongan core values will encourage students' participation in physical education. Findings of the study address the needs of a policy that will enhance students' participation in physical education if used in a culturally responsive way.

### Introduction

THIS STUDY WAS DESIGNED TO EXPLORE Rarotongan core values. The research question was: What Rarotongan core values are needed to structure a culturally responsive pedagogy for physical education? It was expected that Rarotongan core values play an important part in student engagement and participation of learning in physical education. The research is important because it uncovers important Rarotongan core values that could be incorporated into the physical education program. By interviewing a range of *pa metua* (elders) and senior members of the community who were knowledgeable about education in Rarotonga, it was anticipated that this would lead to an understanding of their perceptions of what constituted Rarotongan core values and their perceptions in terms of the benefits of the core values for improving student engagement in their learning.

Findings of the study showed that the interviewees conceived Rarotongan core values to be important to students' schooling; they believed the core values could contribute to implementing a curriculum and policy and education of students' learning and engagement if used in a culturally responsive manner.

## Method

### *Participants*

Ten community elders, five government officials, and four school administrators participated in the study. These participants were selected because they comprised *pa metua* who had standing and respect within the community, as well as a range of government officials and administrators who had long-standing careers in education in Rarotonga. This latter group was deemed to possess implicit knowledge about the potential integration of core values in the teaching of physical education. All participants who were approached agreed to be interviewed. For confidentiality, the names of the participants have been preserved for anonymity.

### *Measures*

All participants were interviewed to obtain their views about what constituted core values within the Rarotongan context. They took part in a semistructured interview because it enabled the participants to direct the interview and to share their experiences in their own way. The semistructured method does not confine the interviews to a set format but allows the interviewees freedom to express their views and to lead the interview in directions that are important to them (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). The prompts that were used to initiate and promote the interview were:

*Kia Orana e meitaki maata no teia atiangā kia komakoma taua no runga i taku e anoano nei ite kite. [Thank you very much papa for this opportunity to interview you. Your wisdom and knowledge is important to this research. I hope that we learn from each other.]*  
*Te mea mua e papa me ka tika iakoe kia komakoma taua no runga ite oonu'anga ta tatou akaaercanga no te peu apii ta tatou e utu'utu nei ite apii anga i te tunariki kia riro te reira ei apii ia atu ki te tamariki no runga ite apii pae kopapa. [First papa, please tell me what Rarotongan core values you consider would be needed to structure a teaching lesson for physical education . . . please explain*

*to me why you think the core values you have chosen would benefit Rarotongan students' learning and engagement in physical education.]*

### *Procedure*

Consent for this study was gained from the University of Auckland Human Ethics Committee (ref. 2006/457). Each interview took approximately one hour. I conducted the interview in a friendly manner and with understanding of, and respect for, the participants' background. I recorded some core values in my notebook to discuss with the interviewees such as *ngakau maru* (humility), *kauraro* (respect), and *taokotai* (cooperation). I used the prompts above to guide the participants so that I could understand their perspectives of Rarotongan core values, what it was that the participants thought was needed to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy into physical education, and how this may assist student engagement in classroom learning. The interviews were digitally recorded and were conducted in a comfortable place and at a time chosen by the participant. The interview process was conducted with cultural sensitivity. Cultural issues pertaining to reciprocity and respect were a significant part of the interview. Tapes were transcribed with participants each receiving a copy of the transcribed data; this allowed them to identify any omissions and to alter any errors in transcription. Participants were assured that their details would not be published or revealed to anyone and that they would remain anonymous.

### **Data Analysis**

An ethnographic approach was used to gain access into the community being researched. Following collection and transcription of the data, they were analyzed inductively through an initial process of "open coding." I coded each page of the transcribed notes. At the top of each page of the transcript, I color-coded the interviewee and recorded the data source, date of interview, and page number. I categorized my written notes that dealt with the participants' interviews (Maykut and Morehouse 1994; Patton 1990, 2002). I labelled the data for theoretical concepts, classified them under single words or phrases, and then compared them (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). From these coded themes, I was able to identify the core values that the interviewees identified as underpinning culturally responsive physical education in Rarotongan secondary schools. Six core values were consistently identified by the pa metua. These were:

*tāueue* (participation), *angaanga taokotai* (cooperation), *akatano* (discipline), *angaanga oire kapiti* (community involvement), *te reo Maori Kuki Airani* (Maori Cook Island language), and *auora* (physical and spiritual well-being).

## Results

The findings in relation to each core value are presented below.

*Core Value 1: Tāueue (Participation and Engagement).* In the course of the interview, SA1 revealed how tāueue is valued inclusively and culturally. She said the following:

... I couldn't speak for others ... but participation from a Cook Island perspective is about tāueue, *akamaroiroi* [strength], and *akakoromaki* [patience]. This is the kind of participation and engagement we should be encouraging in our students. I also perceive participation and engagement as a form of *irinakianga* [self-belief], *akaketaketa* [becoming strong], *ngakau aroa* [having a loving heart], *noa* [caring], *ako* [teaching and learning], *ōparapara* [movement], *ngakau maru*, and *putuputu 'anga okotai* [inclusive teaching] and that which involves a student's cultural background, special needs, and disability in the learning process... (ID[SA1]/19.2.07, p.4).

Tāueue has various meanings. CE6 highlighted *akakoromaki*, which is one of the components of tāueue. He said:

... When I was growing up in Mauke but now live in Rarotonga, *akakoromaki* helped me survive as a child growing up even though life was difficult. We survived by fishing in the ocean and growing crops for food. Once a week, the boat arrived from Rarotonga with supplies of corned beef and flour ... my parents looked forward to these days when the boat came. *Akakoromaki* disciplined me. I had to make sacrifices to help my parents at a younger age... (IT[CE6]/13.2.07, p.6).

The data above showed that *akakoromaki* was a challenge and difficult to learn. Another value that was aligned to tāueue was *akamaroiroi*. GO5 said *akamaroiroi* helped her to stay focused in her participation in sport. She stated: "... *Akamaroiroi*, as I remember it when I was growing up, meant a lot to me. At home, my parents' *akamaroiroi* allowed me to have the

strength to do well in sports and physical education. Now [that] I am a mother with my own children, I continue to foster akamaroiroi in kids to tāueue in their sports activities. . .” (ID[GO5/23.03.07, p.8).

The data showed that akamaroiroi could be very useful to help student encouragement and motivation in physical education. Further, SA2 shared how tāueue played an important part in his school, particularly in sports, physical education, and recreation. He added:

. . . Private schools value tāueue. It also means *ngakau toa* [strong heart]. Tāueue in physical education . . . I don't think there is a real issue with that when it comes to sporting events. On the local scene . . . we encourage our students to tāueue in athletics as well. When it comes to those events, our students akamaroiroi and ako other students to have ngakau toa in their life. . . (IG[SA2]/15.02.07, p.7).

Ngakau toa was an important part of learning physical education and sports. Still, SA4 explained that ngakau toa also motivated students to develop enthusiasm and excitement in participating in physical education. He stated: “. . . The value of ngakau toa is important to teaching. I believe ngakau toa is essential to my well-being because it helps me to be strong and overcome my trials and challenges. My students at this school need to learn why ngakau toa is important to them. . .” (IA[SA4]/16.03.07, p.9).

The participants believed that ngakau toa helped students to have the courage and faith to overcome the challenges they experienced each day. Furthermore, CE5 said ngakau toa also encouraged students to ako. Ako is another pillar of tāueue. He stated:

. . . Ako means teaching, listening, and humility. I remember a time my teacher said, this was in the 1960s . . . my teacher told me that if I didn't listen to her my life would be miserable. From that day, I listened to her until I got married and began having children. My parents taught me the value of ako and I continued to teach my kids the value of ako. I want to tell you we need ako in our family life as well as in education. . . (IT[CE5]/26.02.07, p.2).

Tāueue are one of the values that could help Cook Island students to become engaged and be motivated to participate in physical education. Furthermore, this could also help teachers to look at this Cook Island core value as a pathway to encourage students to engage in developing relationships and to involve themselves more fully in physical education.

*Core Value 2: Angaanga Taokotai (Cooperation).* Angaanga taokotai is another core value that can help students overcome their fears and failures. A Rarotongan pa metua said: "... angaanga taokotai would help students to engage in their learning skills and to overcome their shyness..." (IC[CE8]/1.04.07, p.6).

CE8 believed that the core value angaanga taokotai could benefit students by helping them to overcome their fears and become confident when engaging with others. Nevertheless, SA3 pointed out students develop skills from engaging as a team: "... Students learn to support and work together as a team; at the same time, they encourage each other to become engaged in various activities at school. They learn to get to know each other socially by interacting. ..." (IA[SA3]/15.02.07, p.5).

Further, GO2 stated: "... the core values of the Ministry of Education are quality, accessibility, and equity; this could be useful in physical education. The school has never implemented these values in physical education. ..." (IT[G02]/26.02.07, p.2).

These values of quality, accessibility, and equity could be relevant in developing a culturally responsive pedagogy to support and engage students to learn and to respect their peers.

Conversely, GO5 told her story of why angaanga taokotai was not supported in the schools and with her former employers. She said:

... At the moment, we don't have people cooperating. That is why our program was not going to be successful. If only the Ministry of Education were cooperating with the schools, maybe we could become a better school. In doing so, teachers and students would be more cooperative and confident in their physical education programs. The second thing is that there is no status in the school for physical education. It is not considered a core subject but an option, and we don't have any trained teachers ... they really focus on senior level not Year 9 and [Year] 10, and of course if you don't focus on your Year 9 and Year 10, by the time they get to level one, learning becomes difficult at NCEA level. How could students learn to engage if the school is not cooperating together. ...? (ID[GO5]/26.02.07, p.8).

It appeared this participant did not believe that angaanga taokotai was well supported by the Ministry of Education or the schools. This could be a problem in student learning of participation and engagement in the future and is already evident in the schools.

However, CE8 described how other values related to the core value of *angaanga taokotai*. She said:

... What people really need to know is that Rarotongans always need special characteristics like *ngakau maru*, *ngakau akaaka* [being down to earth], and *ngakau toa* if there is to be *angaanga taokotai* even though it is difficult. What is the heart of Rarotonga that we can all trust? In that way, we are developing necessary skills to move our country together as one nation. My view is that there is no real heart for the people of Rarotonga. How can our kids have a good heart if there is no *angaanga taokotai*...? (IC[CE8]/1.03.07, p.6).

The values of *ngakau maru* and *ngakau toa* in relation to *angaanga kapiti* (cooperation) could possibly encourage students to succeed in schooling regardless of their differences. SA4 explained to me in a different manner which characteristics were important for *angaanga taokotai*. He indicated:

... [It] is not about who makes the most money or what title you hold, whether it is a Prime Minister or a politician. Perhaps [it] is working together regardless of ethnic backgrounds. Being able to get along, put up with each other, and strive to build a nation with oneness. Only when this is accomplished ... would Cook Islanders once again become a nation with pride and integrity... (IS[SA4]/16/02.07, p.3).

*Core Value 3: Akarongo te tamariki or Akatano (Discipline)*. *Akatano* plays a role in teaching students to use appropriate behaviors and show respect to their peers. CE8 suggested why achieving discipline was difficult in the schools. She said: "... No discipline and the children are left at home by themselves. Parents are working more hours ... leaving their children at home unsupervised. This is why discipline is a big problem in the schools..." (IC[CE8]/1.03.07, p.9).

According to the interviewee, *akatano* was one of the more difficult values to teach the students. Students who were not disciplined could have problematic issues in learning later on. Similarly, GO1 reported:

... Discipline, I guess, is an important learning tool for teachers as well as for students. Today student discipline is an issue in the schools in Rarotonga. Students attending school have brought with them the behavior, attitude, and problems from home into

the classroom. These issues should be dealt with at home. Discipline is also to help students to stay focused, to participate, maintain, and sustain the value of becoming a better person. If students do not see the significance of discipline in learning, it will not make them a better learner in the classroom... (IJ[GO1]/12.02.07, p.10).

Hence, akatano can be seen as an important value in Rarotongan education. Similarly, CE2 stated how important discipline was in the family. He said:

... Te tuaanga ote peu kia apii ia ki roto ite oraanga mapu e pera katoa te angaanga vaerua kia manuia to ratou oraanga me ki ia ratou ite vaerua tapu. Ko teia ta te atua kia ka inangaro kia tamau tatou ite apii kia riro tatou ei tamariki vaerua meitaki... (IN[CE2]/7.02.07, p.12). [*Discipline needs to be taught in the lives of our youth and young single adults so that families and children can learn to develop unity. To work together and share spiritual blessing with each other at all times. This is what God wants them to do so they can learn to become good disciples of God.*]

The participant highlighted that students could become disciplined if parents engage closely alongside their children.

From the perspective of most of the participants quoted above, it appears that, although they believed discipline should be a family responsibility, many seemed to be neglecting this responsibility. Hence, for schools, discipline had become an important component of helping students engage in teaching and learning.

*Core Value 4: Angaanga Oire Kapiti (Community Involvement)*. The elders who identified the value angaanga oire kapiti believed this would benefit the school and the community as long as they worked in partnership to achieve educational goals. For example, SA1 outlined how communities and schools could come together to get the best outcome for students. He indicated:

... The school values the community. Community brings a spirit of kindness and knowledge that is astounding ... loving for parents who want their children to succeed in life ... giving students the opportunity to learn about their cultural tradition ... to explore who they are by valuing the knowledge of the past ... how they come to know their essence ... values represented in the

community lead to student who would one day become the leaders of tomorrow. . . (ID [SA1]/19.2.07, p.10).

However, SA3 proposed that one of the ways to encourage *angaanga oire kapiti* was for the community and school to engage together in sharing their expertise.

I encourage teachers that, if there were some skills they are not very good at, to please go to the people in the community [who] could do a good job teaching, and physical education is an example of that, and we don't have qualified teachers [who] can teach sport. I asked the Cook Islands Sports National Olympic Committee (CISNOC) to come teach sports skills to our students. . . (IA[SA3]/15.02.07, p.7).

Hence, the success of the community and school depends on how partnership programs are put in place for the students to engage in their learning. Therefore, GO3 said: “. . . Children come from the community to the schools, and they take what they have learned in the school back into the community. . .” (II[G03]/12.02.07, p.14).

Children are the future leaders of Rarotonga. What they learn in the community and at school can develop their leadership skills in the future. Yet, CE1 suggested that community projects play an important part in helping Cook Islanders not to give up their cultural values but to hold on to their cultural identity. He said: “. . . The community is united; it helps younger people in their education such as in teaching the language, dances, culture, helping support children to learn, and not fragmenting nor pulling each other down. . .” (I[CE1]/16.03.07, p.2).

The community and school could both be successful if the younger ones were molded through good education, education that recognized the value of both participants: the school and the community.

A proverb that relates to this point of view was suggested during an interview with CE9 who explained:

. . . An Aitutaki proverb, “. . . *Te uu* (parrot fish) will go out and they always go back to where their heart is and where they were brought up. That is, the man with a heart and of the people. I can sit back and say ‘where has it all gone’ when you think about it, it [is a] way of saying how they were brought up. . .” (IT[CE9]/1.03.07, p.8).

This proverb reflects the lifestyle of Rarotongan culture, both historical and contemporary. Cook Islanders are changing today, and the children are influenced by the *papaa* (Western) culture. The future of their culture lies in Rarotonga maintaining their heritage helping communities and schools to become more proactive and to motivate students to engage in learning cultural traditions. For cultural responsiveness to become effective, the Rarotongan community needs to play an important part in helping teachers engage students in learning and becoming culturally involved.

*Core Value 5: Te Reo Maori Kuki Airani (Maori Cook Island Language).* The pa metua who identified te reo Maori Kuki Airani as a core value agreed that Maori language needed to be actively used in the schools. Consequently, GO4 would rather have te reo Maori Kuki Airani taught in every school in Rarotonga but suggested it would be very difficult to start unless the government officials and teachers cooperated. He said:

... Te akaruke nei tatou ito tatou reo. Tetai basileira kare o ratou peu ete reo kare tereira ite basileia. No reira kia inangaro ia tatou kia akakeu ia tereira. Kua irinaki raoki au e manga marama taku e aere nei au kua akakite mai te repoti ate UNESCO akataka mai i roto ite rima mataiti kia manuia e mete matutu nei rai to tatou reo. . . (I)[G04]/4.02.07, p.14). [*We are ignoring our Cook Island language. If a nation doesn't value its own cultural language, it is not a nation. We need to develop and encourage our Maori language teachers and parents to teach their own children about Maori Cook Island language at home and also at school. I will be happy if, in five years time, the reports of UNESCO show that our language is becoming strong.*]

With te reo Maori KuKi Airani being so important, GO5 confirmed that te reo Maori KuKi Airani should also be recognized in the physical education program. He stated: "... We have traditional games and sports in physical education that were played by our ancestors. Te reo Maori Kuki Airani is important for our children to learn, but this is not happening in physical education. . ." (ID[G05]/26.02.07, p.10).

However, the revival of te reo Maori Kuki Airani in the schools has not been successful. Sadly, CE4 indicated that, in the next five to ten years, the Cook Island language will no longer be the national language. She said:

... The reason for that is because Cook Islanders are being influenced by outside sources, which are detrimental to the Cook Island culture. Te reo Maori Kuki Airani is like a vessel being directed in the right place. If the vessel is not functioning well, the language

will eventually die out, which we are seeing happening today. . . (IM[CE4/]12.02.07, p.4).

Hence, te reo Maori Kuki Airani was considered important to the land and cultural heritage and to the way in which these were interconnected. Similarly, CE6 reaffirmed why the values of te reo Maori Kuki Airani were important in the physical education program. He said:

. . . Apii ite tatau no atu e tatau papaa ana koe. Ka tatau Maori te puapii kia koe e ka akapera koe me tatau kite tangata, No reira te au apinga katoatoa ite apii i tera tuatau e reo Maori paurua. Ta tatou apii oki i teia ra te iti (limited) ua atu ara te reo Maori ite Kuki Airani tikai. Te matakū nei au ko te ngaro to tatou reo. Kua aere te peapa kite orometua kia puapii sabati ite akakite kia ratou e kia akamaroiroi ia ta tatou tamariki ite reo. Ko te Cook Islands tetai iti tangata e paruparu nei to ratou reo. te reo kote katu mata tereira ote basileia koia oki ia Rarotonga nei ko te tango ote hasileia ko tera taku tuatua i aere. . . (IR[CE6/]13.02.07, p.10). [*Learn to read in Maori, and it does not matter if you read in English. When the teacher reads in Maori, that is the way students should read to each other. Our reading in Maori is limited, and we need to encourage our kids and parents to read in Maori to their children at home and wherever. I am scared that we are going to lose our Maori language. The announcement has gone to the Ministers of each church to encourage Ministers to speak in Maori. We Cook Islanders are weak when it comes to the language. The language is the eye of our nation.*]

The elders confirmed that te reo Maori Kuki Airani was unique and was important to education particularly and, in relation to this article, to physical education. This is interconnected with auora.

*Core Value 6: Auora (Developing of the Physical and the Spiritual).* From the perspectives of the pa metua, auora is important to Rarotongan life. *Au* means physical well-being and *ora* means spiritual well-being. These two components play an important part in students' engagement in learning and participation in physical education. In a similar way, Hāuora forms a core element of the New Zealand Health and Physical Education Curriculum (1999). The core value of physical and spiritual well-being was, not surprisingly, also considered essential for teachers to teach in a culturally responsive manner. Thus, CE6 explained how auora influenced the well-being of his life in the Cook Islands and how this could also be influential in contemporary society. He said:

... [L]ife was fabulous. We were fit and healthy. We worked hard clearing our gardens, feeding the animals like pigs and chickens in the morning. Before we went to school, we prayed. After school, we worked hard in the plantation, fishing, weaving, arts and crafts, and so forth. At night time, we prayed. I felt this fabulous chicken skin running through my arms at that time. My parents told me that was a good sign. These were the best times of my life. Today I hardly see those kinds of physical work in the home. I think our children need to understand our physical well-being and the kind of life we lived as a child. Today my children have their own mind. They don't listen to stories and experience. No wonder they don't finish school on a high level. . . (IR[CE6]/13.02.07, p.9).

Auora was the focal point of learning to participate in various cultural practices. Understanding auora could help students to become self-reliant and to take responsibility for what was offered in the learning environment and to share the knowledge with others. Aligned with auora is *pitoenua* (connectivity or the umbilical cord). This is a representation of the meaning of spiritual and physical well-being. In physical education, the physical education teacher and students need to be attached to enable learning to be constructive and meaningful to be able to develop auora in the students. Hence, G05 explained why *pitoenua* was important to the learning of culture. He said: "... The *pitoenua* represents our identity and cultural values. This is an element that we should be proud of because *pitoenua* is not about us, but it is about our culture, heritage, and the ways we live our lifestyle. . ." (ID[G05]/26.02.07, p.13).

Hence, *pitoenua* is about developing relationships between the students and the teacher in understanding student identity and cultural background.

### **Discussion**

The core values identified in the study consisted of *tāueue*, *angaanga taokotai*, *akatano*, *angaanga oire kapiti*, *te reo Maori Kuki Airani*, and *auora*. There were positive feelings about the core values that the participants highlighted in this study. These core values were considered pertinent to the educational development of culturally responsive pedagogy for physical education in Rarotonga. The participants believed that the core values could revive some of the cultural knowledge and values that have been lost and enhance student engagement in classroom learning.

One of the ways to help learners engage in their learning effectively in physical education is to facilitate teaching and modelling (Kirk 2004). Kirk and Tinning (2002) have both indicated that physical education is socially constructed and knowledge is shared between one another. The core values identified by the participants were associated with students' engagement and creation of knowledge, thinking, solving problems, and developing good relationships with the teacher and peers. This could help students become better learners. Samu (2006) proposed that, in the Pacific education world view, and this can also be perceived from a Rarotongan perspective, core values were useful and could enable students to engage socially and interactively with each other and, thus, gain confidence in both themselves and their peers. There is no doubt, according to Samu, that, by having students engage together in smaller groups, their learning becomes more effective and cooperative. In support of this, Taumoevalua (1998) suggested that Tongan core values such as *faka'apa'apa* (respect), *'ofa* (love), *fetokoni'aki* (mutual helpfulness), *tauhi vā* (looking after relationships) are important core values, and this may also be aligned to Rarotongan core values because it is vital for students to become more confident and reliable and to become active learners.

The influence of the core values could help to stimulate an interest in students' engagement of learning and culture. The core values could also cultivate a sense of identity within culture, school, and community. Thus, they promote schools with strong ties to the community and help learners become engaged as they began to build their self-collective and cultural identity within an environment of pedagogical excellence (Dei 2008). Jonassen (2003) indicated that cultural value was based on the principle of *inangaro* (love) that came from the heart of the teacher to the students. This could help students gain trust in their peers and eventually achieve their educational goals. The core values identified in the current study could be used to develop student learners' engagement in a physical education program that was culturally responsive to students' needs.

### Conclusion

The core values identified by the participants in this study could underpin culturally responsive teaching in physical education. The participants considered these values to be important for students' learning and believed they could improve students' participation and engagement in physical education as well as benefit physical education teachers by promoting them as culturally responsive practitioners.

Promoting these core values could foster students' learning about cultural practices and could also minimize unfavorable student attitudes

and behavior toward cultural practices and, thus, increase their engagement in physical education. In addition, Rarotongans would be encouraged to revive some of the cultural practices that have not previously been taught in the school or in the physical education program. Having the core values taught in the classroom could help teachers to understand a student's background and identity and could also develop physical education teacher confidence in understanding the cultural learning of Rarotonga such that eventually teachers would become culturally responsive to help students engage better in their learning.

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