

Learning from sustainability enactment grounded in Māori worldviews within education settings in Aotearoa New Zealand



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Introduction To The Authors And The Research Context

Aotearoa is a Māori name for New Zealand, a set of islands in the South Pacific that was colonised by Great Britain after a treaty, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, was signed with Māori chiefs in 1840. Sandy and Jenny are scholars from Aotearoa (New Zealand) who have for many years worked together in facilitating workshops or community groups which focus on understandings of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the history of colonisation, and race relations in Aotearoa.

The global COVID-19 pandemic and recent IPCC report on the urgency of the climate crisis (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2021) have brought greater awareness of the unsustainability of patterns of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation of our planet's human and natural resources. These existential challenges can cause us to pause and reflect on our inter-relationality and inter-dependence with nature. The way human societies have increasingly encroached into wilderness areas, converting these for agricultural or urban purposes "is widely recognized to influence the risk and emergence of zoonotic disease in humans" (Gibb et al., 2020, p. 1).

Indigenous peoples serve as guardians of the planet's natural resources. Indigenous knowledges contain valuable resources for sustainability practices (Corn-tassel & Hardbarger, 2019; Tom, Sumida Huaman, & McCarty, 2019). Despite histories of colonisation and the ongoing forces of globalisation, Indigenous peoples continue to strive to maintain guardianship over their lands as well as the biodiversity of their environments (Raygorodetsky, 2018). As the capacity for the exercise of this guardianship is removed, so too is the protection of both Indigenous peoples, their languages, knowledges and the biodiversity with whom they

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have co-evolved for millennia (Gorenflo, Romaine, Mittermeier, & Walker-Painemilla, 2012).

This study formed part of an international collaborative project: *Reorienting Education and Training Systems to Improve the Lives of Indigenous and Marginalized Youth* (Hopkins, n.d.). More than 120 institutions from 40 countries/Indigenous territories participated in the wider project which aimed to collaboratively work with and learn from Indigenous and marginalised communities to address the aspirations of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 4.7 requires of all countries that:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017, p. 8).

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE WORK FOR PRACTICE

This study aimed to show ways in which three different education settings in Aotearoa utilised Māori constructs, as well as pedagogies that reflected the notion of education for sustainable development (ESD), focusing on social, cultural, linguistic, economic and ecological sustainability issues within their localities. Our data demonstrates that ESD approaches involving critical, empowering, action-oriented, transformative, problem-solving and transdisciplinary pedagogies, whilst not often expressly articulated as 'ESD' in educational discourse in Aotearoa, are implicit in the educational paradigms in the education settings that were the focus of this study.

There was evidence of commitment to the inclusion of te ao Māori and te reo Māori (Māori worldview and language), as per the expectations of the New Zealand Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2007, 2017; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017). Infusion of te ao Māori values such as kaitiakitanga, the obligation to actively care for and protect the environment, were evident in all three sites. This demonstrates 'culture's contribution to sustainable development' as per the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 (UNESCO, 2017, p. 8). Aspects of ESD included: the empowerment of students; collaboration and shared responsibility; critical thinking; systems/holistic thinking; integration of both Māori and Western knowledge domains; and commitment to intergenerational equity. Also evident was a focus on place-based learning, locally grounded in their communities and in a commitment to care for their local environments and beyond. Dispositional outcomes for children include critical thinking, confidence, collaborative problem-solving, leadership and advocacy, along with a deep concern for others including the environment.

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