TE WANANGA: DEVELOPING A BICULTURAL MODEL USING CRITICAL SYSTEMS

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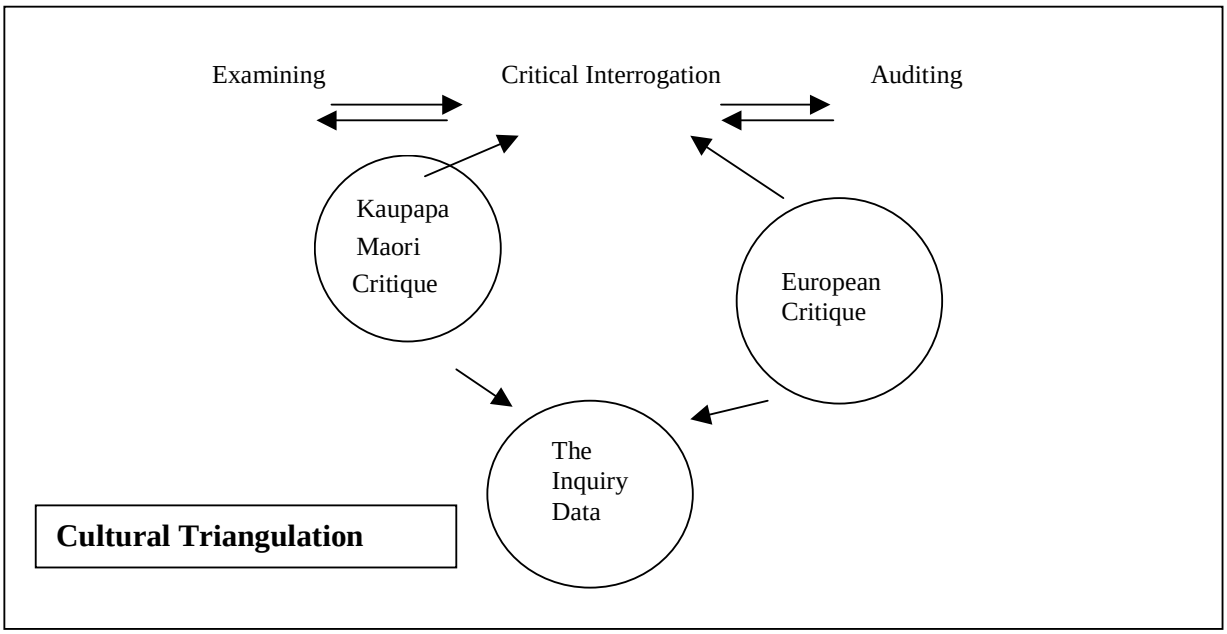
Critical Systems As An Inquiry Process

For some years, as bicultural or Kaupapa Maori researchers, we have been seeking to inquire into what makes Maori business, "Maori". After consultation with our mentors we decided in this phase of our inquiry to focus on a Maori Tertiary Education Institution, or Wananga. The question then becomes, what makes a Wananga, a "Wananga"? What are the norms and purpose, the strategic intent of a Wananga? We see this as the "inside story", the story from within, convinced that no amount of externally focused "research" will give this inner story. As with our earlier monograph (Tumatanui) which gave the "inside story" of a group of Maori Funeral Directors, we used a form of "narrative inquiry" to give the story of a whanau group from Te Wananga-O-Aotearoa, the largest and longest established Wananga, whose central campus is in Te Awamutu, in the North Island of New Zealand. In addition to the stories of our knowledge carriers, we sought to explore the critical basis of these stories, and by implication of the Wananga itself. We did this by using two critical systems methodologies, one European and the other Maori.

Cultural Triangulation

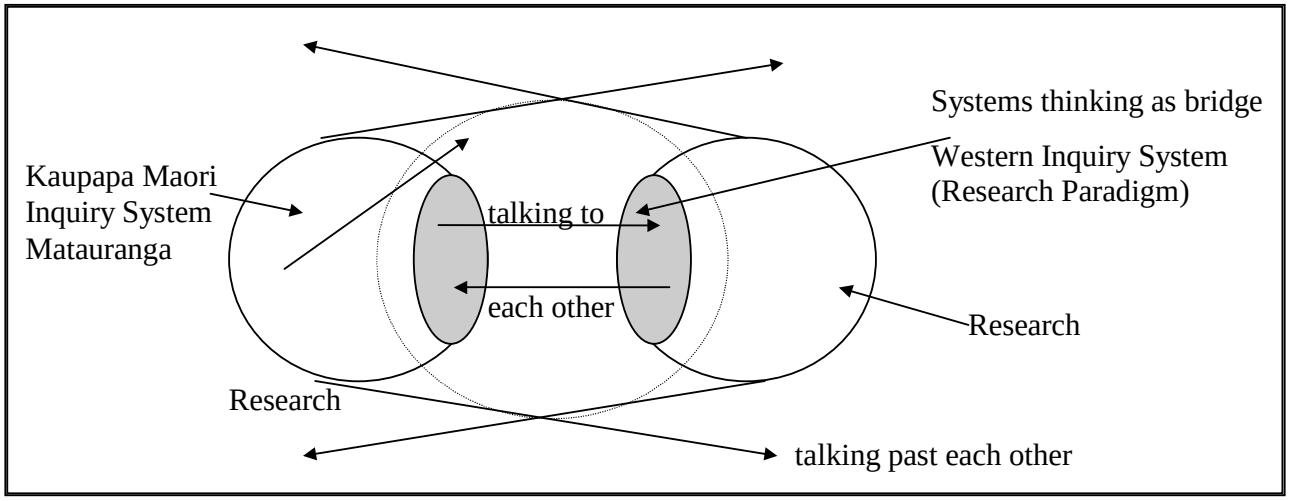
The European Methodology has been developed by the Swiss Systems Thinker, Werner Ulrich. It is called "Critical Systems Heuristics". Our earlier inquiry had revealed that, for Maori entrepreneurs operating in a monocultural business environment, the business problem is essentially an ethical one. They simply were forced to operate in an ethically incompetent world. Ulrich's methodology promised to explore this seldom visited dimension. To audit this inquiry process we looked to Russell Bishop's "Model of Critical and Cultural Consciousness". We saw the dual methodological process as a form of **cultural triangulation**, enabling us to determine more accurately the bicultural position of the Wananga (at least as perceived by our knowledge carriers).

At the same time, we wanted to explore a possible generic model for bicultural inquiry. In this Model European and Maori methodologies are used to cross check each other (one to investigate, the other to audit), to prove that an ethical basis for dialogue exists. In this Model it does not matter which methodology is used to explore and which to audit. The process itself ensures that each methodology is given equal status, since each "interrogates the other".



Systems Thinking: Bridging The Transcultural Gap

The use of the two methodologies echoes the "eyeball to eyeball" or "*hongi*" model we used to explain the purpose of our bicultural inquiry process: to move from "talking **past** each other" to "talking **to** each other". (Taurima & Cash, 1999b). In using hongi (pressing noses) as a form of greeting Maori *tikanga* (custom) suggests that a direct interchange is about to take place. This metaphor challenges the way research has traditionally been done: in an exclusively European way. Forcing research to be done in a non-Maori way by imposing norms drawn from another world view or research paradigm reflects the phenomenon of trans-cultural miscommunication, recognized by bicultural researchers Joan Metge and Patricia Kinloch in a famous text as "Talking Past Each Other". (Metge & Kinloch. 1984). In recognizing Maori knowledge (Matauranga) as a "system of systems", we glimpsed the possibility that systems thinking might be used to bridge that gap.



Eyeball to Eyeball Model

The proposition (presented graphically in our "eyeball to eyeball" or hongi model) of this paper is that systems thinking can play a critical role in linking the two world-views, so that they talk **to** each other, rather than **past** each other. The purpose of this research is clear: To reconcile peoples and so ensure bicultural sustainability.

Critical Systems Heuristics: Opening up a "Dialogue of Witnesses"

One systems thinker whose work promotes closing the cultural gap is Swiss critical thinker Werner Ulrich.
Ulrich's *Critical Systems Heuristics* facilitates an exploration of the underlying purpose and intent of an organisation or business (a Wananga). The term "heuristic" implies a "discovery" or "finding out" approach (Greek*: heurich-ein*, to find). The classical sense of "critical" is to see if this case differs from an accepted norm. However, Ulrich users "critical" in the modern sense of questioning or reflecting on those norms. Critical reflection is the process by which we determine the norms that guide us in our thinking and action. To be critical is to be aware of the (cultural) assumptions that underlie our norms. One cannot therefore be critical and dominating. One reason for using this Methodology is that it is a European methodology which is fully critical – non-dominating, non-colonialist. It is not the use of European models, we suggest, that is inappropriate in a bicultural inquiry process. Rather it is the use of exclusive, single perspective, one dimensional models that must be avoided because they are unaware of the cultural assumptions on which they are based (are uncritical). Our aim was to break through the boundaries of such models using Ulrich's approach and so open up what he calls a "dialogue of witnesses."

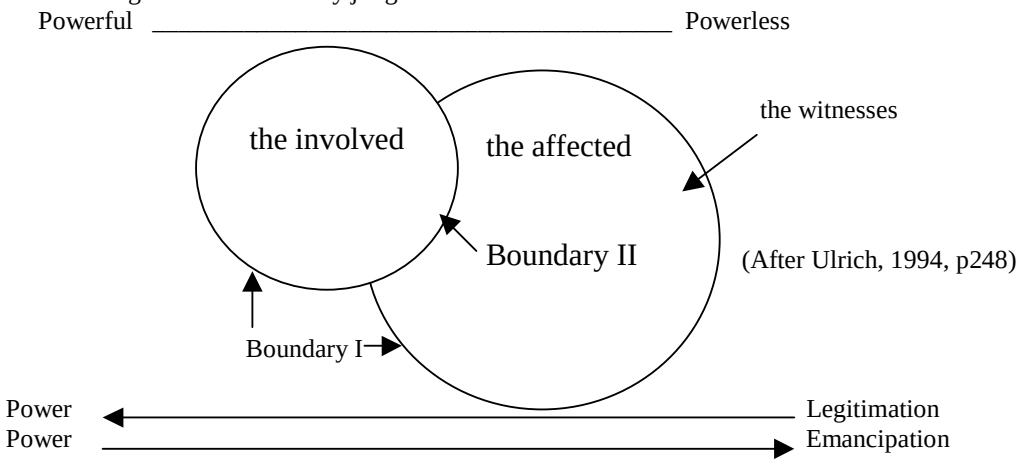
Boundary Judgements as Excluding Mechanisms

The term "dialogue of witnesses" is used by Ulrich to describe interactions between the system's owners and designers (the involved) and those who have been left out of the picture but who are forced to live out the consequences of that design (the affected). The "affected" means principally the **affected but not involved**. Although it is clear that the experts (those defined as **inside** and **involved** in the design of the system or process) can also be affected, they are so in a different way. They are affected by a system in the design of which they have had and have a say. They are morally and ethically committed to this system through this involvement. Whatever minor quarrels they may have with it, it is in important ways **their system**. In designing a social system (such as a tertiary educational system or institution) some judgement must be made about what is "**in**" and what is "**out**" (the environment). These **boundary judgements** define what the system is about and who are the "players". They decide the **normative** content that governs every aspect of that system. The total system is governed by the norms of the involved alone. The norms of the affected play no part in this system. "They do not contribute resources or expertise, nor do their purposes motivate the planning effort." (Ulrich, 1994, p266). In every practical sense they are out in the cold. The aim of this inquiry, therefore, is to bring them "out of the cold". The inquiry's tone is, therefore, "emancipatory". It aims **to involve the affected through dialogue**.

Emancipation: Why Self-Determination is Important

How do judgements about boundaries, "what's in", "what's out", contribute to our understanding of the problems of Maori entrepreneurs in the real world business environment?

Consider the following model of boundary judgements:



The Two Basic Kinds of Boundary Judgements

Boundary I, (outside circles) defines the total system as against the environment. The affected are within the total system but not within the ownership – designership – expertship circle (involved). They are quite simply the ones who must live in a system in which they have no share in shaping, owning or contributing usefully to. They are the ones who miss out. Boundary II recognises the important distinction which creates **the boundary** that the affected will always meet. Our assumption is that it is the boundary recognised in the sub-title of our research project, "Overcoming Boundaries". Boundary II (inside curve) represents graphically the boundary that **outsiders** (e.g. Maori entrepreneurs) must go "over", "around", "behind" or "through", in order to play an active part **on their own terms** (i.e. as involved) in their own industry. Witnesses, while seemingly passive on their role, are nevertheless important actors in the total system. By accepting the over-all design of the system, they provide **legitimation** for the involved, otherwise the whole system would contain only the involved. The experts (involved) need witnesses to claim legitimate power. An important corollary follows. The witnesses need to become involved in a process of "emancipatory self-reflection" (Ulrich, 1994, p257) to free themselves from this power. This action has been described by Maori social planners as *tino rangatiratanga* (self-determination).

Some Findings From This Inquiry

It is only possible here to give a brief outline of the application of Ulrich's model to the Wananga participants. A full publication giving the stories of the knowledge carriers is planned for the coming year. Here are some highlights, given in the view of the knowledge carriers (lecturers, tutors, students of the Wananga).

- The Wananga is for 100% of people, people of all cultures (as against "the top 5%" for mainstream institutions). Therefore unemployed and those who have "fallen through the cracks" have special pride of place.
- The philosophy is to assist the personal development of all, accepting that all learning is "from within", and that "unconditional love" is the key (as against the common "jug and glass" concept of learning).
- That the Wananga is based on the "inverted pyramid" principle with the students at the top (as against hierarchical institutions).
- Curriculum is set aside until the student is ready (as against the strictly curriculum focus of mainstream tertiary institutions).
- All are involved in support of everybody through *awhi* (embrace) and *tautoko* (support) as against the process of "weeding out" weaker students.
- Based on a spiritual understanding of a universe (*wairua*) in which the Maori role is "to weave a web of understanding throughout the world (especially indigenous peoples)".

In addition, there was a startling finding from within the research methodology itself. Ulrich's methodology asks twelve questions built around four key questions: Why do it? Who does it? Who plans it? and Who is left out of it? Each question is asked twice; once in the "is" mode (how things currently are), and once in the "ought" mode (how you think they should be). The purpose of this is to open up the critical ethical differences i.e. to map the ethical shortcomings of the system. A startling finding, in this case, was that the knowledge carriers reversed the is/ought logic. They saw the mainstream institutions (Universities, Polytechnics, Private Training Establishments) as embodying the "is" dimension – they represented for them the current reality of provision of adult tertiary education in their country. Their own institution (the Wananga) they saw as embodying the "ought" mode i.e. as a truly *ethical* model or system. For them emancipation and cultural reconciliation could emanate only from a culturally-aware process of learning.

Finally, when we applied the "cultural triangulation" principle, using Bishop's Model of Critical and Cultural Consciousness, we found a close match between Bishop's criteria (which are based on the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi) and those we used for our Research Protocol. We found that Bishop's questions had already been incorporated into the principles of our own draft Protocol. The draft Protocol used in our research process is based on six critical principles, each of which links with Bishop's six critical concerns:

1. The knowledge carriers are the principal researchers (representation)
2. They control the knowledge (power/imposition)
3. Their stories are valid (representation)
4. The research is for their benefit and for the Maori community (benefits)
5. Maori mentors guarantee cultural safety for the knowledge carriers and the research facilitators (legitimation)
6. The research facilitators are accountable to the mentors who also formally initiate the project (accountability/initiation).

The Protocol, as a living practice rather than only as a document, ensures that the major questions raised in Bishop's model are answered in ways that protect the knowledge carriers, ensure that the inquiry benefits the community, and support Maori language and cultural aspirations. Publication ensures that the inquiry process, no less than the knowledge gathered in the process, is "open", "public" "without disguise" (the meaning of "*Tumatanui*"). It is open for all to make their own judgements.

What We Think We Learnt: Beyond "Conclusions"

For us, it is important to acknowledge that, for a systemic inquiry that relates to Maori forms of knowing (*Maturanga*), simple conclusions and recommendations (such as form the critical part of linear forms of inquiry) are no longer relevant. The stories of the knowledge carriers stand on their own reality. We can enter into this reality only by entering into a process of dialogue with these researchers. For our part, however, it is important to acknowledge what we (as research facilitators) think we learnt from the inquiry. Some learnings relate to the inquiry process itself; others to specific understandings relevant to the industries themselves (funeral directors and adult educators). In both cases the learnings concern how to reconcile peoples by sustaining cultures in a "culturally together" model.

Firstly, we learnt that the reconciling understandings must start from within the world-view of the "affected by not involved" i.e. the non-dominant culture or "world-view". The assumption on which this rests is that this world-view is not merely different. The other world-view (Maori) is, above all, rich, comprehensive and, on its terms, equally compelling. It does not need to be "propped up" from without nor does it need to follow the accepted protocols, criteria or formulations of other world-views. It is not surprising, therefore, that we found a bicultural protocol was essential for our inquiry. To attempt to understand the "other reality", the involved must move towards the affected. They must surrender some power and be prepared to enter into a partnership, or what Russell Simpson calls a family (*whanau*) or "*whanau* of interest", on which common ground can be established. Both the Maori funeral directors and the Maori adult educators had to break boundaries to survive and thrive in the monocultural world. Our message is: let the involved take clear steps towards power sharing so that a partnership of interest can be forged. Only then can reconciliation be a positive force for all worlds – including the business world.

Secondly, it seems to us that the Wananga presented itself as a reconciling model for all cultures. Far from being a "separate" institution it saw itself as an inclusive emancipating cultural institution not despite of, but because of, its acknowledgement of Maori *tikanga* (custom). This claim constitutes a challenge to the way wananga are currently viewed – as separate culturally exclusive organizations.

Thirdly, the Wananga challenged Western concepts of education through such practices as unconditional love (*aroha*) and "learning from within". This challenge implies a critical approach to the western models of learning. Only a culture that is critically aware (prepared to acknowledge its own cultural basis) can move from the isolating position that power always holds. In doing so, it will draw closer to the partnership potential of a genuine "whanau of interest". Redrawing the boundaries that separate peoples, we have learnt, involves preparedness to interrogate each other (through cultural triangulation) and a readiness to enter into a "reconciling dialogue" on equal footing. Only then can we be truly said to be in the worlds of one of our knowledge-carriers, "culturally together". Finally, it is our contention that cultural togetherness is the key to the problem of sustainability.

First the reconciling of peoples, next the guardianship of the resources. In the words of the Maori proverb:

Uia mai koe ki ahau	You ask of me
He aha te mea nui	What is the most important thing in this world?
o te ao?	My reply must be
Maku e kii atu	It is people, it is people, it is people.
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata	

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