

### Socially constructed structures and institutions

Many things that happen in schools or centres have been socially constructed. When we understand this, we can start thinking about our own agency and ability to contribute to doing things differently. Disrupting some of the 'taken for granted' assumptions that go unchallenged and continue to maintain power over others, requires our becoming consciously aware of how and why injustices in our society were created and how they have continued to play out. It also gives us hope that that which has been socially constructed, can also be socially deconstructed.

### Conscientisation

Conscientisation is becoming consciously aware of the part we play in keeping things the same by supporting and perpetuating the status quo. This requires understanding what and why we are doing what we do and the implications of our actions on others.

This new awareness may disrupt our thinking; disrupt what we thought to be the truth and open us up to seeking different perspectives and a reframing of what is possible and preferable.

In the context of education in Aotearoa, New Zealand, conscientisation requires understanding the part we each play in supporting a system that continues to perpetuate harm on disproportionate numbers of Māori learners. Evidence across the range of social indices shows these disparities to be significant, intergenerational and ongoing. Our agency to disrupt these disparities requires understanding the implications of the historical choices that constructed this inequity and challenging ourselves at a personal level to investigate alternatives.

*I can become conscious of something but then not do anything about that. I can spiral around, become more and more conscious, but that alone isn't going to promote equity.*

### Resistance

Conscientisation can make us aware but if we do nothing with that awareness, nothing changes. Resistance is about no longer accepting or turning a blind eye to acts of social injustice but doing something about them. This can begin by asking critical questions of ourselves.

*What are the things that I need to do differently? What have I been doing unconsciously that I need to unlearn or that I need to undo, so that I can be sure that I am supporting Māori students to succeed as Māori?*

Resistance is about understanding and activating your own agency.

*What am I going to do about it?' 'What can we do in order to disrupt the status quo?' 'What can we do to provide them with better choices for the future?*

Critical questions are those that go to the heart of determining who has the power to dominate our interactions and ultimately the outcomes that privilege some and marginalise others. One of the questions that's central to critical theory is, 'whose interests are being served by the current arrangements that we have?' And that's fundamentally a question about power.

Disrupting the traditional top-down model of collective conversations or group meetings will require some initial facilitation. A lot of little conversations to identify who is open to this learning might be the first steps. However, having honest and courageous, solution-seeking conversations with our colleagues and other members of our whānau or community can be incredibly powerful.

*We're not here to talk about you over there; we're talking about us in here. I think that inclusiveness is a very different way of being. A conversation that is deeply open to learning.*

## Praxis

Praxis means becoming deliberate and conscious about what we do, why we do this, and what our next steps need to be.

*It's my practice and the theory behind my practice coming together so that I move forward in a very mindful way. New theories help me to establish new practices*

*I can start to transform my everyday practice until it becomes the new normal for me. I know exactly why I am changing and I can talk to people about why I'm doing it in the way that I am.*

## Transformative praxis

Transformative praxis requires the merging of conscientisation and resistance in order to create new, more equitable, social realities - challenging and changing the social conditions that may be marginalising a particular group or groups.

*Through equity we can transform the status quo of Māori learners into something where they can experience greater success without having to compromise who they are.*

In the case of Poutama Pounamu, while our focus is on tamariki mokopuna and rangatahi Māori, we are also concerned for the wellbeing of all marginalised learners.

*The goal is that both Treaty partners are represented - that both Treaty partners are resisting together and both Treaty partners are more successful together.*

## Critical questioning

Critical questioning is something we use to focus the challenge and deepen our thinking about how power plays out in the work that we are engaged in. Critical questions open up our thinking and our learning.

*We're making the invisible visible in these meetings, things like power, control and privilege.*

*We could ask pretty straightforward questions such as, is that an assumption? What are you actually saying? What do we actually mean?*

*One of the things that tells us that people are really starting to get the bit between their teeth is when we hear them critically questioning each other; then you get dialogue that's evidence-based. That is the beginning of collectively owned sustainable change.*

## On-going spiralling conversations

Spiralling conversations go round and round, but also these conversations come back to particular things and to looking at them from other points of views. It's the same process, the same event or conversation, but we've got a whole lot of learning that's happened that allows us to deepen our understanding, to ask different questions, and to engage in richer conversations.

*There's a lot of to-ing and fro-ing and making sense of the big words but when it's about fundamental principles, people kind of say 'yeah, we'll go there with you.' It is finding ways to allow people to make sense of the ideas, and experience those as new ways of being.*

## Listening and identifying what's really meant

Listening carefully, not only to the words being said but thinking about what might sit behind or alongside those words can open up the opportunity to take our thinking deeper. It could provide opportunities to pose some critically reflective questions, perhaps challenge what's been voiced as a piece of common sense, where actually there's nothing 'common' about it. We are looking for the really subtle points within the conversations.

*I think listening is key because if you're constantly talking you can't hear anything. And it's not just thinking about the words that are being said, I'm also thinking about the tone of voice.*

The term discursive positioning describes this critical analysis of what people are saying and not saying; understanding where they are coming from.

*I'm thinking about body language and facial expressions. I'm also thinking very hard about what's not being said, and where what's being said may or may not be coming from.*

## Unlearning, learning

Part of new learning is being prepared to challenge some of our existing beliefs and ways of viewing the world. This requires us to be open to being challenged and being prepared to learn. It might be asking ourselves who else we need to be having conversations with and how those conversations should be prioritised. This means holding the mirror up to our own practice and thinking about what we are going to do with what we are learning.

*We are asking, 'where do we want to be? What sort of environment do we want to be? What kind of a team do we want to be? If this was rocking what would it look like and feel like? What would it sound like?' Once we have answers then we can come back to, 'where are we now and what we will do next?'*

## The fabric of society

Part of understanding and deconstructing what has become the status quo is taking responsibility for what it means to be accepted by and connected to wider society. Being positively connected to and responding to what's happening in our communities is a right that should be available to everyone.

*When we engage in those conversations you can't help but see where multiple sites of conscientisation, resistance and transformative praxis come together into the people that we are.*

*I think that as they really start to feel a new way of being, they see the potential. It's essential to focus on Māori students, absolutely core to it, but it is also about the fundamental change that this could bring to the whole community. They also start to see the change that it could mean for our country.*

## Spread and agency through wānanga

Through wānanga, schools and centres can come together, and the sharing that happens can be very powerful. The more collaboration, the more transparent they are with one another, the more likely we are to learn together in ways that can accelerate the changes we need and want. Those who are engaging in critical conversations really want to talk to others about how it's going, what's working and the next steps for going forward.

*It's classroom reform, school or centre wide reform and then societal reform. You can't consider spread unless you feel agentic, otherwise it's too big a job. Agency is when individuals, or a team, feel able to bring about change. It has to involve that agentic response to change and then other people start to go, 'huh, I can do that.' It's infectious. Agency is infectious.*

*Once people get a taste of new ways of being, new ways of interacting, new ways of connecting with their colleagues. It's a different feeling and there are different possibilities and all of a sudden these possibilities are real for us all.*



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