Building Critical Leadership

Building Critical Leadership means becoming consciously aware of how, for many indigenous peoples, inequality is the legacy of the racialised education system established through colonisation. Critical Leaders begin to understand and question how this inequality is playing out and what this might look like in their school or centre today if a more equitable response were to be achieved.

> *Our Board and our PTA was just like me. They were white and they were middle class and they were making decisions for the majority of our whānau and our tamariki who are Māori.*
> *So I knew that something needed to change.*
> > Primary School Principal

By deconstructing acts of oppression Critical Leaders are then able to reconstruct and spread new systems for teaching and learning where all learners and their families can participate without having to compromise who they are. Paulo Freire refers to this as 'conscientisation'. Conscientisation is not just raising awareness, it is an ongoing process of uncovering, understanding, and resisting the part we may play in the oppression of others.
This requires a deeper understanding of what is currently happening for learners and the contexts for change within which they can better support tamariki to learn and achieve more effectively. These understandings provide a pathway for other marginalised learners and families.

> *First of all, I needed to understand who I was within the system. ... if you're not aware of your own position then it's very hard to actually get out of that position and to be aware of other people's positioning.*
> > Education System Leader

Disrupting and challenging the status quo

Building Critical Leadership often requires disrupting the way we have traditionally viewed the world. Until this happens, even with the best of intentions, the reform processes may falter.

> *It takes a long time to get into a position where you can start looking outside of your own school to start looking at transformation within society. And that's where the challenge is for all of us to get into that space.*
> > Education System Leader

A growing number of education leaders in Aotearoa are helping us to understand why building Critical Leadership is important. They are showing us how to challenge and push back against structures within their schools or centres that have continued to privilege some learners, while resulting in disparity for others. The evidence is compelling. It's not that we don't know what to do; it's just that too few have had the courage, the capability, and the support to step up and do it.

> *Nothing is beyond examination, and by doing so we believe we better ensure our Māori ākonga will be better engaged and achieve educationally.*
> > Secondary School Principal

Indigenising and decolonising

Our leadership response must include a critical examination of how knowledge is understood,

and teaching and learning play out. This means understanding whose knowledge is privileged and how learners and their whānau see themselves in classrooms and wider schooling.

> *We place value on rich local contexts... on connections and relationships that are meaningful for our learners and the relationship-based pedagogy we want practised in our classrooms. We wanted our campus to be a classroom for the school; we wanted to capture the powerful narratives that exist in our school and we want to build on those.*
>
> Secondary School Principal

Opening up to the community

As the community increasingly sees itself reflected in their children's learning, they are more likely to view it as a trusted and safe place to bring their own knowledge and support to the school or centre. Leaders become beneficiaries of new connections and relationships with deeper levels of engagement than may have been unimaginable even a short time earlier.

> *Our Māori whānau said we love the place-based curriculum, seeing effective teaching techniques to help our kids retain the information they learnt. And, for our Māori learners, they said: "I really feel like I belong here, and they are amazing teachers." Why would we want to change that?*
>
> Primary School Deputy Principal

Critical Leadership requires becoming critically conscious of how power relations play out across all areas of the school or centre, including how this influences the relationships they have with families and the wider community in which the school or centre is located. It continues with all staff being able to authentically engage in these wider cultural relationships.

> *We are a team that help our staff, particularly those who are non-Māori, to hono or connect with many facets of te ao Māori and we are open to this always. Particularly because our staff want to be correct and do right.*
>
> Secondary School Deputy Principal

This means that Critical Leaders are not only reforming schools and centres for equity and social justice, they are also building the reform through transformative acts of indigenisation and decolonisation. This requires understanding, voicing, and enacting our commitment to developing new relationships of mana ōrite with mana whenua and Māori, where Māori can be more self-determining. In Aotearoa New Zealand this is still a very challenging space.

> *There were 7% of our community who said we'd gone too far. Probably echoed 7% of my colleagues, you know, do you really want to be the Māori school? Is that what you want to be known as? But as we talked about it, we realised that actually that was something that we should be celebrating. 7% of our non-Māori whānau were recognising that things had changed from what they were comfortable and used to. And if we worried about them then we'd be paralysed into doing nothing.*
>
> Primary School Principal

Links to Te Hurihanganui Pou and Principles

Critical Leaders understand the Te Hurihanganui pou *Kaupapa Māori* and *Critical Consciousness* as underpinning the new power relations required for the cultural changes and structural shifts they are seeking to establish.

The Te Hurihanganui principles: *Te Ao Māori, Tino Rangatiratanga, Whanaungatanga, Te Ira Tangata, Mana Ōrite* and *Te Hāngaitanga* are then used to examine, deconstruct, and shift the traditional systems and structures that are still present in the school or centre, so that the new culture and structures can be restructured, understood and owned by all.