

# Claiming Spaces: Prioritising Maaori Worldview

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*Ohomairangi Early Intervention Services*

## Introduction

Ohomairangi Trust was established as a provider of early intervention services in February 2002. It is funded and accredited by the Ministry of Education, and is the first Kaupapa Maaori based early intervention service to be accredited by the Ministry of Education. Essentially Ohomairangi was developed because of a need in the community for a service that could focus on developing and providing early intervention in a uniquely Maaori way, without the constraints of a crown agency. The Ohomairangi early intervention team has a commitment to supporting both the positive developments for Maaori within the Ministry of Education, and the continued independent research and development of Kaupapa Maaori services. The primary purpose of Ohomairangi is to develop and provide a Kaupapa Maaori based early intervention service across Taamaki Makaurau, which meets recommended practice guidelines. This evolves from a starting point of Kaupapa Maaori theory.

This paper focuses on the role Ohomairangi plays in creating indigenous space in Aotearoa. Given the size constraints of this paper, the focus has been further defined to one of the key underlying elements of creating such a space: 'engagement'. The processes of engagement with each other and with the children, families and communities with whom we work are paramount to the success or otherwise of interventions. The relationships that develop through processes of engagement are the foundation upon which interventions take place, and upon which we work with others for the ultimate goal of self-determining indigenous people and communities.

## Engagement

The term 'engagement' in its simplest sense is applied as a method of interaction with others,

which generally has an intended outcome. It is known to include both dialogue and written material, and may be formal or informal.

A current review of literature and internet sources indicates that the term 'engagement' is a fairly recent addition to the discourse of the New Zealand Crown and other agencies. It has become increasingly apparent in the last five years.

In 2004 the Department of Labour published the document titled "Government – Community Engagement: Key learning and emerging principles". This was the first of a thematic paper series from the 'Community Economic Development Action Research Project' (CEDAR) undertaken in 2002-2003, for the purpose of exploring the use of research as a conduit for developing a closer relationship between government policy and community. This paper was intended as a resource to support those who engage with communities and offers a significant contribution to the current review.

The definition of 'engagement' which underpins the Department of Labour's paper originates from the Privy Council.

*Citizen engagement refers to processes through which government seeks to encourage deliberation, reflection, and learning on issues at preliminary stages of a policy process often when the focus is more on the values and principles that will frame the way an issue is considered. Citizen engagement processes are used to consider policy directions that are expected to have a major impact on citizens; address issues that involve conflicts in values or require difficult policy choices or tradeoffs; explore emerging issues that require considerable learning, both on the part of government*

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*and citizens; and build common ground by reconciling competing interests.*

*Citizen engagement differs qualitatively from consultation in a number of ways including an emphasis on in-depth deliberation and dialogue, the focus on finding common ground, greater time commitments and its potential to build civic capacity. In this regard, citizen engagement processes should be used selectively (Department of Labour, 2004, p5)*

Clearly the requirements of the Crown and other agencies wishing to embark on engagement are greater than those expected within consultation processes. Such differences are explored in greater depth below. This paper acknowledges the Crown's desire to encourage greater participation of citizens in policy development, referred to in this context as 'citizen engagement'.

*Engaging citizens in policy making is part of good governance. Governments are under increasing pressure to enhance transparency accountability. Information sharing, consultation and participation are fast gaining currency in civic democracy as tools for government – community engagement. Therefore for governments to respond to these challenges, they need to build a commitment and capacity of civic engagement (Department of Labour, 2004, p5).*

Not all of the literature is as descriptive or indeed shares the same description of engagement. In a paper titled "Local Authority Engagement with Maori" published by Local Government New Zealand (2004), the findings of a quantitative survey of council practices are reported. The term 'engagement' is used synonymously with 'working with' and the survey questions investigated:

- Maori involvement in council structures: This included the formation of Maori standing committees; Maori membership on other council committees or subcommittees and working parties; Maori representation on or Maori advisory committees; consideration of Maori constituencies/wards.

- Policies and practices for establishing relationships with Maori: This included a range of options including co-management of sites and activities; relationship agreements; consultation policies and practices; iwi management plans; projects and funding.
- Council resources, training and relationship monitoring: This covered things such as iwi liaison and Maori policy units; internal staff and councillor training; monitoring of relationships; hearing commissioners.

The items in the survey suggest that engagement refers to involvement which may or may not engender similar expectations of 'information sharing, consultation and participation' described broadly in the CEDAR paper above. There is nothing that assures the involvement will be active rather than passive. Committee representation for example may allow for an active role in decision-making processes or it may simply be an observatory role with limited powers. Even in the event that it does allow for an active role, a one or two member representation on a committee of eight or more has limited persuasive power or power to make change.

The CEDAR paper notes that work undertaken by councils with Maori is done so within a legislative framework and that this requires councils to 'take account' of Maori concerns in certain circumstances. The development of structures and policies to meet such requirements however is the responsibility of the individual council. The work of CEDAR may well be applied to assist such processes.

A third paper dealing with 'engagement' was published in 1999 by the Ministry of Education and provides guidelines for those who work with Maori in the education sector. They are intended to 'assist Ministry of Education staff to consult and engage effectively with Maori'. A clear understanding of the benefits of reciprocal relationships that underpin successful engagement is evident in the paper's intent.

*We need to be aware of the contribution and real difference education can make to their (communities) wider economic, social and cultural development ... Good policy design*

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*and good policy implementation require us to identify how Maori may be affected by these, and to obtain and incorporate their perspectives wherever possible in all phases from problem definition and the formulation of options through to decision-making and implementation ... flexible and positive consultation and engagement will improve the quality of our work and contribute to better educational outcomes for Maori (Ministry of Education, 1999, p.1).*

The excerpt above from the foreword of the then Secretary for Education, Mr Howard Fancy, promises a commitment to relationship building that will have beneficial outcomes for both the communities and the education sector.

In terms of adding to the definition of 'engagement' evidenced in the literature generally, the Ministry of Education (1999) further states that:

*Engagement is a broad umbrella term used in these guidelines to encompass all our interactions with Maori (formal, informal, verbal, written, whether related to specific issues or not).*

It is important to note that the Ministry of Education (MoE) has not simply exchanged meanings between 'consultation' and 'engagement' but have sought to explore the relationship of each to each other. To understand the context of the MOE's definition of engagement, the following are listed as the purposes of their guidelines:

- To improve responsiveness and service delivery to make a difference in Maori education
- To comply with legal principles of the Treaty of Waitangi
- To empower by constructive engagement, raising achievement, reducing disparities and assisting those at risk
- To improve our leadership role through effective partnerships and innovation. (Ministry of Education, 1999, p.2)

In a further Crown document titled the "Strategy for engagement with Maori on international treaties", by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and

Trade's legal division, a different perspective of 'engagement' emerges. In contrast to the Ministry of Education's paper discussed above, this paper recognises the lead agency as the more powerful partner in the relationship at every level.

*The onus is on the lead agency to identify ... whether there is a need for engagement with Maori ... If it is considered that Maori involvement is required, the lead agency will be responsible for establishing the appropriate degree and nature of this involvement based on the nature, degree and strength of Maori interest. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's legal division, 2005, p.1)*

This document does little to acknowledge the partnership role of Maori as Tangata Whenua in Te Tiriti o Waitangi and therefore the subsequent role of Maori in all other treaties negotiated on behalf of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

*...there will not be a need to involve Maori in discussions on all treaties but that the focus must be on ensuring that this occurs on international treaties concerning issues of relevance to Maori ... Maori involvement would be expected on any treaty action affecting the control or enjoyment of Maori resources (te tino rangatiratanga) or taonga as protected under the Treaty of Waitangi (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's legal division, 2005, p.1).*

Although the final sentence in the above excerpt shows some recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its implications for further treaty negotiations, it reflects a limited perspective, whereby the Crown remains the dominant partner who determines the basis and indeed process for Maori participation.

The document goes on to list opportunities for engagement with Maori and to its credit does suggest that these 'exist during all phases of treaty making'. Given the context described earlier of the lead agency determining the what, where and when these latter statements seem to be of limited significance. The document states that "Engagement with Maori on particular treaties will

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enable the development of an ongoing relationship with Maori” (p.3). For meaningful ongoing relationships to occur who determines the points and nature of engagement will need to be addressed.

The term ‘engagement’ and more specifically the terms ‘civic engagement’ are even more prevalent in literature from North America, some of which is reviewed below.

‘Dialogue for Democracy’ (Bake, Davies, Elggen, Ethington, 2005) is a university based research project which studied the definition and application of ‘civic engagement’ in Utah. It identified that the term ‘civic engagement’ has its origins in Dewey’s (1993) concept of education in a democratic society, with Dewey (1933) asserting that knowledge is about the comprehension of information and, information without comprehension has limited value. To understand or comprehend information is to know the relationship that various pieces of information have to each other and to one’s own context. This can only occur when the acquisition of information, its relationships and its meaning are reflected on. In the context of whaanau engagement this would imply that there is little value in simply gleaning information from the whaanau. Rather, effective engagement will require an understanding of that information by reflecting on how it relates to present and future information. It requires further reflection on the context from which it is gleaned and the context to which it might be applied. This could be viewed as a process of engagement which can contribute to greater knowledge amongst all participants in the process.

In the university context engagement is applied to *a reciprocal beneficial academic relationship between a university, its students and faculty, and the surrounding community”*(Bake et al, 2005).

For this present paper we can apply the notion of ‘reciprocal benefit’ to the relationships between whaanau and others, in the facilitation of engagement for whaanau development. In so doing it would be reasonable to expect that a primary

objective of facilitating engagement with whaanau would include real benefits both for the Crown or other agency, and the whaanau.

Participants in the ‘Dialogue for Democracy’ study identified a range of definitions for civic engagement that further define how the term might be applied for whaanau engagement. Emergent themes included individual public participation, dialogue, public expression, and reciprocity and community improvement.

These themes however exist on the assumption that by definition civic engagement is a democratic process that builds a democratic society. Indeed it may be on that same assumption that this report has been commissioned. However, this review would be incomplete if it ignored the body of literature which questions this very assumption.

Literature that challenges civic engagement is grounded in an in-depth analysis of contextual issues which impact on and indeed further challenge the intent of those who initiate engagement processes with communities. The literature examines the demographics of those who tend to participate frequently in matters of civic engagement and those who tend to be marginalized in the processes and not frequently represented. It questions the intent of the engagement initiators who continue to encourage processes that only gain the participation of certain members or groups of society. If the engagement initiators truly intend the civic engagement to add value to and aid the creation of a more democratic society then it would be reasonable to expect that the underlying reasons for skewed participation and marginalisation need to be addressed. Armony (2004) writes:

*The intersections of class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and age – analyzed in light of the broader political context – are critical to understanding participation in civil society (2004, p99).*

Civic or whaanau engagement may be initiated to address and gain community input into issues of concern within society. What Armony and others (eg., Daynes, 2005) caution is that until the underlying societal causes for these issues are

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addressed, the engagement may do little to improve the concerns and more to preserve the status quo.

*We need to examine the history of the issues they (engagement initiators) aim to address, and the contexts out of which their theories, models and practices emerge ... If we are to respond to the issues we face today, we must ask and answer serious historical questions as part of our work. We must know how things got to be the way they are where we are... we must uncover the historical contexts of the programs we adopt. We must ask how those contexts will fit the contexts we work in. It is only when those questions are answered that we can bring to bear the historical analogies and methods that give the movement for civic engagement its energy and appeal. (2005, p.4).*

To facilitate the most effective engagement, the literature appears to suggest two steps. First, that the Crown and its agencies first undertake a thorough analysis of who currently participates in opportunities for engagement or consultation and how the history of Maori development and colonisation in Aotearoa has created the context for the current participation demographics. Secondly, that the Crown and its agencies address any issues of inequity and mistrust reflected by the demographics. This is obviously a time consuming process which would require a long term commitment to re-building the relationship between Maori and the Crown.

Educational theorist Paulo Freire's extensive work on the development of educational pedagogies and pedagogy of the oppressed, has resonated with indigenous peoples throughout the world. Freire acknowledges the cultural underpinnings critical to the engagement and progress of any peoples. Based on recognition of the cultural underpinnings of folk traditions, and on a recognition of the importance of the collective construction of knowledge, Freire's pedagogical project created a vivid new vocabulary of concern for the oppressed, and uncoiled a new and powerful political terminology that enabled the oppressed to analyze their location within the privileging hierarchy of capitalist society and to engage in attempts to

dislocate themselves from existing cycles of social reproduction.

*Linking history, politics, economics and class to the concepts of culture and power to develop both a language of critique and a language of hope. These work conjointly and have proven successful in helping generations of disenfranchised peoples to liberate themselves (Freire, 1998, p90).*

In summary, it is relationships and the re-building of relationships that are at the heart of successful engagement. Knowing and understanding the context of the whanau will be critical to engagement practices that result in benefits for all. Finally the literature also tells us that engagement is clearly not just another word to replace consultation. It's meaning centres fundamentally on active participation and a relationship of mutual benefits.

## **Conclusion**

Even in a Kaupapa Maaori service such as Ohomairangi, and some might say especially in a Kaupapa Maaori service, there is the existence of power relations. This is an important part of both the engagement and indigenous spaces discourse. So, what are the important factors for us as Maaori interventionists to keep in mind?

Firstly, it is an understanding that indigenous spaces do not exist in isolation. We work within other spaces, alongside other spaces and around other spaces. How we are positioned in our collaborations or conflicts with others, however, is superceded by the fact that those other spaces actually exist. That is, we cannot pretend, no matter how staunch, how pretty, how peaceful, or how gutsy the space we have created, that we act alone. The reality is that all of our indigenous spaces exist in a context somewhere along the continuum of colonized Aotearoa, which exists in a Neoliberal world. We do not act in isolation of any of that.

Secondly, our organization is state funded by the Ministry of Education and therefore to an extent we might be perceived as state agents. What does this mean in terms of the equation that this puts us

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in with families? State funding plus state agent does not equal the family position. We need therefore to recognize that and ensure that our practices with families mediate the risks they may face in such an unequal equation.

The third point to make in terms of power relations in early intervention, in special education, is that often there is an isolation factor for a family with special needs. That is, the community ties that would normally exist for families may not be there at all, or at best the ties are qualitatively different. Isolation tends to reduce one's sense of power and one's sense of belonging.

The fourth point that impacts on the power relations in our work is that which is probably the

easiest for us to mediate. That is, it is about our own attitudes and beliefs. If we as interventionists view the family as being 'in need' and operate from a 'needs based' position, then we immediately dis-empower families with that view. If on the other hand, we operate from a 'strengths based' position, then we immediately place power with the families that may be equal or greater than our own perceived position.

Finally, it is important for us to reflect and consider who creates the space. Are we creating a state space that we bring families into, because the state are our funders? Or are we privileged to be joining the space already occupied by families?

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