Shifting disciplines:
Communication, discourses, and identities

Parehau Richards, with Shirley Leitch and Judy Motion

ABSTRACT
This paper both re-presents extracts from an opening speech that Parehau Richards gave at the 1998 ANlCA conference and analyses the structure, content, and motivation for the presentation. The paper draws on the oral presentation that Parehau made at the opening as well as reflections that Parehau shared with Shirley Leitch and Judy Motion about why she chose to speak at the opening and what objectives she hoped to achieve.

The presentation began with a greeting and introduction in Maori:

Parehau Richards is the Director of the Maori Resource Management Programme, Dr Judy Motion is a senior lecturer in Management Communication, and Dr Shirley Leitch is an Associate Professor and Associate Dean. All are based at the Waikato Management School, in Hamilton, New Zealand.

Ka mihi tuatahi ki nga Atua Maori, ki a Ranginui e tu iho nei, ki a Papatuanuku e takoto nei, ki a korua tamariki e arahi, e avahi, e wero, e whangai nei i a matou.

Tuarua nga mihi nui ki te Arikinui, ki a Te Atairangikaahu me tona hoa rangatira a Wharaha, a raua tamariki, mokopuna hoki, ara, te Kahui Ariki whanui tonu.

Ki a koutou nga manuhiri tuarangi kua tae mai ki te riu o Waikato ki tenei huihuinga, tera koutou katoa. Nau mai, haere mai ki tenei te kura Raupapa.

Ko Whanokao te maunga
Ko Motu te awa
Ko Te Whanau-a-Apanui te iwai
Ko Apanui te tangata.
Ko Taupiri te maunga

Australian Journal of Communication • Vol 25 (3) 1998
Ko Waikato te awa
Ko Waikato te iwi
Ko Potatau te tangata

In recent years, many opening ceremonies in New Zealand have involved the tangata whenua of New Zealand (Maori). Maori protocol involving powhiri (Maori welcome) has either led the proceedings or played a dominant part in the opening ceremonial proceedings. Initially, a powhiri was considered for the opening of the 1998 ANZCA conference. Parehau Richards, a staff member of the Waikato Management School and member of the local Tainui Iwi (or tribe), was asked to work with organisers in the final stages of preparation to organise a powhiri.

Parehau Richards: I wondered about hurriedly organising a powhiri but felt that time constraints did not allow for such a ceremony. It would simply not have been possible to organise the necessary people. However, I thought about the theme of the conference, 'shifting disciplines', and decided that it would be important to be involved. The opportunity to be part of the opening of the conference was a way to make an impact in the early part of the conference that might focus participants on issues important to New Zealand and to this place. For me, the theme was a challenge. A great part of any consideration of 'shifting' or of 'change' requires that we think about people, time, and space. In New Zealand, serious thinking about 'shifting disciplines' should involve considerations of the tangata whenua (indigenous people of the land) and the Treaty of Waitangi.

Upon reflection, Parehau decided to try something quite different for her presentation at the ANZCA conference, positioning structural elements and the thematic format of mihi and korero (talk) within a keynote address.

Parehau Richards: In terms of my Maori oral training in korero and waiata, one challenge is knowing my place, knowing what are appropriate formats and styles for me to use. For example, it is not appropriate for me to use words that, typically, male speakers (in many tribal regions) use in their whaikorero (speeches) at powhiri on marae. That's why I chose to talk about the history of this place and my connection to the history of the place, to share that with the visitors, to open up and introduce myself and this place to the people of the conference, who are mainly not from this place.

In constructing her keynote, Parehau drew upon her multiple identities—as a Maori with strong connections to Tainui and Te Whanau-a-Apanui, but also with Pakeha (European) ancestry; as a Catholic who...
had been raised for some time with Anglican grandparents; as a Maori
woman; as a rural girl who grew up to be an academic in a western-style
institution.

Parehau Richards: In one sense, accepting a speaking role at the confer­
ence put me in a difficult position, but I think it is important for certain
voices to be heard. I have been encouraged, through my upbringing and
through training at school by an uncle of mine who taught me Maori, to
speak in appropriate public forums. On my mum’s side, it’s all right for
women to speak, although, from my grandmother’s generation down to
my generation, few women speak on the marae but they certainly do
speak in the wharenui (meeting house).

I was brought up by my Te Whanau-a-Apanui grandparents, and therefore
I’ve never been a very active Tainui member. I’ve always found myself posi­
tioned on the margins, though I’ve holidayed here and I know my imme­
diate family, and parts of my extended family. I know that my Tainui
people do not find it appropriate for women to stand up on the marae
and speak. For me, speaking on a marae is different to this particular
instance in a lecture theatre. So I think that’s why I talk about keeping
myself safe. People have trained me to think carefully about keeping
myself safe and presenting korero (talk) in ways that are appropriate for
the time and the audience. My grandmother uses prayer, and certain
uncles and aunties have helped prepare me for public appearances in
waiata (song), haka (a warrior challenge), and korero (talk). So for that day
of the conference opening, I thought it was important to acknowledge the
atua Maori (creator), acknowledge the Maori queen, not only on my
behalf but on behalf of the conference. It was important to have a voice
and it was quite important to represent a voice that I knew was probably
not going to be a strong voice at the conference—a Maori voice. So, I was
weighing up those sorts of things. And I was probably feeling relatively
comfortable in doing that with other women around, who I know hold
certain positions and whom I feel relatively safe around, who were going
to be there to support me. If a group of male faculty had asked me to do
the same sort of thing, I don’t know whether I would have done it.

Parehau wove elements of mihi and powhiri into her keynote speech.
However, she was careful not to duplicate a powhiri so that her speech
could not be misinterpreted as a transgression onto the traditional space
of Tainui speakers who have that role in this region.

Parehau Richards: The paepae is at the front of the meeting house. It is the
area where the kaikorero (speakers) sit. My observations have been that
it’s the first speaker and the second speaker of that paepae who welcome
the visitors and introduce the place to the visiting group. The speakers will

Shifting disciplines

3
talk about the identity of the people of the place, the name of the wharenui (meeting house), and the connection between the wharenui’s name and the traditional people of the place.

The format I used also drew upon the skills that I got from a university course in oral communication. I suppose I was weaving this knowledge together with the things that are significant in terms of Maori oratory. I was drawing on the elements of powhiri, that is the karanga (welcome call), whaikorero (speeches), and waiata (singing). I was weaving together different skills from that knowledge base as well as the things I learnt in oral communication. I tried to divide my speech into talking about this place, positioning myself within or alongside this place, and then trying to relate that to the conference and the words in the conference title about communication, discourse, identity, and the theme of shifting disciplines.

Parehau’s keynote address opened with the brief passage in Maori that is quoted in full above. She went on to explain the meaning and significance of her words for the non-Maori speakers in the audience.

Parehau Richards: I would like to speak briefly about this place, recognising some geographical features of this region, the history of this place, and the carvings that adorn this place, the Waikato Management School. I will conclude by making some comments about what I perceive to be some of the issues and challenges of ‘shifting disciplines’, in terms of communication, discourses, and identities.

First, this place. Many of you are new visitors to this place. Some of you have been here before and know this place. This morning I have acknowledged the significant geographical features of the region: the local mountains of the Waikato Basin, Taupiri in the north, Maungakawa in the north-east, Maungatautari in the south-east, and Pirongia in the south-west, as well as the Waikato river that flows through the centre of Hamilton as it makes its way to the Tasman sea on the west coast of New Zealand.

This morning, I have also acknowledged the people of this place—the Maori Queen and her family who reside at Waahi Pa, north of here, and the people of the Waikato, especially Ngati Wairere and Ngati Raukawa, the tangata whenua (people) of this place (where the Waikato Management School is located).

Second, as I talk about the history of the people, I will locate myself in it and talk from within it. Through my mother, I am connected to the people of Te Whanau-a-Apanui in the eastern Bay of Plenty. My mountain is Whanokao, my river is Motu, and my marae is Te Kaha. Through my father, I am connected to the many peoples of the Tainui canoe; Taupiri is my mountain, Waikato is my river, and Turangawaewae is my marae.
I am a lecturer here at the Waikato Management School in the Maori Resource Management programme. The decision to become an academic was not mine alone. My parents and grandparents, as well as my family, have helped me to choose my career path. As a woman who is a member of whanau, hapu, iwi, Maori, and non-Maori organisations, I find myself involved in a range of projects simultaneously. These include being the treasurer at my son’s kohanga reo (language nest), a Maori health provider committee member, as well as being a granddaughter of my late grandfather, who had extensive genealogy and networks. These projects require me to have a range of communication strategies ‘under my hat’ that enable me to meet the challenges I face.

Third, the carvings. The carvings in the foyer outside of this lecture theatre represent the permanence of te riu o Waikato (the Waikato basin). The carvings in the foyer outside of this lecture theatre symbolise the long-standing commitment of the tangata whenua to nurturing knowledge and understanding. They also symbolise the value and importance of education and knowledge for those who come to the Waikato Management School and the University of Waikato.

Academic conferences do not generally take any account of the place or of the identity of the people of the place in which they are staged. At best, conference participants are provided with lists of good restaurants or of local tourist attractions. Parehau was interested in presenting a quiet challenge to the conference by simply acknowledging in her speech things that are of value to her and other Maori people of this place, and thus opening up the discursive possibilities within the conference itself.

Parehau Richards: I understand from what you and others have said to me that the conference opening touched some people emotionally. That may have been because they’re not used to that sort of thing at all. The approach I took has come out of my background and training. My grandmother had a huge influence on me in that way. Right from when I was a young person, my grandmother encouraged me, and so did my grandfather. They encouraged me to do things in a quiet way that suited my nature. I tend to have a placid nature so they encouraged me to do things in a less aggressive way. I think my grandfather was always on edge about what I was learning at university in case some of the ideas I was going home with were radical. He didn’t want his grand-daughter to be like that; so he and Nana (grandmother) definitely trained me to be respectful to present things that might be of a political nature in a quiet way, which has been challenging at times.
It was acceptable to them that I was controversial but in a way that was more respectful and softer. Part of that was because of their observations of me and of my character but that sort of approach was also because of considerations of my whanau, hapu, and iwi. My family tend to be the workers in the background, in the kitchen. Grandfather was always very happy when senior relatives would arrive at the marae so that they could be the ones to go out on the paepae, while my grandfather would be the one working away at the back. As I got older, I came to respect these aspects of my grandparents so much because they were both capable of doing the things out the front. I think these things have had a lot to do with my approach.

I challenge people in a nice way. That may have made it more thought provoking for some. For example, I think it was important that in the first part of my talk I could introduce the carvings, because the carvings are representative of the mountains and the people of this place, of the history of the place and the river. I referred to the carvings as being out in the foyer so that when people saw the carvings they would know what they represented. I feel quite strongly that it’s good to direct people, to signal their significance to people and talk about their history so that the carvings are not just standing there by themselves with no connection to what’s happening.

Making connections was a significant part of what Parehau set out to do in her welcome.

Parehau Richards: The word that comes to mind is connections or links. Another observation of mine about the paepae is that people who whakarero (speak) from the paepae are also very knowledgeable about relationship links, whether that be through genealogy or through events in history. When they have visitors to their place, one of their big jobs is to make those links and to make those connections. Although I didn’t have whakapapa or genealogical links with the group at the conference, that was a reason for the second part of the talk in which I positioned myself by talking about being a worker here and making academic or work connections. I drew out the challenges that we all face in terms of the theme of the conference. But I still found it important to make the geographical links first so that we all came in to the conference with a knowledge of these things. I went on to position myself as a young woman academic and made the links in the latter part of the speech in terms of the themes of the conference.

In addition to the geographical and genealogical aspects of Parehau’s speech, she also made strong reference to the spiritual dimension.
Parehau Richards: There were a lot of spiritual elements that went through my speech and it was a mix of Christianity and more traditional Maori knowledge and ideas, and there was an intermingling within that. I was brought up, especially the time I had with my grandparents, in quite a politically religious family. My grandmother and grandfather were staunch supporters of the Anglican church but I was baptised a Catholic because my father was a Catholic. And then I came to university and did a lot more reading and gained more understanding about the huge role that religion played in the colonisation process. Then I also experienced the dwindling of numbers in the Anglican Church in Te Kaha. On a Sunday morning you might get about six people in the congregation.

Alongside many of my peers, as well as sending my baby to kohanga reo (a Maori language pre-school) I am attempting to reclaim Maori knowledge and supposedly traditional ways of sustaining Maori, of looking after our spiritual side. These pose challenges for me that I’m still working through.

I was brought up to think that Atua meant God, the God that we refer to in the Catholic Church and Anglican Church. But at university I’ve done a lot of work around Atua and Atua Maori. In one sense, I like referring to Atua as the energy forces and the ecological system—as whanaunga (relatives). Sometimes I consciously make the decision that I’m going to refer to Atua Maori and refer to the energy forces, to Tanemahuta, the forest, Tangaroa of the seas, and then other days it just naturally comes out that I’m referring to God.

I feel quite strongly that we’ve lost so much of the knowledge about Atua Maori and I’m grappling to try to reclaim some of that knowledge and reinterpret it.

Here at university it is common for Maori to use their tertiary experiences as a foundation for finding out more about our identities in the land of our birth. Much of this knowledge has been nurtured outside of the university—with grandparents and knowledgeable people out in the community. When I first started as an undergraduate student here at the Waikato Management School, my peers and I felt strongly that we had to leave most things about being Maori, including our aspirations and experiences, at the door. This was difficult because I wanted to learn Maori language, culture, and management. At the time, this set of subjects was not part of an acknowledged package of courses.

Parehau is now the Director of the Maori Resource Management Programme that incorporates this unique combination of subjects.
Parehau Richards: Over more than one hundred years, there have been many struggles by and for Maori wanting to learn more about being Maori. Linda Smith (1992) from Auckland University summarises four strands of mana wahine (important Maori women’s) discourse that I find useful to theorise some of my experiences:

Whanau discourse—that which reconnects me to genealogy and geographies that are mine;

Spiritual discourse—that which connects the past to the present knowledge and history;

State discourse—that which assists me to the social, political, and economic position of Maori women;

Indigenous discourse—that which connects me and locates me in an international context.

Parehau concluded her speech by reflecting on some of the cross cultural communication differences between Pakeha and Maori.

Parehau Richards: Fundamental to the study of communication is a recognition that communication is a two-way process, and transactional in nature. I know that much of the teaching in places like this university is based around formal written and oral presentations of information. The aim is to continue positive transactions and interactions that build relationships. But what about times when in some cultures it is more appropriate to be silent, to laugh or to cry: how do we teach and learn these things?

REFERENCES