

# CHANGING THE CULTURE OF RESEARCH: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TRIANGULATION OF MEANING

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The *triangulation of meaning* is a framework that describes the future rigor of research and a way in which to confirm the nagging notion that objectivity is bound to evolve. It is an idea that contextualizes all others, a daringly simple matrix in which to see the whole in all parts. The idea of viewing reality in an outside, inside, and transpatial way is now part of a postquantum physics movement, and a segue into the beauty and practicality of indigeneity. Seeing through engagement with mind, body, and spirit has helped me develop a different consciousness. Our world is asking us to view old problems in new ways. It's time. Here is one way to begin the seeing that is meant to challenge current assumptions of research philosophies, methods, and outcomes. It is meant to offer you ideas you recognize. And through it all, a joy in remembering.

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Whether or not you can observe a thing depends on the theory you use.  
It is the theory that decides what can be observed.

—Albert Einstein

**I**t's time! Time for new theories so we can see our world differently.<sup>1</sup> And in that seeing, a new way of doing. We are moving from epistemology to hermeneutics, from knowing to meaning. From intelligence to interpretation. From fragmentation to wholeness. From status-quo objectivity to radical/conscious subjectivity. It will mean a different way to approach literacy, research, energy, ideas, data collection, sustainability, and *all* collaborations. But, first, we must know how we view intelligence.<sup>2</sup>

Epistemology for Hawaiians is a distinct idea.<sup>3</sup> (All indigenous peoples I have met know this discussion is inevitable.) We know that intelligence is far more complex than what a poor SAT score tells us. *We know this.* We know that facts and truth are not one and the same. *We know this.* We know that objectivity found in measurement is only part of the picture we are looking at. *We know this.* We know there is a difference between knowledge and knowing. *We do know this!* And because these times call for courage in our truth-telling, we are now able to express ourselves *through* our intelligence into our interpretation. It was Hans-Georg Gadamer who taught us that understanding occurs in interpretation—the *'i'ini* (animating principle) of a word, the *ea* (life force) of ideas. Our own interpretation will change everything. Understandings will shift. It is indeed a time of *'ike kai hohonu*, of searching and deep knowing. Now comes the telling. And as we all know: *It is in the telling.*

Enter the *triangulation of meaning*, a simple framework in which to place our nagging sense that there is a “within of things” (Teilhard de Chardin, 1955), a way to engage in the world that matures objectivity, a space to contemplate, a process to heal from the blistering promise objectivity held out for us. Here is an authentic leap into new ways of viewing reality that will challenge current research paradigms based on Newtonian assumptions of space, time, and knowing. It is simple. It is older than time. It is the very context we exist in without our knowing. Please put on some tea. I'll get the candles.

## THE TRIANGULATION OF MEANING: BODY, MIND, AND SPIRIT

Triangulation, three intimations of one idea, should be noted as a guide to edifying coherence among associations.

—Zach Shatz (1998)

Here we go! Here is a set of ideas that may bring you back to remembering. It extends indigenous epistemology into a context of world awakening. It is daringly uncomplicated, but then again, words only point to the truth. *Genuine knowledge must be experienced directly* (Fremantle, 2001). This section is meant to help you organize your research mind and give you the courage to do so with the rigor found in facts, logic, and metaphor. It is offered now because it organized my own thoughts and oiled the tools needed to dismantle the master's house found in perfect order in my own mind.<sup>4</sup> We as researchers can now become architects of meaning, shaping spaces as yet unseen. Here is the challenge. Here is a floor plan.

Let's begin with the idea of *triangulation*. Wilderness education teaches that if you wish to find your place on a topographical map, you need only locate two geographical distinctions on land and, with the use of a compass and pencil, the third and final spot—your location—can then be found. The use of three points to discover one's location in both two and three dimensions is the art and science of triangulation, and I have always thrilled to its use and implication. Thus the metaphor of *triangulating our way to meaning* with the use of three points. The three points? Body, mind, and spirit.

Using body, mind, and spirit as a template in which to organize meaningful research asks us to extend through our objective/empirical knowing (body) into wider spaces of reflection offered through conscious subjectivity (mind) and, finally, through recognition and engagement with deeper realities (spirit). Finally, we are defining places science can follow into but not lead or illuminate. Other ways of knowing something must be introduced if we are to evolve into a more enlightened society. It will not occur with scientific or objective knowledge only.

Nobel Laureate Werner Heisenberg put it more succinctly: “Physics can make statements about strictly limited relations that are only valid within the framework of those limitations” (Heisenberg, cited in Wilber, 2001, pp. 33–74).

So, before we begin this discussion, please understand that your schooled mind has been shaped by mostly one point in the triangulation: body. Body is a synonym for external, objective, literal, sensual, empirical. Change agents, indigenous researchers, cultural leaders, and transformational scholars are now working together to help this idea grow up. So, take a breath. Keep your mind open.

To begin, *mahalo* (thanks) to Ken Wilber for his capacity to see patterns in philosophy and research that brought this idea to the world.<sup>5</sup> I have simply extended his preliminary list into trilogies that make sense to me and the needs of our focus. It was my wilderness education experiences that brought forth the idea of triangulation as I have experienced the beauty of its practice and utility. We are poised to use three points in our experiencing of life and research to find our way home. Not two. Not one. Three.

## THE NUMBER THREE

The Tao gives birth to One.  
One gives birth to Two.  
Two gives birth to Three.  
Three gives birth to all things.

—*Tao Te Ching* (chap. 42)

It is more like Bucky Fuller’s tetrahedron.<sup>6</sup> It is about the structural integrity formed when *three* points meet in dimensioned space. The tetrahedron is also the sacred geometry of infinity, energy, and the perfect balance of equilibrium found in postquantum physics. It is the doorway into wholeness. We at first thought it was about opposites, about duality, about bridging polarity and painting our theories of gender, science, and life under this light. Black-and-white comparisons

kept us busy for hundreds of years. It has shaped the polemic universe we now take for granted. True or false. Body or mind. Oppressor or oppressed. Cognition or feeling. Real or imagined.

The world is indeed perceived in binary systems. It has caused untold horror and helped to create a rigid epistemology we now assume cannot evolve. We have options, however. Why not experience duality like the yin and yang, the Kū and Hina of our ancient selves?<sup>7</sup> Life is found in dual forms, but as we gather evidence from all sectors of world scholars, mystics, and practitioners, we are discovering that life moves within a *context of dynamic consciousness* that synergizes with Aristotle's highest intellectual virtue he referred to as *phronesis*. This is not simply a discussion of moral relativity or the third point in duality; it is a piercing into different planes of reality to discuss what inevitably shifts into nonduality because of its inherent wholeness. It has helped me step from entrenched patterns of thinking to include older ways and more experienced expressions of what intelligence really is and how it can be expressed. It's about time, don't you think?

## REACHING FOR WHOLENESS

Relative and absolute, these two truths are declared to be.  
The absolute is not within the reach of the intellect, for intellect  
is grounded in the relative.

—Shantidevi

The world is more than dual. It is whole. We have looked at parts so long we perhaps believe the gestalt of our knowing is not possible. With regard to research, we *still* believe statistics is synonymous with truth. It is a dangerous road to travel when we pack only empirical ways of being into our research backpack. Here is the point of doing research at this juncture of history: Empiricism is just one point in our triangulation of meaning, and although it may begin the process of research, it by no means is the final way in which to engage, experience, or summarize

it.<sup>8</sup> Research and life are more in line with body, mind, and spirit—three simple categories that have been lost in theory and rhetoric. Thus begins the discussion of a triangulation of meaning. *Ho‘omākaukau?* (Ready?) Let us begin.

## BODY: THE GROSS AND PHYSICAL KNOWING OF LIFE

### *First Point in the Triangulation of Meaning*

I believe we carry our values in our bodies. We carry our culture in our bodies.

—Peesee Pitsiulak, Inuit

We’re not talking gross as in yucky. Gross starts the triangulation of meaning because it describes what is outside, what is external, what is seen, what is empirical. It is the *form* that consciousness has shaped. It is one way to begin this discussion of research for meaning because it is what we are familiar with. It is science in all its splendor. It is the part of your research that may be counted, sorted, or emphasized because of statistical analysis. It is what you see, not the way in which you interpret what you see or hear. It is the A-B-C of experience you may jot down in memo form so you don’t forget specifics. This is the description of what was in the room, the socioeconomic status graphs, what was said, or the written ideas on butcher paper shared by informants. It is the information phase of gathering ideas. It is vital. It is the objective pathway we mistook for destination.

The body idea in the triangulation of meaning is what science has cornered. It is expressed through sensation via objective measurement and evaluation. It is a valuable and rigorous part in the triangulation of meaning and the center of most research processes. The gross/external part of the triangulation is the nitty-gritty of experience, the atomic process of physical movement, the force that moves

objects. It is vital to not underestimate the beauty of research found at this level. The problem was that we assumed all the world could be described this way. In one sense all the world can be described in this way. We are simply acknowledging the world to be fuller, richer, and lived deeply also in the internal processes that empiricism only points to. Thus the world *can* be described via objectivity alone. It just would not be enough. *Is not enough.*

Table 1 draws out why detailing this portion of the triangulation is vital and yet only one third of the whole. It will give you a clearer picture of what I am talking about. Table 1 gives us a glance at the future of rigor. Gross/external/body knowing becomes part of a wholeness forming when combined with mind and spirit. Mature self-reflection finds objectivity moving in space/time toward a subjective reality that finally realizes the strength and beauty of its limitation and potential.

Study Table 1. Do you sense the simplicity here? The list is detailed now so we can be on the same page when we discuss the other two parts of the triangulation. This body-centered aspect in the triangulation is absolutely vital if we are to evolve. It is not the “bad guy” of research but a critical link to help us expand what it is we are engaged in. Valuing an empirical relationship with the world *begins* the discussion we may have with aspects of an idea, event, or issue. It is simply not the end.

The body/external knowing of the triangulation is what we all can relate to because it is the template in which society and our institutions of higher learning operate. It has been the bread and butter of research and science and the main assumption found in the notion of rigor. It is objective, tangible, and measurable. Now, don't you think it's time to evolve? After all, one does not live on bread alone.

TABLE 1 The triangulation of meaning in its many forms

Body	Mind	Spirit	Source
'Ike (to see)	'Ike (to know)	'Ike (revelations)	Hawaiian
Objective	Subjective	Cultural	Karl Popper
Facts	Logic	Metaphor	Mike McCloskey
Perception	Conceptualization	Remembering	Yoga sutra
Empiricism	Rationalism	Mysticism	Ken Wilber
Information	Knowledge	Understanding	Manu Aluli-Meyer
Sensation	Reason	Contemplation	Ken Wilber
Instinct	Intelligence	Intuition	Halemakua
Emotion	Feeling	Awareness	Spinoza
Force	Power	Liberation	David Hawkins
Its	I	We	Buddhist inspired
Life	Mind	Joy	Upanishads
External	Internal	Transpatial	Ken Wilber
Knowledge	Knowing	Enlightenment	Māori inspired
True	Good	Beautiful	Plato
Gross	Subtle	Causal	Ken Wilber
Tinana	Hinengaro	Wairua	Māori
Hearing	Thought	Meditation	Buddhist
Duality	Nonduality	Wholeness	Ken Wilber
Biology	Psychology	Spirituality	Manu Aluli-Meyer
Seeing	Thinking	Being	Ken Wilber
Word	Meaning	Perception	Patanjali
Monologue	Dialogue	Presence	Ken Wilber
Empiricism	Epistemology	Hermeneutics	Manu Aluli-Meyer
Dot	Circle	Sphere	Mel Cheung
Eye of the flesh	Eye of the mind	Eye of contemplation	Ken Wilber
Ways of knowing	Ways of being	Ways of doing	Aboriginal
Decolonization	Transformation	Mobilization	Poka Laenui

*Note:* Unless noted specifically in the References and Additional Readings of this article, all descriptors in this list have been collected during a lifetime of experiences and kept as journal entries without citation. Students have also given me their renditions, and I have begun that list.

## MIND: THE SUBTLE AND SUBJECTIVE KNOWING OF LIFE

### *Second Point in the Triangulation of Meaning*

The great consciousness exists in my mind.

—Oscar Kawagley, Yupiaq

Finally! Truth that objectivity is a subjective idea that cannot possibly describe all of our experience. To believe that science or objective and empirical-based research could describe all of life reduces it to its smallest part. Ken Wilber (2001, p. 26) stated it clearly: “Physics is simply the study of the realm of least-Being.” Claiming that all things are made of subatomic particles is the most reductionistic stance imaginable! Science and the belief in objectivity as the highest expression of our intellect, it turns out from those most experienced, works only in “restricted fields of experience” and is effective only within those fields (Heisenberg, in Wilber, 2001). What a revelation! Let me repeat: *Objectivity is its own limitation.*

Enter mind, subjectivity, thought. Courage is needed to articulate these ideas with a robustness that will signal a leap in consciousness within our society. Even though insults will be hurled by mobs who have an investment in status-quo thinking, be prepared with ideas that scaffold what has become obvious: Our rational minds, our inside thoughts, our subjective knowing are vital to how we experience and understand our world. The question remains: How will the internal process of thought-made-conscious affect the process and product of your work?

Return to Table 1 and look again at synonyms found in the mind category of the triangulation of meaning. They are not the EKG lines found on graph paper, they are the *thoughts* those lines represent. Thought is an inside and subtle experience inspired by a richness or poverty only you can imagine. Because thought shapes form, do you see how vital it is to develop our minds consciously and not get stuck on form? This is where we are heading as a planet—to become more mindful of what it is we must do, how we must heal, where we must go to invigorate our own process not fully encouraged within our institutions of learning.

The following four quotations are from my heroes. They are given here as an extension of what my own people have portrayed in their own reading of their world. As we begin to formulate authentic ideas within ancient streams of knowing, let the dialogue expand our connection to world-doers who have articulated the beauty found in their own knowing:

**MAORI MARSDEN** (Māori). Abstract rational thought and empirical methods cannot grasp what is the concrete act of existing which is fragmentary, paradoxical, and incomplete. The only way lies through a passionate, inward, subjective approach.

**DAVID HAWKINS** (Psychiatrist). To merely state that objectivity exists is already a subjective statement. All information, knowledge, and the totality of all experience is the product of subjectivity, which is an absolute requirement intrinsic to life, awareness, existence, and thought.

**LEROY LITTLE BEAR** (Blackfoot). Subjectivity is your starting point to reality.

**GREG CAJETE** (Tewa). Native science reflects the understanding that objectivity is founded on subjectivity.

Subjectivity, thought, logic, rationality, intelligence, conceptualization—these are some of the inside processes mind brings forward. They are the snapshots from our trip to meaning, heightened purpose, and useful inquiry that will aid in healing ourselves and our world. The mind part of this triangulation harnesses what is seen, counted, and expressed into a metaconsciousness that explains, contextualizes, or challenges. It gives us the green light to engage in creative exploration needed to unburden ourselves from the shriveled promise objectivity has offered the world. We are being asked to *think* now, to develop truth in our bias, to speak our common sense, to deepen what intelligence *really* means.

This will change your research process and structure. Knowing of the relevance and maturation of conscious subjectivity will sharpen your rationality, help you speak through your gender so that you may lend what is beautiful about being alive, unique, and one-of-a-kind. No kidding! Knowing mind—your mind—and how it has helped shape your thoughts will make you honest and help you write truthfully, as an incest survivor, or as a Pacific Island scholar facing untold obstacles, or as a recovering addict working in prisons. Whatever it is. Whoever you are.

It is all distinct, all shaped in mind patterns that if recognized will bring forth greater intelligence, not less. Self-reflection of one's thoughts and actions helps you to understand that who you are, how you were raised, and what you eat all act as agents for your mindfulness or mindlessness. And all affect how you see and experience the world.

Mind as the second point in our triangulation of meaning helps us recover from the bullying and uniformity of “power-over” epistemology. It gives us breathing space to self-reflect in meaningful ways and engage with a rigor perhaps not captured in academic citations. Remember this! You will have to expand your repertoire of writers and thinkers if you wish to explore beyond the limitations of predictable research methodologies. It will be your mind that recognizes and describes new patterns needed for rationality, logic, and the true rigor found in knowing something in depth. Follow mindfulness to its own intelligence and seek inevitably what most scholars refuse to admit exists: *spirit*. Yes, let us enter this grove with care and quietude.

## SPIRIT: THE CAUSATIVE AND MYSTICAL KNOWING OF LIFE

### *Third Point in the Triangulation of Meaning*

At this point, the rational, conceptual aspect of the mind must let go, allowing a breakthrough into direct, intuitive experience.

—Francesca Fremantle (2001)

Here it is, the third point in a spiral. It is what people misconstrue for religion and dogma. *It is not that*. The spirit category in our triangulation of meaning is no less valuable, no more valuable. It is part of the whole, period. It is data moving toward usefulness moving toward meaning and beauty. It is the contemplation part of your work that brings you to insight, steadiness, and interconnection. It is the joy and truthful insights of your lessons and the rigor found in your discipline and focus that is not so much written about but expressed nonetheless.

Spirit as a point in this triangulation is all about seeing what is significant and having the courage to discuss it. It is what Trungpa Rinpoche described as “an innate intelligence that sees the clarity of things just as they are” (Fremantle, 2001, p. 59). This category that pulls facts into logic and finally into metaphor recognizes that one will eventually see more than what is presented. *You are being offered an opportunity to evolve.* Here is where the mystical aspects of this category encourage, inspire, calm. To know we are more than simply body and thought is to acknowledge how those ideas expand into wider realms of knowing and being. This is a spirit-centered truth that is older than time. Again, do not confuse the category of spirit with religion.

Look again at Table 1. What do you learn from the spirit category? Are these not the products and process of a conscious life? Is there any wonder billions of people wish to capture these values and ideas in ritual? The spirit part of triangulating ourselves back to meaning is all about the purpose and reason of our lives. It will help you think of your research as something of value and keep you at the edge of wonder with how it will shape who you are becoming. This third category encompasses the first two. It is an advancement of earlier ideas and gives a structure of rigor by which positivism is ultimately shaped.

Spirit in the triangulation of meaning is as it says: whole, contemplative, intuitive, metaphoric, joyful, liberating. Within research, spirit is answers you will *remember* in your dreams. It is questions you will frame differently after eye contact with a child. It is understanding an unexpected experience that will heighten the clarity of your findings. It is the “aha!” that comes from stirring oatmeal after a night of transcription. Developing a respect for the qualities of awareness, joy, and beauty will actually develop how you *think* and thus *see* the world. Do you see how all categories are really just one?

The spiritual category in this triangulation of meaning holds more than the extension of the first two categories. It is the frequency by which all connect. It is not simply a linear sequence. All three categories occur simultaneously. It is an idea whose time has come as it helps subjectivity mature into the fullness of its potential. Do not fear what is inevitable—that we are all part of the birthing of a new culture. Why not do it with a consciousness that is courageous in its purpose and quiet in its consistency?

Here is the point: research or renewal; mundane or inspiring; fragmented or whole. Do you see why Sir Karl Popper called the advancing of objectivity toward subjectivity into the inevitability of culture something we need to recognize? As *Kumu Hula* (hula teacher) Keola Lake, said during an interview, “Culture is defined as best practices of a group of people” (Meyer, 1998). Here is the metaphor of this discussion: *that we change the culture of research*. We do this simply by engaging all three points of the triangulation of meaning: body, mind, and spirit.

## HA‘INA MAI KA PUANA: THUS ENDS MY STORY

If knowledge is power, then understanding is liberation.

—Manu Aluli-Meyer

I believe it is time to think indigenous and act authentic even at the price of rejection. To disagree with mainstream expectations is to wake up, to understand what is happening, to be of service to a larger whole. You may even begin to work on behalf of our lands, water, and air. This is why we are heading into the field of hermeneutics—interpretation—via epistemology. We must first detail what we value about intelligence to even see there are other interpretations of life, brilliance, and knowing. The idea that the SAT or other measurable tools of “intelligence” are just tiny facets of intelligence is now timely. *Your* rendition of your own experience is now the point. Who are you then? What do you have to offer the world? How can we work together? Here is where hermeneutics enters with a bouquet of daisies. To realize that all ideas, *all* histories, *all* laws, *all* facts, and *all* theories are simply *interpretations* helps us see where to go from here. To understand this one idea has brought me to this point of liberation.

When ancient renditions of the world are offered for debate within a context of real-life knowing, there is a robustness I find invigorating and breathtaking. Here is where interpretations matter, and because indigenous folk are peopling places we were never found before, do you see why things are changing? We simply posit difference—a difference that knows place and encourages harmony within that place. Of course we are far from perfect, but we do bring something unique to the table. We bring dreams, food, elders, courage, and the clarity of speech and purpose. After all, there is no time to waste.

We are shaping longboards for a winter swell that is coming. It's time to learn new skills with our ancient minds. Time to deploy common sense back into our consciousness. Time to laugh more and bear witness to the deeper truth of why we do what we're doing. Time to see how we can connect and help others. Time to work on behalf of our 'āina (land). Time to triangulate our way back to meaning. Do you see how we are *all* on the path of sovereignty?

It's funny how the practice of cultural specificity helps me be interested in the collective again. The wider collective. As if the path to wholeness first begins with fragmentation. It's my own body, mind, and spiritual walk toward knowing that I have worked out in this article. And for this I'm grateful. Mahalo for sharing the space and making the time.

May you find your own secret (Nityananda, 1996). May your bibliography be easy to gather. May you know your own brilliance. May it lead to collective joy.

Amama ua noa.

*This article is an excerpt from Manulani Aluli-Meyer's (in press) chapter, "Indigenous and Authentic: Native Hawaiian Epistemology and the Triangulation of Meaning," in L. Smith, N. Denzin, and Y. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies. New York: Sage.*

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Manulani Aluli-Meyer is the fifth daughter of Emma Aluli and Harry Meyer with roots in Hilo, Kohala, Wailuku, and Kamāmalu. She is part of a larger Hawaiian Education Movement committed to the concepts of aloha, ku a paio, and lōkahi. She is a philosopher who learned from many Hawaiian teachers, elders, and practitioners about Hawaiian intelligence or epistemology. She is currently an associate professor of education at the University of Hawai‘i–Hilo.

#### NOTES

1 For an in-depth discussion of the role of “seeing,” see the writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

2 For a discussion of Hawaiian epistemology in relation to research, see Meyer’s (in press) chapter, “Indigenous and Authentic: Native Hawaiian Epistemology and the Triangulation of Meaning,” in L. Smith, N. Denzin, and Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*. (The present article is an excerpt from this chapter.)

3 Epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge. It asks questions people have long taken for granted: What is knowledge? What is intelligence? What is the difference between information, knowledge, and understanding? It is vital to debate the issue of knowledge/intelligence because of the needs of our time.

4 Audre Lorde (1984) inspired this dilemma found in postcolonial theory classes: Can you dismantle the master's house (i.e., imperialism, colonialism, etc.) with the master's tools? The answer is both yes and no. All outward realities are first inward expressions and thought patterns. A new consciousness must be forged to approach old issues. False dualities of master and slave must also be reconfigured.

5 Ken Wilber, integral philosopher, was the first to introduce me to three points in philosophy and research. I discovered this in his epic work, *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* (Wilber, 2000).

6 I have always enjoyed the image of the tetrahedron learned from a lecture Buckminster Fuller gave in Honolulu before he died in the 1980s. He described the tetrahedron as "structural integrity" itself.

7 Yin/yang is a Chinese way to organize female and male principles, Kū and Hina is a Hawaiian way. It gives us a way to recognize balance and to cultivate both aspects in our own character.

8 Empiricism is the idea that knowledge is gained from a direct experience with reality via our five senses: hearing, touching, tasting, seeing, and smelling. It is the basis of positivism and the core of rationality based on objectivity and measurement. Indigenous scholars are asserting that even at this fundamental level, we are shaped by culture, place, time, and so on. Of course this will detail a different reality, one that ultimately will extend beyond acultural empirical assumptions into a new reality that postquantum physics now recognizes.

